EXPLORING CULTURES OF POSITIVE TEACHER

MORALE DURING A PANDEMIC:

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY USING CULTURAL

THEORY

By

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Title of Study: EXPLORING CULTURES OF POSITIVE TEACHER MORALE DURING A PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY USING CULTURAL THEORY

Major Field: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Abstract: Cultivating school positive school culture is one of the most important responsibilities of a school leader. It is even harder to achieve, during a global pandemic. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore, through the lens of Cultural Theory, how two selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the grid and group cultural theory matrix, two elementary sites were observed to understand their school culture. The two sites were determined based on a school culture survey indicating positive teacher morale. The principals at the schools had at least three consecutive years leading in that building. Teachers with a minimum of three consecutive teaching years at the school, with the same building principal, were eligible to participate. Teachers were randomly selected from those who volunteered. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, artifacts, and observations at staff and team meetings.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cultivating a positive school culture is one of the most important responsibilities

of a leader (Harris, 2015). Under normal conditions, shaping a positive school culture is a

daunting task. In pandemic conditions, it can become almost unmanageable. One

outcome of a positive school culture is positive teacher morale, which is important to

student success (Lambersky, 2016; Willis & Varner, 2010). An extensive body of

literature documents disaffected and demoralized teachers experiencing various forms of

job dissatisfaction and withdrawal, which has a range of negative effects (Sabin, 2015;

Senechal et al., 2016). Disaffected teachers distance themselves emotionally from their

students and have lower expectations for themselves and their students. They also have

higher rates of absenteeism, which disrupts daily routines and is correlated with student

absenteeism (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). Ultimately, teacher disengagement negatively

effects student achievement and the entire educational process (Senechal et al., 2016).

In March 2020, COVID-19 disrupted school cultures globally and changed the

manner in which the world conducted education. Schools were shut down, and students,

families, and educators quickly adapted to alternative teaching and learning strategies

(Harris & Jones, 2020). This adaptation created tremendous stress, on both families and

teachers, and morale plummeted. A May 2020 study by the Education Week Research Center documented that 71% of teachers reported their morale was worse than before the pandemic (Gewertz, 2020a).

The World Health Organization declared Coronavirus (COVID-19) a global pandemic in March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). A global pandemic occurs in phases as the number of cases increase and the community responds (CDC, 2016). The World Health Organization's "Continuum of Pandemic Phases," displays a distribution curve with the increase of number of cases. There are four phases in the pandemic continuum: interpandemic, alert, pandemic, and transition (CDC, 2016). The phases in the continuum also overlap with the stages of the pandemic risk assessment. The three stages of the risk assessment include preparedness, response, and recovery (CDC, 2016). The global average of cases is lowest during the interpandemic phase, which is during the preparedness stage. The global average of cases greatly increases through the alert and pandemic phases, with the greatest global average of cases occurring in the pandemic phase. These two phases overlap with the response stage. The global average of cases greatly decreases moving into the transition phase, which overlaps with the recovery stage (CDC, 2016). There may be a slight increase in cases during the transition phase. The global average of cases decreases until it levels out to the original global average of cases, returning to the interpandemic phase and preparedness stage (CDC, 2016).

The onset of the global pandemic occurred in January to February. While there was knowledge and awareness of the COVID-19 virus, there was little impact on schools in the USA at that time (Ballotpedia, 2020). In March, the preparation phase began as school

leaders recognized COVID-19 was going to have an impact on schools. School leaders began planning alternative teaching and learning methods. By the end of March, as the global community entered the full pandemic stage, 46 countries had closed some or all of their schools (OECD, 2020). Most schools turned to some type of remote learning and in many states educators were instructed not to introduce new concepts or standards (Gerwetz, 2020b). By June of 2020, the duration of school closures ranged from 7- 19 weeks (OECD, 2020). Education was in a crisis.

When navigating a crisis, there are three best practices identified for academic leaders: connecting with people as individuals and establishing mutual trust, distributing leadership throughout the organization, and communicating clearly and often with all stakeholders (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Distributive leadership is an effective style of leadership at any time, but those who practice distributive leadership during a crisis experience more success (Berjaoui & Karami-Akkary, 2019). Principals must be mindful of school culture and work collaboratively with a team to maintain a positive and healthy school culture that empowers teachers, staff, parents, community, and students, especially during times of crisis (Muhammad, 2009, Senechal, et al., 2016). Harris (2015), highlights the importance of leaders considering cultural preferences and to note whether the majority of stakeholders are aligned with the practices. Cultural preferences that are not in sync with the overall cultural context could make a difference in the morale of each school.

Statement of the Problem

Positive teacher morale is important to student success. However, positive teacher morale is prevalent in some school contexts, but an extensive body of literature reported large numbers of schools with disaffected and demoralized teachers (Senechal et al., 2016). Moreover, the stress related events of the COVID-19 pandemic have caused teacher morale to decline significantly in many schools (Gewertz, 2020a).

One way to explain the discrepancy in some schools experiencing positive teacher morale and other schools experiencing negative morale is through Mary Douglas' (1982) cultural theory. Harris (2015) posited the two dimensions of cultural theory, grid and group, may be used to explain how cultural factors may either enhance or hinder teacher morale. The dimension of grid refers to the degree to which roles and policies constrain personal choices. For instance, in a school's organization, the roles some are given or assume and the policies and procedures governing those roles may enhance or inhibit occupational ethos, morale and all day-to-day school activities (Harris, 2015). The dimension of group refers to the degree to which individuals are socially incorporated and committed to an organization as a whole. For instance, some find meaning in engaging with and committing to a collective team, while others prefer more isolated work. This study-focused on how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through the grid and group dimensions of their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore, through the lens of Cultural Theory, how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

1. How is teacher morale described at this school?

2. How do school leaders facilitate teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic?

   a) How is teacher morale facilitated through the grid (role and policy) dimension of the school?

   b) How is teacher morale facilitated through the group (social commitment and incorporation) dimension of the school culture?

3. How do cultural preferences affect teacher morale during the pandemic?

Epistemological Perspective

This research used a constructivist epistemology. According to Creswell (2014), constructivist researchers often address the processes of interaction among individuals and try to make sense of the meaning others have about the world.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework identified for this study was cultural theory, which was developed by anthropologists Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, and Steve Rayner (Douglas, 1986).Cultural theory is useful in understanding school contexts, identifying individuals' values, beliefs and behaviors, accounting for the influence of the social environment, and exploring how constructed contextual meanings are formed and changed (Harris, 2015). Cultural theory uses a grid and group framework to classify school contexts and provide a multifaceted view into the setting (Harris, 2015). Grid refers to the degree in which the roles, rules, expectations and procedures constrain a person. Group refers to the value some place on collective relationships and commitment to the larger group. The degrees of both grid and group can be plotted on a dimensional matrix with a continuum of strong to weak. The dimensional matrix contains four distinct categories defining social

environments as: Individualist (weak-grid/weak-group), Bureaucratic (strong-grid/weak-group), Corporate (strong-grid/strong-group), and Collectivist (weak-grid/strong-group) (Anfara, 2015). This framework was used as a lens to explore the roles and responsibilities of principal leadership in promoting teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With teacher shortages, increasing mandates and higher societal expectations, school culture is one of the intangible benefits a principal can provide to teachers. Teachers with low morale are not as hopeful of their future in education and are more likely to leave the profession (Senechal, et.al, 2016). School culture is powerful and has a large impact on school members and activities (Harris, 2015). With so many factors out of a principal's control, school culture is one area they can have a direct impact and intentional focus.

School culture is described as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes and rules defining how a school functions (Cromwell, 2002). School culture results from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices (Muhammad, 2009). Cultural theory is one way to help understand school culture. Originally, cultural theory was used to explain a vast area of social contexts, such as political cultures, workplace relations, ethnic groups, and religious groups. Harris (2015) identified grid and group theory as a way to understand school culture as it provides a matrix to classify school contexts and observations surrounding school culture. This theoretical framework was appropriate for this study because it helped identify roles and relationships between the principals and the teachers, how their roles and relationships were structured, and how the roles and relationships between the principals and teachers affected teacher morale.

The grid and group diagram was a useful conceptual model for this study. The model contains four distinct quadrants: individualist, bureaucratic, corporate, and collectivist. The

four quadrants were easy to identify, marked clearly, and were useful for identifying the school culture. Each section of the matrix contained different meanings, and teacher surveys, interviews, feedback, and observations provided a greater understanding of teacher morale at each school and the overall school culture. Figure 1 below provides a model of a grid and group matrix and descriptors for each quadrant. Each quadrant is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Strong Grid

Weak Group   Strong Group

Weak Grid
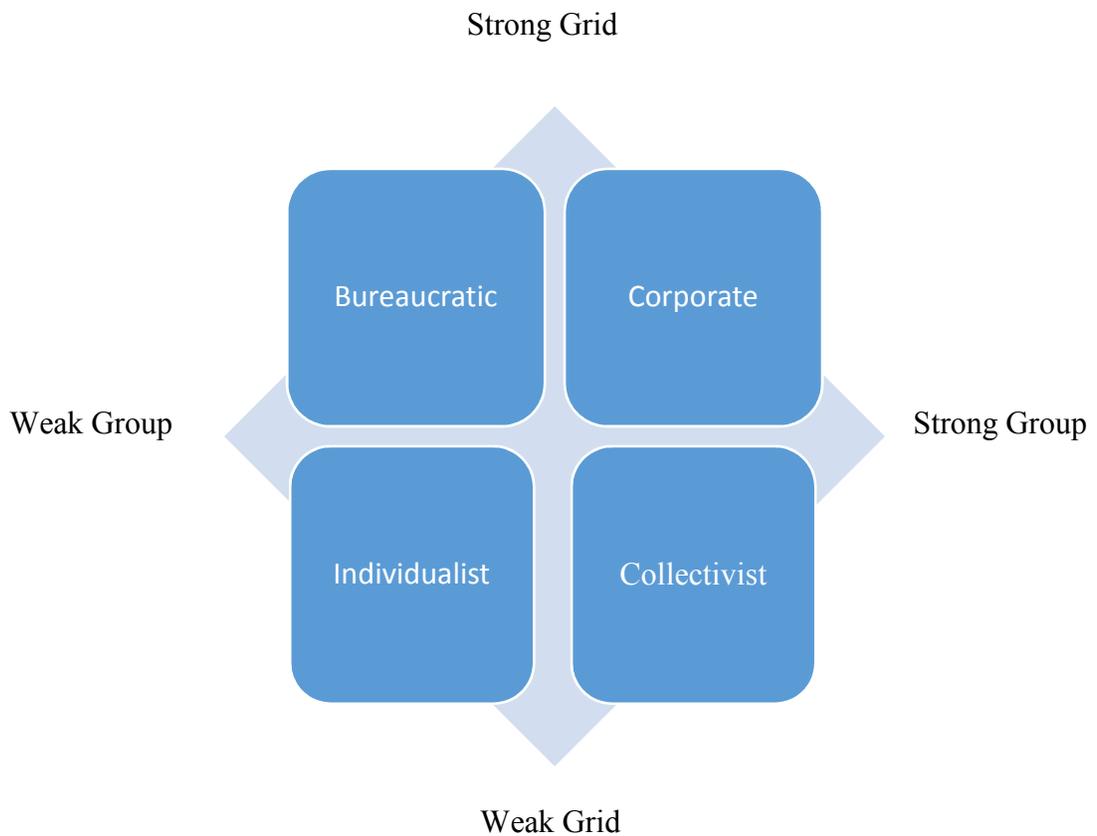
Figure 1. Model of a grid and group matrix. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership," by E. L. Harris, 2015 Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield

Procedures

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The study of school culture is suitable for qualitative research particularly a case study. In case studies, the richness of the phenomenon and the depth of the real-life context require the researcher to focus on a variety of variables and look for evidence from multiple sources (Merriam, 1998). Findings from this study focused on how and why teachers' perceptions of school culture are related to their principals' leadership.

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. As Merriam (1998) stated "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). In order to rule out other factors influencing school culture, two elementary sites within the same district, with similar demographics, test scores, and student populations were a part of this study. The study's population consisted of elementary building principals, counselors, and elementary teachers currently serving within the same building. The principals served as the building leader for at least three consecutive years, and the other participants had a minimum of three years' experience serving under their building leader. The study's population contained an equal number of elementary building principals, counselors, and elementary teachers per building to create a well-balanced overall population for the study.This study did not include parents, students, or other district employees.

Data was collected through one-to-one interviews in teacher classrooms and principal's offices. Once interviews were completed, observations were made too. Interviewees were offered two options for interviews because of the COVID-19 pandemic: an in-person, socially distanced interview or an interview via Zoom. The in-person, socially distanced interview was conducted with each participant wearing a face mask if they chose and sitting more than six feet apart, per Center for Disease Control recommendations (CDC,

2020). The interview conducted via Zoom allowed me to send the interviewee a Zoom meeting link, and subsequent to the Zoom meeting, I also conducted an informal follow up visit of the classroom and school building. The Cultural Context Assessment Tool (Harris, 2015) was used to collect data during the interviews and determined the grid and group dimensions and overall school morale and culture. Other data was analyzed, such as informal observations, formal observations at staff meetings and other teacher meetings, artifacts, such as electronic communication, flyers, and messaging from the principal to staff and parents.

Trustworthiness, along with understanding, is a feature essential to the validity of qualitative research. It is established by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of study findings (Mills and Gay, 2016). Patton (2015) suggested three ways to ensure the data accurately represent the researcher's intentions: (a) stay focused on the interview script and do not go off script other than to ask deeper questions on the same topic; (b) keep a self-reflection journal, review thoughts and processes on a daily basis, and make corrections as needed; and (c) spend enough time at the site so interviewees are comfortable and avoid distortions produced by the presence of a researcher. I took my time at the schools with the teachers, listened and built relationships, and reviewed the data. These steps were crucial to building trustworthiness. Credibility was established by taking the time necessary to really listen to the respondents, understand the meaning behind their answers and transcribing it accurately. At the same time, dependability was developed as the focus remained on the process of the inquiry and ensuring the process was logical, traceable and documented. The transferability of findings was dependent. Triangulation was established by using all the data together and ensuring credibility, dependability and transferability were achieved.

Potential Significance of Study

When conducting a study, it is important to consider the potential significance of the study to research, theory, and practice. Since teacher morale is essential to overall school success, the impact of principal leadership on school culture is important to understand.

To Research

There is research on the pressures facing principals and the turnover in leadership associated with the stress and responsibilities principals face today (Lashway, 2003). There is also research on different leadership styles (Lashway, 2002b). However, connecting the implications of how leadership cultivates or inhibits school culture needs more study. This qualitative study built on existing research to determine teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership and school culture. This research also makes a special contribution as it took place during the rapidly, changing, high stress context of a pandemic.

To Theory

Many theories speculate on the connection between principal leadership and school culture. This study could expand upon those theories as relations between principals' leadership styles and school culture are examined. Principals need to define their leadership style and understand the loneliness of the position and how leadership and school culture coincide. As the school culture is studied, it should identify how leadership plays into the culture of the school.

To Practice

School leaders face growing challenges as students' needs become greater, accountability rises, and pressure increases on building leaders. With this in mind, the more information we can provide to principals to empower them to become stronger leaders, the

more successful they will be in their schools, ultimately leading to a healthier school culture. The findings of this study may assist principals in improving and maintaining strong leadership and healthy school culture at school sites. Ultimately, this information may be able to provide helpful leadership tools for principals in an ever-demanding position.

Definition of Terms

Cultural preferences. Interests and inclinations everyone develops, derived from every day activities and interaction with others, over a period of time (Wildavsky, 1987). Cultural preferences are significant to educators when reviewing the four prototypes in grid and group life, and often in a school, not all stakeholders are in sync with the dominant preference of school culture (Harris, 2015).

Distributed leadership. Distributed leadership recognizes multiple leaders, including formally and informally designated individuals within an organization. These leaders demonstrate shared leadership practices with a focus on the interactions of the leaders (Harris & Spillane, 2008)

School culture. Many define culture as the shared stories, beliefs, heroes and heroines, rituals and ceremonies, décor and language, metaphors and myths a group of people share (Cromwell, 2002; Harris, 2015). Mary Douglas defines culture using the principles and ideas from several approaches: the symbolic view, the shared beliefs and values defined by Terrence Deal, Kent Peterson, and Allan Kennedy and cultural duality, which includes both the beliefs and knowledge and the interrelationships and actions of cultural members (Harris, 2015).

School Leadership. The act of providing and exercising influence while creating and guiding the talents and commitment of teachers, students, and parents toward achieving common educational goals (Leithwood & Rieh, 2003).

Teacher Morale. A confident state of mind that progressively looks to achieve an essential and shared function. Teacher morale can be viewed as teachers striving to achieve their individual goals and educational goals of the school system and their perception of satisfaction that stem from the total school (Govindarajan, 2012).

Summary of the Study

Chapter I of this study focused on the introduction and importance of the study. Overall, public education continues facing growing challenges, and the principal's position continues facing growing challenges too. Elementary school principals have many responsibilities, and if school culture is not healthy and positive, it is a hard battle for principals. Principals may have a better understanding of where to invest their time and energy in school leadership, thereby creating a better culture and overall school success by finding what teachers find most important in school culture. The findings of this study may assist principals in the great challenge of school leadership, and ultimately assist them in creating a positive school culture. This study is a qualitative study using the Grid and Group Culture Theoretical Framework developed by anthropologists Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, and Steve Rayner.

Chapter II focuses on the literature review. It will provide a deeper understanding of teacher morale, school culture, and cultural theory, most specifically include perceptions of teachers and principals, leadership effect on organization and leadership styles.

Chapter III covers the methodology and includes detailed explanations of the process involved in participant selection, interviews, data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations are addressed as well as trustworthiness.

Chapter IV presents the data in thorough detail. A rich and detailed description is included of the interviews and any observations. Chapter V-analyzes the data and relates it to the theoretical framework.

Chapter VI concludes the study. It includes conclusions, interpretations and implications of the study to research, practice and theory.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leadership is key to building a positive and healthy school culture. The principal has the largest role in leadership at a school site, and the type of leadership modeled has a profound influence on students, staff, and the community (School Leaders Network, 2014). Culture is intangible, but even an outsider walking into a school can detect a healthy or unhealthy school culture in just a short amount of time (Haberman, 2013). Culture can affect staff and student performance (Habegger, 2008). With this in mind, some principals are able to create and maintain a positive school culture, while others who may even be able to define and identify positive school culture, are unable to make the same positive impact. The role of the school principal continues to change and demands on the principal can be time consuming and detract from being a visible presence in the building (Lambersky, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of a huge and unpredictable demand on a school leader. Principals were forced to make tough and quick decisions regarding transitioning to distance learning, instituting social distancing practices, and in some cases completely changing how teaching and learning occurred (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Unpredictable events can happen at any time, therefore, it is essential for school leaders to understand what is most meaningful to

teacher morale in order to build and maintain a healthy school culture.

This literature review will focus on research on teacher morale, teachers' perception of school leadership and school culture, different types of leadership, the principal's impact on school culture and how principals can lead through a crisis like COVID-19. Culture is a critical element of effective leadership and there is evidence that schools with stronger cultures have a higher morale and commitment, greater capacity for innovation, and are more effective in setting and reaching goals (Louis & Wahlstorm, 2011).

<div align="center">**Teacher Morale and Effects on Education**</div>

Positive teacher morale is important to educational success (Senechal et al., 2016). There is an extensive body of literature documenting disaffected and demoralized teachers experiencing various forms of job withdrawal, which has a range of negative effects (Finnigan, 2010; Lambersky, 2016). Disaffected teachers distance themselves emotionally from their students and have lower expectations (Senechal et al., 2016). They also have higher rates of absenteeism, which disrupts daily routines, is correlated with student absenteeism, and undermines school climate (Senechal, et al., 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Ultimately, there is evidence that teacher disengagement has negative effects on student achievement (Senechal et al., 2016).

Teacher morale may be explained as the mental or emotional state of a person or a group of people involved in an activity (Senechal et al., 2016). Job satisfaction can also be described as a positive demeanor and an upbeat attitude toward a person's position or work (Lambersky, 2016). As cited in Senechal et al., (2016, p 10) Linda Evans, who spent many years conducting qualitative research on teacher morale, describes it as "a

state of mind determined by the individual's anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as significantly affecting his/her total work situation". Satisfaction with the job can lead to positive teacher morale (Willis & Varner, 2010). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary provides three characteristics of morale:

(1) a mental and emotional condition of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand, (2) a sense of common purpose with respect to a group and (3) the level of individual psychological well-being based on such factors as sense of purpose and confidence in the future (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

While the definition applies to individuals and groups, it is clear morale is a factor in teaching and schools.

Teacher Attrition

There is evidence of a relationship between satisfaction and performance. Further, dissatisfied teachers are more likely to leave the profession, resulting in higher attrition rates (Lambersky, 2016). Twenty-five percent of beginning teachers leave their positions within two to three years of teaching, and almost 40% leave within the first five years of teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalkvik, 2011). Nationally, 16% of public school teachers leave their schools every year (Burkauser, 2017). Twenty-two percent of the new teachers who were hired in Arizona between 2013 and 2015 left after their first year on the job. Of the new teachers hired in 2013, 42% were not in the Arizona Department of Education database by 2016 (Hunting, 2017). High turnover rates make it a challenge for schools to attract and develop high level and effective teachers, especially at schools with high-poverty and at-risk students, resulting in the least experienced and sometimes less effective teachers being hired at schools with great needs (Simon &Johnson, 2015).

Teacher attrition rates can be connected to the value teachers feel in their work and the tasks they are asked to perform (Santoro, 2011). There is research showing teachers leaving high-poverty schools are not leaving because of the students, but because of working conditions; moreover the more turnover at sites, the harder it is to build capacity for improvement (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Additional reasons for teacher dissatisfaction include poor salary, student discipline problems, poor administrative support, poor student motivation and a lack of staff collaboration and influence (Willis & Varner, 2010). Negative workplace conditions are often cited as the major reason given for leaving the teaching profession. These working conditions include lack of support from the school administration, poor student motivation to learn and student discipline problems (Hong, 2012). In one study, Boyd (2005) and his colleagues found that school administration is the most important factor in teachers determining career decisions.

There is evidence of higher teacher attrition rates leading to a negative impact on student learning (Burkhauser, 2016). In an eight-year study in New York City, results indicated that students in grade levels with higher teacher turnover scored lower in both English language arts and math, and these effects are even greater in low-performing schools (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Stability in staffing is especially important for low-income students who research suggests are more dependent on their teachers, yet they often are taught by less experienced teachers (Simon &Johnson, 2015). Research shows first year teachers are less effective than more experienced teachers and constant staff turnover disrupts the entire school's organizational culture, making it a challenge to sustain instructional programs (Johnson et al., 2012). A report from the Arizona Department of Education discusses the high percentage of inexperienced teachers and the

negative impact on student achievement. To be specific, high turnover of beginning teachers creates years of unstable learning environments for students and the effects are greatest at low-income schools (Hunting, 2017). Modest teacher turnover rates might have no impact or some positive impact on schools if the teachers leaving were ineffective or had poor relationships with colleagues, but a continual pattern of teacher turnover impacts instruction and student learning (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Teacher Attendance

Teacher morale can also impact teacher attendance. School leaders need to be cognizant of teacher absenteeism (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). One district report to the U.S. Department of Education for a 2009-2010 study showed 47%of the school district's teachers were absent more than 10 days during the school year. U.S. teachers generally take off over nine days a year during a typical school year (Kronholz, 2013). Those numbers demonstrate an average student may have a substitute teacher one day a month. This has a significant cost to learning as teachers generally leave behind review or busy work for substitutes. Duke researchers have found students being taught by a substitute for 10 days a year has a larger effect on a student's math scores than changing schools, and half the size of the effect of poverty (Kronholz, 2013). A study in Ghana was conducted to discover if student and teacher absenteeism affect the performance of students. The results showed lower student mean scores for those in classrooms with teachers missing school, demonstrating students' learning is impacted negatively by higher teacher absenteeism (Obeng-Denteh, et al., 2011). There is evidence suggesting that students in a classroom eventually lose interest and their desire to learn when the regular teacher is absent often and instruction is led by a variety of substitute teachers

(Jacob & Kritsonis, 2007). Student academic achievement falls, and students do not feel connected to the classroom (Jacob & Kritsonis, 2007).

Morale, Leadership and Achievement

Teacher morale influences all aspects of teaching and learning. Motivation, effort, and job satisfaction can be linked to teacher morale (Willis & Varner, 2010). Results of a study in Southwest Mississippi found the principal leader plays a significant role in the development of positive culture, which directly improves teacher morale (Quin et al., 2015). The indirect effects of principal leadership on teacher morale and focus on instruction benefit the achievement of lower socioeconomic students even more than higher socioeconomic students (Tan, 2016). Teachers' expectations rise when principals communicate a clear vision, share expectations and set high standards for instruction and learning and therefore, student performance may be impacted by principals working effectively with teachers (Lambersky, 2016). Research has shown positive motivational effects in schools with principals who set clearly defined goals and vision (Finnigan, 2010). In a study analyzing achievement in mathematics, the findings indicated a relationship between principal instructional leadership and the impact of teacher morale on privileged students' achievement. There was a correlation between teacher morale and autonomy and privileged students' results (Tan, 2016).

The state of Arizona conducted a study to investigate the increase in teacher attrition and reviewed teacher satisfaction as a factor. Support from school administration was frequently cited as a key to teacher satisfaction in Arizona (Hunting, 2017). Principals that are seen as supportive rather than authoritative task managers were identified as essential to job satisfaction. The presence of a strong social network and

supportive administrators has been shown to protect against teacher burnout and teachers leaving the profession (Willis & Varner, 2010). Another interesting finding is 52% of the teachers' surveyed noted support from administration as one of the top three considerations when choosing a teaching job (Hunting, 2017). Evidence regarding low teacher morale has been linked to lack of recognition. Research findings emphasize that teachers were dissatisfied with the amount and type of recognition and respect they received as teachers in the district (Willis & Varner, 2010). A survey of 40,000 teachers conducted by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation discovered supportive leadership as the standout, top-ranked item in teacher retention (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). Consideration by the principal for the needs and feelings of staff members has been shown to have positive effects on motivation and teachers' desire to perform their responsibilities (Finnigan, 2010).

Instructional Leadership

Teachers have great appreciation for leadership with a focus on instruction (Mendels, 2012). Hattie's (2015) research affirms the positive effect of instructional leadership. In a culture and student learning study conducted of over 1,000 district office, school administrators, teachers and parents in nine states, the researchers found in schools where principals were part of the instructional process and had high expectations for good teaching, the teachers' perspective of the school was much more positive (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). In addition, schools with higher morale have higher student achievement, as indicated in a study in Texas (Macneil et al., 2009). An analysis of teachers in New York City middle schools found when schools strengthen their organizational teams, teachers are more likely to stay in those schools and student

achievement increases at a faster rate (Kraft et al., 2016). Teachers cited a small number of factors impacting their decision to leave a site and one of them included the principal's instructional leadership (Simon & Johnson, 2015). In addition, teachers want to work for principals who conduct fair and meaningful evaluations and provide suggestions for improving pedagogy (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Coinciding with instruction, another leadership component that leads to higher teacher satisfaction and morale is collective responsibility. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are an avenue to collective responsibility and collaboration (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Principals play a key role in PLCs by fostering a schoolwide learning environment, and it is essential for them to be an active participant (Tan, 2016). Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) found the schools with principals who shared leadership had higher functioning PLCs and a greater culture of change. A study of teachers in Tennessee found teachers need principal leadership in order to develop norms of collaboration (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teachers prefer work environments where they collaborate regularly and learn from each other rather than working in isolation. Work environments that promote collaboration are likely to support and improve student learning (Johnson et al., 2012). In addition, when teachers have time built in their schedules for collaboration, and planning, they were less likely to say they had plans to leave the school (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Further research supports principals providing structured time for teacher collaboration (Dufour & Mattos, 2013).

Trust

Trust is another essential component to teacher morale (Kelley et al., 2005). Trust reduces uncertainty and insecurity in teachers involving external requirements and

demands (Finnigan, 2010). When principals encourage teachers to grow and have a voice, the teachers are much more likely to trust the leadership (Louis & Wahlstorm, 2011). It is also important for teachers to trust each other. A MetLife Survey found that the levels of relational trust between individuals and groups, such as teachers, students, administration, enhanced commitment and engagement among teachers, even in the face of an intense workload (Senechal et al., 2016). In Byrk and Schneider's work on school-based relationships, they found trust to be a prerequisite for collaboration and building communities (as cited in Simon & Johnson, 2015). Principal leadership is essential in establishing effective PLCs and breaking down the barriers for teachers (DeMatthews, 2014). It is important for principals to understand PLCs cannot exist and endure without trust between teachers and administrators or among teachers (Louis & Wahlstorm, 2011).

A longitudinal study of middle school teachers in New York City found that teachers were more likely to remain at schools where they had a trusting relationship with the principal (Simon & Johnson, 2015). According to Hammond (2014), teachers often state the need for a sense of belonging and trust as prerequisites for positive morale (Hammond, 2014). In a Norwegian study of relations between school context variables and teachers' feeling of belonging, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and motivation to leave the profession, evidence found teachers relations to principals and colleagues were predictors of a sense of belonging (Slaavik & Slaavik, 2011). This indicates the importance of a sense of trust and respect among staff members and the principal. Trust can also signify the value of respect the principal has for their knowledge and skills. Teachers express gratitude for trust when the principal assumes the best in them and demonstrates trust in the overall staff (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012).

Morale and Disaffected Teachers

While positive teacher morale is important to educational success, positive teacher morale is prevalent in some school contexts; however, there is an extensive body of literature documenting large numbers of schools with disaffected and demoralized teachers (Senechal et al., 2016). According to the most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, there are approximately 14,000 school districts overseeing nearly 98,000 schools, which serve over 50 million students in grades kindergarten through twelfth in the United States of America. It costs around 600 billion dollars annually in local, state and federal tax dollars to support these students. Clearly, public education is a large investment (Senechal et al., 2016). There are over 3.5 million teachers in public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). It is clear, understanding teacher morale and how to support it is important to student learning, principals', and schools' success.

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher found that teacher job satisfaction nationally fell 23%between 2008 and 2012, making it the lowest in 25 years. The survey also found that over half of teachers felt very stressed several times a week and an increase in stress of 15 percent since the mid-1980s (Senechal et al., 2016). Dissatisfaction and discontentment among teachers is also evident through news and social media, where it has become common for educators to speak out negatively about their daily struggles and concerns in the profession. Additional examples of teacher dissatisfaction can be found in the rise in teacher strikes and sickouts in large cities such as Chicago and Detroit. There is an increase of dissatisfaction among the nation's teaching force (Senechal et al., 2016).

Perceptions of Teachers and Principals

In a study by Parsons and Beauchamp (2012), teachers in five highly effective elementary schools discussed the importance of the principal being knowledgeable, positive, aware of new innovations, sharing common vision and goals, and effective at communication. In a study by Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005), researchers investigated the relationships between principal leadership style and impact on school climate. The study also reviewed the principals' perceptions of their own leadership styles in comparison to the teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership styles. The study showed teachers' perceptions of principals' effectiveness are positively related to school climate, and principals' flexibility are negatively correlated to school climate. Principals who think being viewed as flexible to each individual's needs is a strength are misguided. Teachers prefer consistent treatment (Kelley et al, 2005). These discrepancies between how principals perceive their behaviors and what teachers feel that they actually do are important (Kelley et al., 2005). The perception study is an example of the importance of principals to have the situational awareness and good relationships with staff to understand the school culture, which ties in directly with cultural theory.

Although teachers consider instructional leadership an important component of building leadership, a study of Florida principals shows most principals spend less than 10% of their time on functions related to instruction such as classroom observations and professional development. Most of their time was spent on administrative duties and organizational management (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). The principals most likely consider those tasks essential to quality leadership, but the perceptions of the teachers may differ. Schools that retain teachers have principals who consider their teachers as

learners and commit to their continual development (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Evidence

supports the need for principals to be competent instructional leaders who can lead

teachers to excel in teaching and learning (Tan, 2016). Teachers also like to be

recognized for their time and effort into extra initiatives and committees (Lambersky,

2016).

Teacher Led Initiatives

Teacher-led initiatives and activities are one element in building a successful

school culture. According to a study conducted by Birky, Shelton and Headley (2006),

principals are the key person in encouraging or discouraging teacher-led initiatives and

activities. To build a culture of collaborative leadership, principals need to focus on

embracing change and encouraging experimentation by teachers, promoting and

facilitating collaboration, and involving teachers in decision making (Birky et al., 2006).

A principal's actions must model and support collaboration in many ways if such a

collaborative culture is to develop and flourish (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). Quin et al.

(2015) found that teachers appreciate principals who inspire a shared vision and enable

others to be a part of the process. Principals play a big role in empowering teachers to

grow and take initiative. Along the same lines, principals can discourage a culture of

collaborative leadership by withholding or limiting power from teachers, placing teachers

in workplaces of isolation, and micromanaging small details, rather than focusing on the

big picture (Birky et al. 2006).

Principals sometimes believe they are taking pressure off of teachers by handling

all leadership responsibilities and decision-making alone. However, an inclusive

leadership style is more appealing to teachers. When teachers participate in leadership,

motivation and morale are improved (Finnigan, 2010). Marks and Printy (2003)

conducted a study focused on school leadership relations between principals and teachers,

in which they examined the potential of collaboration between teachers and the principal

around instructional matters to enhance the quality of teaching and student performance.

The study found the most effective principals involved teachers in the transformation of

the school and their efforts built a sense of teamwork and a unified mission (Marks &

Printy, 2003). Teachers' perceptions of working conditions are strongly related to their

job satisfaction and future career plans (Johnson et al., 2012). Teachers prefer to be a part

of a professional community and take collective responsibility for their students'

learning. Collective work is important to teachers and they appreciate when leadership

and responsibility for student learning is shared (Louis & Wahlstorm, 2011). When

leadership is shared and professional communities are strengthened, instructional

practices are improved, which is associated with increased student achievement

(Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). Effective principals provide leadership opportunities for

teachers, ensure the leadership opportunities teachers can be managed effectively, and

provide support to teachers as they engage in leadership activities so they can develop

and expand their abilities (DeMatthews, 2014). Louis and Wahlstorm (2011) found in

their study when the collective responsibility was high and when principals consistently

sought ideas and feedback from teachers, student achievement was high.

A qualitative study from Ontario, Canada revealed how principals can influence

teachers' emotions and morale. Professional respect shown for teacher capability,

providing appropriate acknowledgement for teacher commitment and competence are

two factors that affect teacher satisfaction (Lambersky, 2016). In addition, a study

conducted by Grissom (2011) found that teachers working in a high-poverty school led by an effective principal were more satisfied than teachers at an average school and that the turnover rate is minimal at those schools. Research suggests the teachers' perceptions of their school greatly influence their decisions to stay or leave their schools and principals are in the best position to influence the working conditions at the schools (Burkhauser, 2017). Forty percent of teachers in a study by Lambersky (2016) explained that their morale was influence by the principals' presence. The building principal has an indirect effect on morale due to their relationships and interactions with others and events (Macneil et al., 2009). Principals' have a positive impact on teachers and student learning by communicating goals and demonstrating a commitment to the goals by allocating resources to them (Finnigan, 2010). There is also evidence of the importance of principals maintaining high expectations for student behavior and handling discipline (Lambersky, 2016).

Teacher Relationships

There is evidence that teacher job satisfaction comes from a sense of efficacy and success in working with students, teachers, and administrators. Those personal and professional daily relationships in the school building and with colleagues are directly related to teacher job satisfaction (Senechal et al., 2016). Teachers' perceptions of value, supervisory support, and positive relationships are a predictor of belonging (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). It is important for teachers to be acknowledged and receive genuine, positive reinforcement from their principals (Lambersky, 2016). There is research supporting a relationship between teachers' experiences with their colleagues and their continued commitment to teaching at their school (Simon & Johnson, 2015). A statewide

survey conducted with Massachusetts' teachers found working conditions, such as facilities and student demographics are not as important to job satisfaction as are relationships with the principal and other teachers. The elements that matter most to the teachers include collegial relationships, principal's leadership and school culture (Johnson et al., 2012). Every year the National Education Association Survey reports teachers identify cooperative and competent colleagues as one of the top six factors that help them be successful (Simon & Johnson, 2015). In the Met Life Survey, interviewers found evidence of individual morale being both encouraged and discouraged by the quality of the collegial relationships within the school. The teachers with positive morale typically felt connected personally and professionally to the community of the school, while the teachers with low morale were more likely to feel isolated (Senechal et al., 2016).

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Teachers' feeling a sense of job satisfaction is essential to school success. Findings from a study on teachers' perceptions of leadership in Ontario showed principals have an influence over job satisfaction (Lambersky, 2016). Through the interviews the MetLife Survey conducted, teachers' discussions of their work often came back to reflection and evaluation of school leadership. From the teachers' perspective, they preferred autonomy and an opportunity to express their voice and to be heard. Another critical component to the success of a principal is the ability to communicate about policy and share how policies impact decision-making. Successful principals are able to distinguish the policy from their own leadership and implementation (Senechal, et al, 2016). Principals play a big role in providing and promoting professional growth

opportunities to teachers by serving as instructional leaders and opportunities for

reflective practice for teachers (Kraft et al., 2016). Principals should pay close attention

to how their teachers are experiencing the overall school conditions in order to address

job satisfaction. The social context of schooling has an impact on teachers' perceptions of

the workplace (Johnson et al., 2012).

Principals need to understand it is important to teachers to have a feeling of job

satisfaction and effectiveness. There is a link between school leadership and improved

student achievement, and leadership is second only to classroom instruction among

school factors that impact student learning (Bartoletti & Connelly, 2013). Teachers want

to feel a sense of satisfaction and effectiveness with their students (Kraft et al., 2016).

There is evidence supporting teachers who produce higher achievement gains in student

learning typically are less likely to apply for a transfer or leave the field of teaching

(Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Teachers are less likely to report feeling discouraged and more

likely to have higher motivation when principals allow them autonomy over decisions

such as selecting texts to setting the classroom management expectations for students

(Simon & Johnson, 2015). The findings of Lambersky's (2016) study showed principals

have a definite influence over morale and job satisfaction.

Leadership Effect on Organization

School leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-

related factors that contribute to what students learn at school (Bartoletti & Connelly,

2013). Teacher turnover is associated with principal leadership. A dominant factor

predicting teacher turnover is teachers' perceptions of their leaders (Simon & Johnson,

2015). Teachers in one study identified characteristics of the principals' leadership and

findings indicate there were two primary leadership characteristics that influence school culture: being an effective communicator and being ethical and demonstrating integrity (Hudson, 2012). Principals' behaviors and practices can have a positive or negative impact on school culture and student achievement (Troutman, 2012). Researchers Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstorm and Anderson conducted a six-year study and found that with the absence of talented leadership, there was not student achievement (as cited in Troutman, 2012). The leader's day is built around many duties and activities with little effect on instruction, student achievement, coaching teachers or building school culture. It is a challenge for principals to balance the daily mundane activities and the emphasis on learning and culture. Joseph and Jo Blase (2000) provided a partial answer by asking teachers to describe the behaviors of principals who had a positive influence on student learning. Two major areas were identified: talking with teachers and promoting professional development. These are described in specific behaviors such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, asking for opinions, providing time for collaboration, seeking and providing access to professional development opportunities, and giving positive feedback for effective teaching. By practicing these behaviors, teachers feel respected and autonomous (Lashway, 2002c).

The principal also affects the relationship parents have with the school. In a qualitative study in Australia, results showed the principal's attitude toward parents plays a critical role in parent involvement, contributions to the school, and engagement in activities (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014).

Crisis Leadership

Crisis are unique and unpredictable and school leaders are often put in situations

in which they've had no true training or time for preparation. During a crisis, one of the most consistent elements of crisis leadership appears to be sense making in conditions of uncertainty (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021, Smith & Riley, 2012). During a crisis, challenges occur quickly and both information and known solutions may be scarce. School leaders are often forced to make decisions quickly (Smith & Riley, 2012). During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the key challenges for school leaders were the unique nature of this type of crisis, the rapid timeline, and the accompanying uncertainty that hindered effective responses (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). Leaders' experience was not as significant when the COVID crisis was so rapid and unpredictable.

School leaders may face a crisis at any time in their career. Crises may range from natural disasters, to acts of violence, to a global pandemic. The number one priority a school leader needs to initially place focus is student, staff, and community basic needs understanding that their students and staff have to feel physically and psychologically safe before they will be successful learning (Kaul, VanGronigen, & Simon, 2020). During a crisis, school leaders must engage in effective communication, facilitate sense making in conditions of uncertainty, demonstrate quick decisiveness, be flexible and adaptive, and pay attention to the emotional wellbeing and health of employees (McLeod & Dulsky, 2012, Smith & Riley, 2012). Crisis leadership should include attributes such as: authenticity, agility, resilience, foresight, self-mastery, intuition and creativity (Smith & Riley, 2012).

Following a crisis, educational leaders need to continue to communicate effectively with staff and media; make operational, managerial, and logistical decisions quickly; assess families' needs; manage the outpouring of support; and integrate parent

and community voice (Potter, Pavlakis, & Roberts,2021). Studies have found after a crisis the most effective school leaders continue to keep focus on people rather than procedures. Students and families continue to school leadership for guidance so it is essential for the building leader to model calmness and confidence (Mutch, 2015). Another essential element of effective leadership following a crisis is the continued development of trust. School leaders who are able to demonstrate openness, honesty and benevolence work together more collaboratively with their stakeholders in leading after a crisis (Sutherland, 2017).

Creating a School Culture

Although principals can often define and identify positive school cultures, it does not guarantee they can create it at their own school. A positive school culture is imperative and is the underlying reason why other components of successful schools were able to flourish (Habegger, 2008). Haberman (2013) defined school culture as a shared sense of purpose, values and norms of continuous learning and improvement. Every school has a culture, whether it is a positive one or a toxic one (Blankenstein, 2010). A high commitment and high performance are distinguishing features of schools with a healthy culture and high staff well-being (Engels et al., 2008). Five strategies are identified for a successful school culture which include: set the vision, get the right people on board, put a stake in the ground, keep your ears and eyes open, and be consistent (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012). In the book, *Failure is not an Option*, Blankstein (2010) says a mission is key to school culture and the principal is the key factor as to whether the mission is clear and modeled. Peterson (2002) suggested that culture is built within a school over time as teachers, school leaders, parents, and students

work together. Staff development and professional growth opportunities are directly influenced ty the school culture. Fullan and Steiglebauer (1991) argued that the key to successful and lasting change is not only a change in organizational structure, but also more importantly, a change in the culture. A positive school culture may have a significant influence on the academic and social success of the students within schools (Troutman, 2012). In schools where there is a positive school culture, teachers and staff members trust each other and are willing to share ideas, learn from one another and work collaboratively for the welfare for all students.

Cultural Theory

The theory that will be used for this study is the cultural theory of grid and group designed by social anthropologist Mary Douglas. The cultural theory of grid and group provides a framework to understand cultural theory as it relates to educational practice (Harris, 2015). School culture can be defined as the set of norms, values and beliefs that make up a school. This can include the rituals and ceremonies, celebrations and stories that make up the personality of the school (Muhammad, 2009). Students, teachers and the community are all impacted by the school culture. It is a fundamental belief that all children can learn and the members of the school culture must work together to achieve this goal. A toxic culture is one where staff relations are negative and conflictual, and teachers do not have the same unwavering belief that all students can learn (Cromwell, 2002). A strong, positive school culture reinforces the sense of community and trust needed for school success (Simon & Johnson, 2015). School principals are the biggest factor in creating a culture of teaching and learning in each school, and there is a connection between effective school cultures and leadership (Macneil et al., 2009).

Clearly, positive school culture is an essential component for a successful, thriving school. With this in mind, the principal must have the ability to create that type of culture in order to ensure success for all learners.

Cultural theory is useful for a school culture study as the grid and group matrix can be used to understand school contexts, identify individuals' values, beliefs and behaviors, consider the influence of the social environment and how constructed contextual meanings are formed and changed. The matrix creates four distinct categories in which to define social environments. These four categories are: Individualist (weak-grid/weak-group), Bureaucratic (strong-grid/weak-group), Corporate (strong-grid/strong-group), Collectivist (weak-grid/strong-group) (Anfara, 2015). The framework will be used to provide a lens to view how principal leadership is crucial in shaping a culture of positive teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Grid and Group

In Cultural Theory, grid refers to the degree in which a person's choices are restricted by rules, procedures and expectations of roles within the particular social system or school. Group refers to the person's loyalty to the organization and is a more holistic view of the social system or school (Douglas, 1986)

Grid is placed on the vertical axis from strong to weak. In the grid of a social system, the stronger the grid, the individuals have less autonomy and there is more focus on the rules, procedures, and specific roles and responsibilities of positions. Teachers have less choice in structure of the school setting, instructional materials, and instructional strategies and less decision-making opportunities. Teacher collaboration is minimal and teachers work more often in isolation (Harris, 2015). In a weak-grid school,

teachers have more freedom in decision-making, autonomy, collaboration and more voice (Harris, 2015).

THE GRID DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE

Strong Grid

- Minimum autonomy
- Specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities
- Centralized power and authority

Weak Grid

- Maximum autonomy
- Loosely defined roles, rules, and responsibilities
- Decentralized power and authority
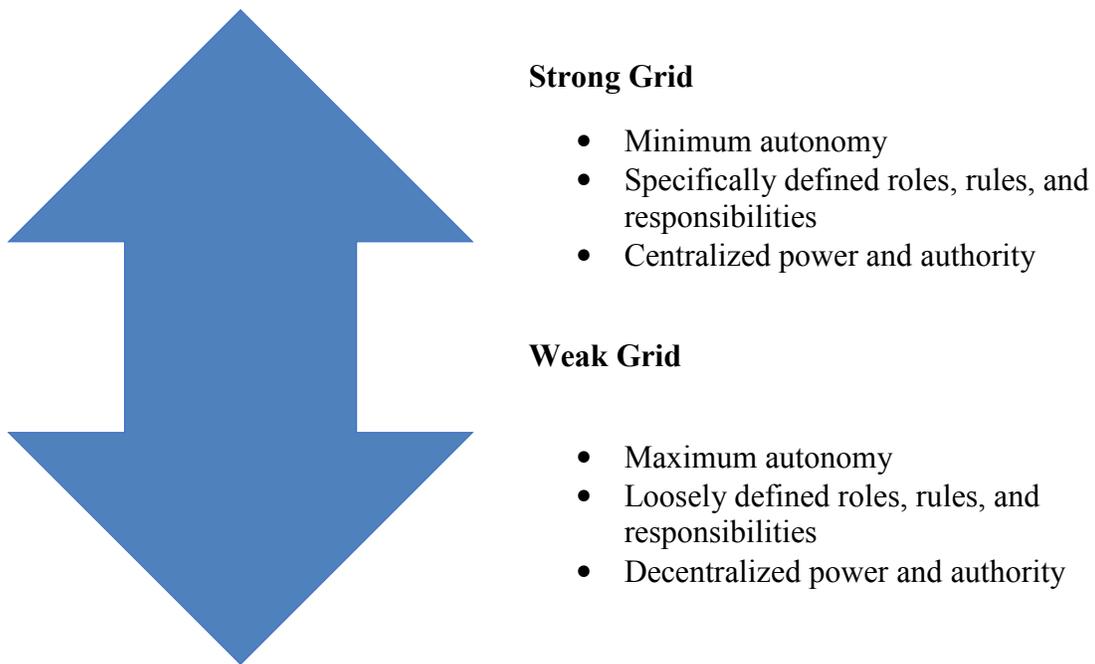
Figure 2. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership," by E. L. Harris, 2015, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Group represents the amount to which people value collective relationships and their level of commitment to the larger social system (Harris, 2015). In a social system with strong group, people have a strong commitment to the whole, rather than the individual (Douglas, 1986). Group is placed on the horizontal axis of a continuum from strong to weak. The stronger the group, the more importance is placed on the survival of the group, rather than individual members (Harris, 2015). Strong-group school environments appreciate and value the continued existence of the school, and weak-group

school environments prioritize individual interest over the collective arrangements (Harris, 2015).

THE GROUP DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE

Weak-Group	**Strong-Group**
Weak school allegiance	Strong school allegiance
Minimal consideration of group goals and activities	Strong consideration of group goals and activities
Minimal social incorporation	Strong social incorporation
Individual interests prioritized over group interests	Group interests prioritized over individual interests

Figure 3. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership," by E. L. Harris, 2015, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Grid and Group Matrix

The grid and group matrix is a useful conceptual model in the study of school culture. The four quadrants are easy to identify and will be useful in identifying school culture. Each section of the matrix has a different meaning and by observing teachers and getting feedback from interviews, there should be a greater understanding of the teacher morale and overall school culture. The four quadrants include:

- Bureaucratic (strong-grid, weak-group)

- Corporate (strong-grid, strong-group)

- Individualist (weak-grid, weak-group)

- Collectivist (weak-grid, strong-group)

Bureaucratic

The bureaucratic environment is strong-grid and weak-group and offers little individual autonomy and may be hierarchical. Individual behavior is a priority and little value is placed on goals within the group. It is an authoritative environment and much emphasis is placed on following rules and procedures (Harris, 2015).

Corporate

Strong-grid and strong-group are evident in the corporate environment. The individual identification is directly related to the group membership. There is great value placed on traditions and group survival is a high priority (Harris, 2015).

Individualist

The individualist is weak-group and weak-grid and there are few imposed formal rules or traditions on the relationships and experiences of the individual. The environment is more focused on individual opportunities and personal gain (Harris, 2015).

Collectivist

Weak-grid and strong-group is evident in the collectivist environment where there are few social distinctions. There is a high value on unity and equal opportunities within the school community and group goals and survival are very important (Harris, 2015).

Douglas' (1982) framework provides the researcher a matrix to analyze specific characteristics that may be influenced by grid and group factors, leading to identifying the quadrant that best describes the organization's cultural bias. The model can be used to help understand and explain how constructed "contextual meanings are generated, caught and transformed" (Douglas, 1982, p. 189). This framework is useful in explaining the individual preferences within the cultural context of a school. Douglas' framework can be helpful in understanding school culture (Harris, 2015).

Figure 1: Grid and group cultural theory

Strong Grid

| Bureauctratic | Corporate |

Weak Group   Strong Group

| Individualist | Collectivist |

Weak Grid
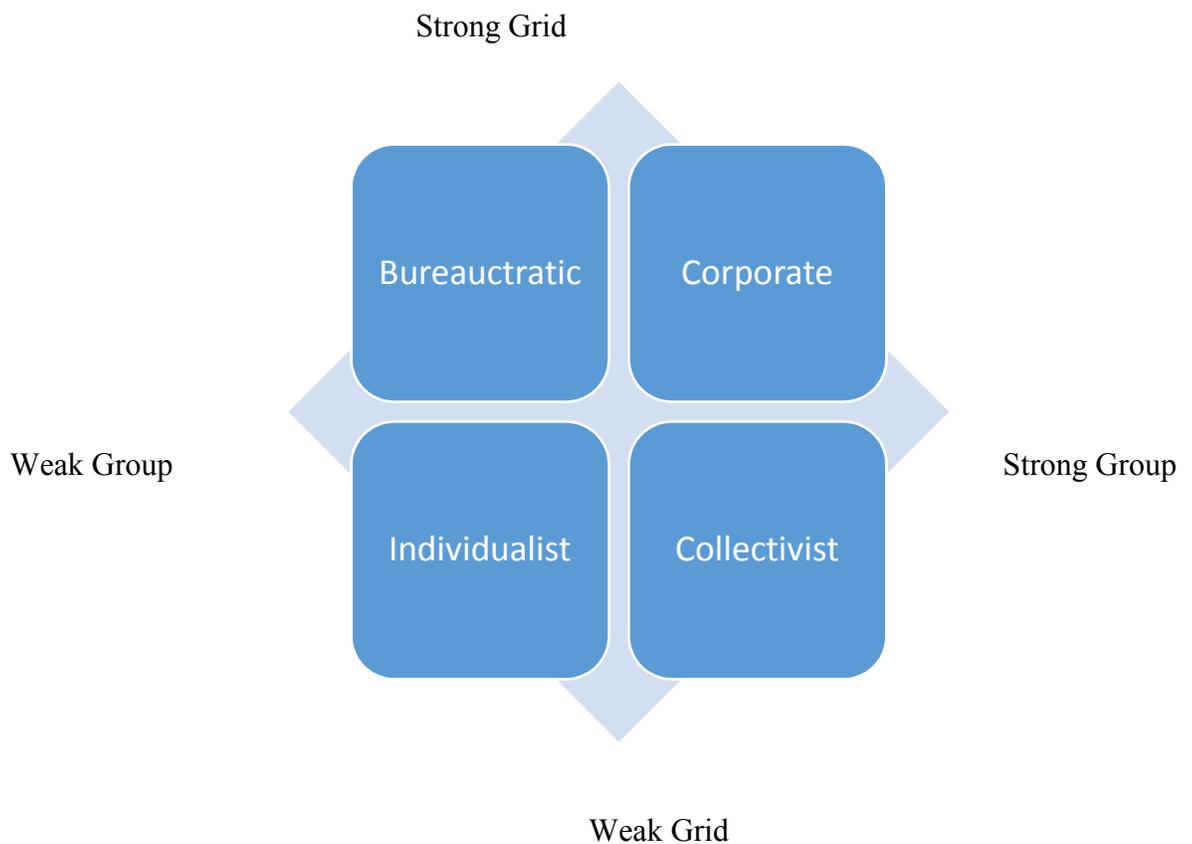
Figure 1. Adapted from "The Grid and Group Cultural Theory" by M. Douglas, M. Thompson and S. Rayner, as cited in How Schools Succeed, by E. Harris, (2015), p. 45.

Chapter Two Summary

Chapter two provided an in-depth review of the literature and the need for continued research and study on this topic. First, the literature focused on the importance of teacher morale and how poor teacher morale can impact teacher attrition, attendance, and student achievement. Next, the literature review discussed evidence of how even though principals may be able to describe and identify a positive school culture, they do not always know how to create it at their own site. The focus was on teachers' and principals' perspectives of leadership, the importance of teacher autonomy and leadership opportunities, and relationships and recognition. Finally, the literature review centered on school culture, creating a positive school culture, maintaining a positive culture during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, different types of leadership, and reviewing cultural theory to analyze and identify factors contributing to school culture. Principals' knowledge of these factors can assist them as they make leadership decisions that may impact school culture.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

It is difficult to create a positive and caring school culture during the best of times because of all the demands placed on school principals; however, during an unprecedented pandemic such as COVID-19, even the most highly successful and experienced leaders faced new challenges and more burdensome demands. This chapter describes the methodology, data collection and analysis, and the trustworthiness techniques used in this study.

A qualitative case study was selected for this research project to understand the teachers' morale under their principals'' leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Merriam (1998) posited a case study is used to provide a deep understanding of the circumstances and meaning for those involved. A clear picture of the teachers' morale during the pandemic was determined because a qualitative case study was used.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore, through the lens of Cultural Theory, how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

1. How is teacher morale described at this school?

2. How do school leaders facilitate teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic?

   a) How is teacher morale facilitated through the grid (role and policy) dimension of the school?

   b) How is teacher morale facilitated through the group (social commitment and incorporation) dimension of the school culture?

3. How do cultural preferences affect teacher morale during the pandemic?

Research Design

The epistemological perspective guiding this study was constructivism. Crotty (1998) posited many construct meaning as they interact with the world they are experiencing, and they use their background and past experiences as they engage with their world. The research design was a case study. Data collection techniques included one-to-one interview sessions with the researcher and interviewees in a private setting or through a mediated online format. Data collection also included informal observations made during the interviews. Creswell (2014) described, a constructivist's worldview as one who seeks understanding of the social and historical constructions of research participants based on the multiple meanings participants may have about their surroundings. The goal of this study was to rely as much as possible on the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2014).

Merriam (1998) defined interviews as a conversation with a purpose to obtain a specific type of information. This study involved asking a predetermined group of participants' open-ended questions, and participants provided questions that led to descriptive answers. This approach allowed each participant to expand their answers and

provide his or her own perspective. I made observations during the interview process too. The unit of analysis for this case was understanding how principal leadership impacted teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodological Procedures

This section describes the methodology, data collection, and analysis used in this study. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews, formal and informal observations, staff meetings, PLC's, documents, and artifacts. A qualitative case study was implemented for this research and allowed me an opportunity for in-depth study of teachers' and principals 'perceptions of principal leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Purposeful sampling is a technique commonly used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002), and relies on selecting cases offering an in-depth understanding of the study's context (Merriam, 1998). This study focused on teacher morale and their perceptions of leadership and how it impacted the school culture. The participants in this study had experiences and history in their buildings, and they were rich sources of information. The interviewees were selected only if they had at least three years of experience in their school while serving the same principal. Data was collected through one-to-one interviews between the interviewer and interviewee, and included observations of staff meetings, PLC's and the overall occurrences in the schools. The interviews were conducted at the participating school sites or another location per request of the interviewee.

Elementary schools within the school district were asked to complete the Grid and Group Surveys to determine if the school best fitted the study. Two elementary sites with similar cultural preferences and assessments, demographics, and student data were selected for the study based on the surveys. I emailed principals and asked them to forward an email to their teachers, inviting them to complete the Grid and Group Preference and Context Surveys on a private Google Form. The data was scored, plotted, and analyzed, and two elementary schools with similar positive school cultures were to participate in the study after surveys were completed. The building principals were notified, and I asked them to forward an email to their teachers asking for volunteers to participate in one-to-one interviews, either in-person or via Zoom, per their choice. The emails included the purpose of the study, the timeline for interviews, the approximate length of time for the interview, plans for the results of the study, and an explanation of how interviews will be kept confidential. Teachers who volunteered were selected based on qualifying criteria. The criteria included a minimum of three years teaching at the site for consideration for the study. The minimum years of experience was essential to get a reflection of ongoing culture. There was at least one teacher per early childhood grade level, intermediate grade level, specialty services, such as special education or counseling, and one fine arts teacher selected for the study to ensure a variety of experiences, unless there wasn't a teacher with the minimum years' experience at the site. This entailed approximately four teachers per site. In addition, the building principal was interviewed.

Data Collection

This section presents data collection techniques used in this study. Data was

collected through interviews, document analysis, and observations. Data storage and security techniques are discussed too.

Interviews

Staff members were interviewed one on one, in a socially-distanced, private setting or virtually, either before school, during their plan times, or after school over a period of a month. Participants signed up for a day and time that best fit their schedule. The interview session was an hour to allow teachers time to get back to classrooms as needed. If an interview needed to extend beyond the hour, another day and time was scheduled to complete the interview.

Erlandson et.al. (1993) emphasized it is important to be well-prepared for the interview process. Principals and teachers were asked to complete a short questionnaire before the interview began. Interview questions are provided in the appendices as Appendix A. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide me a glimpse of the background and basic experiences of each participant so I had an understanding of this information prior to the interview. The data collected in the questionnaire was also helpful in not interrupting the interview with mundane verifications like the proper spelling of names, titles, and other details.

Each participant signed a consent for participation and audiotaping of the interview before the interview began. An interview consent form is located in the appendices as Appendix B. An audiotape was used for listening and coding later in the process and this explanation will be provided to the teacher. An audiotape is the most common way to record an interview (Merriam, 1998). Practicing the use of the audiotape ahead of time was helpful to me in ensuring the process occurred smoothly. I also

provided an explanation that notes may be taken during the interview in order to catch details the audiotape may not capture. The audiotape device was placed in the middle of the table. At the beginning of the interview, I explained the purpose of the study and the interview, confidentiality, and participants' rights to withdraw at any time.

I used a guided approach to interviewing, and the interview remained conversational. The interview style was conducted in an interview guide approach, and remained conversational. The guided interview approach allowed the interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational. The main purpose of the interview was to learn specific information related to what was on the participant's mind (Merriam, 1998). It was important to help teachers feel comfortable to take the conversation where needed to find out as much as possible about how principal leadership influences their morale and perception of school culture. I used my field notes for future reference and then quickly transcribed the audiotape after the interview session. It was essential to try to review and expand my notes nightly in order to get the most accurate representation of the data. Further, ongoing reflections helped prepare me for the upcoming fieldwork. The transcriptions were naturalized because the utterances and natural components of the interview were telling in their own way. Patton (2015) described naturalistic inquiry as it unfolds in the real world. It is important to me to have the transcriptions unfold naturally as well (Patton, 2015). There are times the pauses in thinking and retelling a story are very revealing of the interviewee's perception.

Documents and Artifacts

Documents served as another source of evidence (Erlandson et al., 1993). Documents collected included samples of weekly updates and newsletters, handouts and

flyers, emails and other correspondence from the principal to teachers, parents and students. Signage throughout the building as well as notifications and postings on their websites, Facebook and any other social media used by school leadership was reviewed. In addition, photos of trophy cases, displays, visuals in the hallways and office were taken to be used as artifacts to understand the shared beliefs and values (Harris, 2015).

Observations

Informal observations were conducted while at the school sites and during the in-person interview sessions. Full participant observation combines document analysis, interviews of participants, direct participation and observation and introspection (Patton, 2002, p.265). Erlandson et al. (1993) discussed the importance of developing and refining the art of observation. It was important to have a succinct notetaking strategy and be timely in composing notes and adding information as to avoid missing details of the observations that extended beyond the interviews. Observations included the overall tone and climate in the main office and hallways, artwork and other displays in the building, interactions between staff members, students and administration and details in the classroom

Data Storage and Security

Data was securely stored electronically and any hard copies of documents were stored in a secure setting at my home in a locked cabinet. I was the only one with access to the data. Data was only shared with people assisting with the study and real names will be kept confidential. At the end of the research, data will be stored up to five years and then destroyed, as recommended by Creswell (2014). An overview of the data collection strategies is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Data Collection Strategies

Research Questions	Teacher Interview Questions	Principal Interview Questions	Observations	Artifacts
How is teacher morale describe at this school?	1,3,5,7,10,12	1,3,5,12	School Environment	

How do school leaders facilitate teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  a. the grid (role and policy) dimension
  b. the group (social commitment and incorporation) dimension
	2,3, 4,5,6,7,8,9	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	Staff meetings
			
			PLC meetings
			
			School Environment
				Weekly updates from principal
				
				Newsletters from the year
				
				Social media posting
				
				Art work
				
				Celebratory Postings

How cultural preferences affect teacher morale during the pandemic?	1,7,10,11,12	1,7,10,11,12	School Environment	

Data Analysis Strategies

This section presents data analysis strategies. First, data organization is discussed. Then coding and analysis process is described.

Data Analysis

It is essential to build meaning from the data (Patton, 2015). Data analysis is fluid and is simultaneous with the research process (Merriam, 1998). This process allowed me to focus on the concepts in a variety of ways as the interviews unfolded. Patton refers to the importance of knowing the purpose of the study and how the overall design of the study

flows from prior decisions (Patton, 2015). An essential element in the research process

was taking the time to evaluate the data. Merriam (1998) emphasized the importance of

data collection and analysis occurring simultaneously during qualitative research. The

purpose of data analysis is to make sense of the data (Merriam, 1998). Creswell (2014)

recommended following a mostly linear, but interactive, six-step process for data analysis

to include: organize and prepare data, read through data, code data, generate themes or

categories, convey findings, and interpret meaning.

Organizing the Data

The data was organized and prepared and included detailed transcriptions of the

interviews, reviewing field notes, and analyzing any documents. It was a time in which I

reflected on the interviews and reviewed information to assist in understanding the data.

Coding Process

The coding process was long and detailed as this study included 18-20 interviews.

The first step was analyzing the content of the field notes and interviews to determine

what was most significant. As Patton (2015) recommended, taking notes in the margins

of the field notes assisted in capturing common themes. This was a time to look for

recurring regularities in the data and to group data into common themes. Coding is also a

time to track thoughts, speculations and ideas during analysis (Merriam, 1998). This open

coding continued until all possibilities were exhausted and then transitioned to a focused

coding looking for only identified key themes.

Generating Themes

The researcher should use the multiple perspectives from individuals and other

documents to identify themes in the data (Creswell, 2014). Themes were outlined using

the descriptions of school culture during the COVID-19 pandemic, as shared by teachers during the interview sessions. Douglas's grid and group matrix provided a way to classify the data and draw specific observations about the teachers' values, beliefs and behaviors (Harris, 2015). Douglas's grid and group matrix was used to compare the teacher morale data and principal leadership practices during the pandemic, and their resulting impact on school culture was analyzed.

Convey Findings and Meanings

The findings of the study were conveyed in a combination of a narrative format and through charts and tables. It was written in a narrative format and provided detailed descriptions of the interviews and documentation.

Researcher Role

This section discusses factors such as researcher bias and ethics considered in this study. These considerations are essential best practices in qualitative research.

Researcher Bias

Mills and Gay (2016) defined reflexivity as the process of examining oneself as the researcher, and the relationship to the research. It is reflecting on one's assumptions and preconceptions and how they might impact the researcher in making decisions and framing questions (Mills and Gay, 2016). According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), reflexivity is an important concept because it brings awareness of the possible threat of the accuracy of qualitative research outcomes based on the social interaction component of the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

I have some personal assumptions and experiences that may have influenced the way I reacted to the data I collected for this study in regard to my topic. In my past

experiences as a classroom teacher, I have worked for multiple principals and have firsthand experience with different types of leadership. I have definitely preferred leadership focused on building relationships, trust, good communication and high expectations for students and staff, which resulted in a positive school culture. I have also served as an assistant principal, principal, and district administrator for 20 years and have a definite bias over what I consider effective and ineffective leadership. Because I am a proponent of developing strong relationships with staff in order to develop a healthy school culture, I would assume a principal demonstrating similar values would have a positive school culture. In my opinion, teachers respond positively to a leader who shares experiences, has high expectations, shares responsibilities, and empowers them as leaders.

I have worked with many different types of leaders and I have always been happier when I worked for a leader who had high expectations, while at the same time was flexible and caring and valued school culture. I appreciated the opportunities provided to be involved with leadership and decision-making. As a former principal, this is the type of leadership style I practiced and had very positive experiences so I know this may be an area that may have impacted my bias. In my current role as a district leader, I continue to hold true to my belief that a principal who values his or her staff, develops strong relationships, has fair and high expectations, and acts with consistency will have higher teacher morale and an overall positive school culture. As I reviewed data, it was essential to recognize my own preferences of leadership and be mindful of my interpretation of the data.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations were employed regarding data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation.

Data Collection Ethics

Multiple ethical considerations were addressed in qualitative research regarding data collection. Patton (2015) and Creswell (2014) identified several different considerations of importance to this study: (1) IRB approval, (2) informed consent and confidentiality, (3) selecting sites without vested interests, (4) limiting disruptions at the research site, and (5) interview protocol. Each of these considerations is discussed in further detail.

First, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the university prior to beginning the research. Second, an informed consent form for selected participants to sign was shared with participants, with the acknowledgement that their rights would be protected throughout the research process. Third, a letter was sent to the superintendent of the district and the two principals of the selected elementary sites asking for permission to conduct my study within that school district and school site, as well as completing any type of formal research request for the district. Fourth, disruptions at the research sites were limited by collaborating with the teachers and principals for interview and observation times that best fit their schedule. Fifth, interview protocol procedures were closely followed to ensure neutrality.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Ethics

Ethics regarding data analysis and interpretation included assigning pseudonyms, securing data collected, and ensuring accurate interpretations of data collected (Creswell, 2009). It was essential to protect the anonymity of the school district, school site, and

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participants, therefore pseudonyms were assigned and used throughout the study. Information gathered during the data collection phase were kept secure. Interpretation of the data was conducted through member checks and conversations with staff.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Trustworthiness, along with understanding, is a feature essential to the validity of qualitative research. It is established by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of study findings (Mills and Gay, 2016).

Credibility

To ensure credibility in this study, the techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (2006) were implemented. These included: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, member checks, purposeful sampling, and triangulation (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents (Erlandson et al., 1993). In naturalistic study, it includes thick descriptions and purposive sampling. The research included detailed descriptions of all aspects of the interview and observations.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability refers to the ability of the study to be replicated or repeated, and confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings from the study would be consistent with another person's interpretation of the findings (Erlandson et al., 1993), Notes, documents, transcripts, recorded, and observations will be available for audit to

ensure dependability and confirmability. An overview of trustworthiness and credibility

are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Trustworthiness and Credibility

TRUSTWORTHINESS CRITERIA AND EXAMPLES

Credibility		
Criteria/Techniques	*Result*	*Examples*
Prolonged engagement	• Build trust • Build relationships • Collect a wide scope of data	In the field from May through September communicated though email and face to face conversations
Persistent observation	• Obtain accurate data • Provide depth and context to observation	Observations of participants in staff meetings, trainings, PLC meetings, and Leadership meetings
Triangulation	• Verify data	Multiple sources of data: interviews, observations, documents, artifacts
Peer debriefing	• Additional perspective from a trusted colleague	Discussion emergent themes and findings with trusted colleague
Member checking	• Verify documentation and conclusions	Participants will be asked to verify the interview transcripts and findings to ensure accuracy of the data
Purposive sampling	• Site and teacher selection will provide a wide range of data	Purposeful sample will be used to identify the district, school sites, and teachers to be interviewed
Transferability		
Criteria/Techniques	*Result*	*Examples*
Thick description	• Provide the reader with as much detail as possible to make sound judgements	Write detailed descriptions about observations, settings, participants, and other salient details

about transferring finding to
other contexts

Dependability/Confirmability		
Criteria/Techniques	*Result*	*Examples*
Inquiry audit	• Confirm accuracy of results and trustworthiness of study	All transcripts and documents made available for review
Reflective journal	• Provide my own perspective of interview and observations	Researcher memo and notes will be included as data in the study

Table 2. Adapted from "Naturalistic Inquiry" by Y.S. Lincoln & E.G. Guba. Copyright 1985 by SAGE.

Limitations

The presence of the researcher may be one limitation regarding interviews of the

staff members (Creswell, 2014). Explaining the process and establishing a rapport with

the staff helped teachers become comfortable with the interview process. It was important

for teachers to understand the purpose behind the research was to gain a greater

understanding of leadership and school culture and not a reflection upon them.

Observations were made outside of the interviews in order to get a full picture of the

school culture. With a visible presence in the building, this limitation may have been

minimized as staff members may became comfortable with the researcher in the building.

Summary of the Study

Chapter Three described the research methodology I used for the study. This

study focused on two sites with similar demographics, data and personnel was chosen on

select criteria. In addition this chapter introduced the researcher's role, potential bias,

ethical considerations, and data selection and analyzation process.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Chapter Four presents a narrative description of data collected and analyzed throughout this study. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore through the lens of Cultural Theory how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study sought the perceptions of teachers and principals who worked together at least three consecutive school years. It was focused at two different elementary schools in the same Midwest school district. This chapter begins by describing the background of the school district, and then provides details about the two elementary sites, the teachers, and principals who participated. Finally, this chapter narrows to tell the stories of the two school sites collected and their teacher responses to the interviews.

The description of the scenes in this chapter are used to provide a picture of the teacher morale at each site. The descriptions were used to identify and analyze common themes in the questions and in teacher morale. The themes reviewed included principal leadership, effects of COVID-19, and teacher morale. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documents from the two sites, Oak Hill Elementary and Pioneer Elementary, in the district Crestview Public Schools.

Overview of District

Crestview Public Schools is a large suburban school district in the Midwest serving over 19,000 Pre-K through 12th grade students. The district's student race and ethnicity encompasses 61% White, 13% Hispanic, 9% two or more races, 8% Native American, 6% Black, and 3% Asian. Overall, 47% of the district's students are eligible for free and or reduced lunch. The main language student's speak is English; however, the district serves students speaking over 70 different languages, with Spanish being the second most prominent. The district houses four early childhood centers, 16 elementary schools, five middle schools, a freshman academy, a main high school campus, and four high school academies. Elementary schools vary in size from under 300 students at the two smallest sites, to over 700 at the two largest sites.

Crestview Public Schools employs approximately 900 teachers, 30 principals, and 29 assistant principals. The assignment of assistant principals is based on student enrollment, so approximately half of the elementary schools have an assistant principal. The teachers' average years 'experience is 11 years, and administrators' average years' experience is 18 years. Crestview Public Schools was selected for this study because the district contained a large number of elementary schools with principals having more than three years' consecutive experience at the same site. In addition, the district teacher attrition rate was 14%, and the potential to find teachers with at least three years at the site under the same principal was highly likely

The district mission statement "to educate, equip, and empower a community of learners by providing dynamic learning opportunities which enable all students to be successful," which is displayed on the district website and in district buildings. The district mantra,"100 percent Literacy, Engagement, and Graduation - Every Student, Every Day", is visible as well. The Superintendent of Crestview Public Schools, Dr. Smith, has been in the district 11 years and has served as the

superintendent the last five years. Dr. Smith, along with district stakeholders, led the district in defining and sharing their core values. These are used to drive the district's decision-making and every day actions and are listed on the district's website:

- We embrace the responsibility of our calling. Each of us is accountable to serve our students, our district, and our community. We do it with honesty, integrity, and transparency.

- We are passionate about learning. We consistently seek new ways to lead and follow our students into the future.

- We are a student-focused, relationship driven school district. We strive to engage our students and community through kindness, compassion, and empathy.

- We celebrate and find strength in our diversity. It takes people with different ideas, interests, and backgrounds to drive our district forward.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Crestview Public Schools immediately transitioned to distance learning in March of 2020 just like most of the schools in the nation. The district remained on distance learning from March of 2020 until summer break. The district provided Chrome books and hotspots for families in need of devices, and they quickly trained teachers on the use of Zoom and other online instructional methods. No new standards were introduced and students' grades were not penalized for not completing work during this time. The district devised a reentry plan for the 2021-22 school year. The reentry plan included masks for students and staff, and cleaning and sanitizing supplies and practices prepared. In-person school resumed for all students in early September 2020, two weeks later than was typical for the district. There was a full-time virtual option available for students too. Approximately 3,000 students

attended the full-time virtual school in 2020-21. The full-time virtual school enrollment declined by the start of the 2021-22 school year to approximately 650 pre-K through 12th grade students. For most of the 2020-21 school year, the district had in-person learning, with individual schools and classrooms transitioning to distance learning when COVID-19 cases required.

Selection of School Sites

Eleven sites for this study had principals at the same site for at least three consecutive school years. Seven of the 11 sites had similar demographics, test scores, and student enrollment; these schools were selected to administer Grid and Group Surveys because of their similarities. The principals at the seven elementary sites were asked to share the Grid and Group Preference and Assessment surveys with their staff in a Google Form. The teachers who chose to participate had one week to complete the survey. The data from the seven sites' surveys was tallied and analyzed using the Grid and Group scoring system and two sites were identified to participate in the study: Pioneer Elementary and Oak Hill Elementary. It is important to note the two schools scored similarly to study common connections between individuals and the schools, how people create the schools' cultures, are shaped by it, and how what motivates them. Eighteen out of 36 teachers at Oak Hill Elementary completed the survey and 17 out of 32 teachers at Pioneer Elementary completed the survey. Oak Hill Elementary scored 4.1 on the preference and 4.8 on the school assessment. Pioneer Elementary scored 4.1 on the preference and 4.9 on the school assessment. These two sites similarities between the preference and assessment scores indicating a corporate school culture are shown below in Figure 4.

 Figure 4

Grid and Group Survey Results

Bureaucratic	Corporate
Grid 8 7 6 5	 Pioneer Assess. 4.9 Oak Hill. Assess. 4.8 Oak Hill.Pref. 4.1 Pioneer Pref. 4.1

4
 	
3
 	
2
 	
1
 	
       Individual
 	
  1   2   3   4
	
	       Collectivist
	
	5 6 7 8
	Group

The results of the surveys completed by the two staff indicated corporate environments. In a corporate environment, the social relationships and experiences are maintained by the group and individual identification is gained from group membership (Harris, 2015). Traditions and group survival are very important and all groups work in a cohesive, integrated system for the benefit for all involved (Harris, 2015). Through the interviews, it was evident this was true at both sites. The next section will include narrative descriptions of the two sites.

Oak Hill Elementary

School History

Oak Hill Elementary was built in 1983, renovated in 2012, and is located in the center of a residential neighborhood. Many Oak Hill Elementary students walk to school daily, and about one third of students are transported by school buses. The school contains almost 500 kindergarten through fifth grade students. The population is 60.5% Caucasian, 13.6% Hispanic, 9% Native American, 8.8% two or more races, 5. 6% Black, and 2.6% Asian. Oak Hill Elementary is a Title I school with 50.8% of the students qualifying for free or reduced meals. Oak Hill Elementary has a higher mobility rate than the district average, with 13.2% of incoming students, compared to the district at 7.9%. Oak Hill Elementary has a high parent participation rate in parent teacher conferences (84%) and a higher than district average volunteer hours per student. Oak Hill Elementary has 22 general education teachers, eight special education teachers, two speech teachers, four fine arts and PE, one media specialist, one counselor, and one principal.

Oak Hill Elementary has only had three building principals in its history. The first principal opened the school and stayed there for ten years. Her successor had been her assistant principal, and he served at the school for 18 years. The current principal is starting her tenth year at the school. They have had numerous assistant principals over the years because the district leadership moves the district assistant principals around to provide them a variety of experiences.

School Structure

Although Oak Hill Elementary was built over 30 years ago, it has an updated and newer appearance. The main entrance is welcoming with the school's name above an awning, and to the left of the main entrance there is a butterfly garden with a statue of a child reading a book in

memory of a teacher who passed away. There are welcome signs directing visitors to check in at the main office where there are several cushioned chairs, student artwork, and a front receptionist. All visitors are required to check in at the office and scan an ID through the security system before visiting any classrooms or walking through the building. The front office staff are welcoming and friendly greet visitors before asking their purpose for the visit and procedures. There are three chairs for visitors in the front office and a secure door which must be unlocked by the secretary prior to visitors entering to the main hallway.

Oak Hill Elementary has wide hallways and tiled floors. There are three major wings to the building, with a new addition that leads to a full-size gymnasium in the back of the building. Oak Hill's gymnasium was built in 2007 and still feels new; there is a hallway connecting it to the rest of the building that was built in 2012. Oak Hill's classrooms are located on each side of the building and have large windows with views of the front entrance or the playground. There are classrooms in the center of the building, and they do not have windows. They are larger in size though and have two doorways for entrance and exit. There are bulletin boards with inspirational quotes, student artwork, and colorful signs throughout the school building.

The back of the building serves multiple purposes for Oak Hill elementary. Oak Hill Elementary has two separate playground areas and a running track in the back of the school. The entire play area is protected by a fence with a gate for entering. An awning is being built in the back of the building for students to stay protected from the elements of the weather when waiting in the car line. Car riders dismiss in the back of the building and bus riders dismiss in the front of the building, with walkers exiting from the east side of the building. There are teachers and staff all over the campus before and after school, and it is easy to find someone if assistance is needed.

School Achievement

Oak Hill Elementary received an overall score of a B from the 2018-19 school report card, which is issued by the state. The overall academic achievement proficiency score was 55.2% compared to the district score of 36.3%. The Oak Hill academic growth measurement was comparable to the district score of 53.3%, but lower than the state score of 58.6%. The best score they received was for English language proficiency progress where they scored 62% compared to the district 38.3%. The chronic absenteeism score was 85.59%, about two percent lower than the district score. There were no test scores for the 2019-20 school year due to COVID-19.

Participants

The teachers for the study were emailed and invited to complete a confidential google form asking for volunteers to participate. They were required to have taught at the same school as their principal for at least the past three consecutive school years. Oak Hill Elementary had 10 teachers volunteer for the study, so teachers' names were randomly drawn according to criteria. Criteria include having taught in the same building as the principal for at least the past three school years. Table 3 depicts a participant profile summary of Oak Hill Elementary participants.

Table 3

Participant Profile Summary: Oak Hill Elementary

Participant Name	Years' Experience at Oak Hill Elementary	Years' Experience in Education	Grade/Specialty Area
Oak Hill Principal Ms. Meyer	10 years	13 years	Elementary Principal
Oak Hill Teacher Ms. Jones	14 years	14 years	First grade
Oak Hill Teacher Ms. Franklin	Eight years	15 years	Fifth grade

Oak Hill Teacher Ms. Seymour	24 years	24 years	Special Education
Oak Hill Teacher Ms. Powell	23 years	23 years	Physical Education

As a previous elementary principal, and current district level administrator, I thought I had a solid understanding of school leadership and teacher morale, but then to throw in a global pandemic, I had no experience in leading in a major crisis. I also had no previous knowledge of cultural theory or the importance of understanding teachers' preferences as a school leader.

Through my research and study, I have learned more about what really matters to teacher morale and how to navigate through a crisis. In my own experience as a principal and district leader, I have heard many principals talk about how tired they get from trying to keep and maintain positive teacher morale. Many spend a lot of time on tasks with little impact, when if they spent more time understanding their teachers' preferences they would be able to learn, adapt, and grow more quickly. Adaptive practice is deliberate with the purpose of having a proactive and positive impact on the school environment rather than adapting to existing circumstances (Harris, 2015). Then, if a crisis does occur, the school leader is already focused on the right work.

Participant selection based on years teaching in building with the same principal.

Oak Hill Principal: Ms. Meyer

The Oak Hill principal has high energy and a lot of passion for her school. She has served as the principal at this school the last 10 years and shared she has no intention of leaving before retirement. She loves the teachers and staff. She frequently talks about the importance of family and keeping a balance between work and family. She said she never had any intention of coming to this district, but when the opportunity presented itself, she decided to take the risk, and she's never looked back.

The interview with Oak Hill's principal was conducted in the principal's office, which contained her own personal family photos, pictures of her with various staff members, and inspirational quotes and pictures. She has a full-sized bookshelf completely filled with different types of collector memorabilia. When asked about it, she said at the beginning of her career she mentioned how much she loved this type of memorabilia and over the years, students, staff, and families have added to her collection. She said they are all special to her because she knows someone thought of her when buying them. The office also has a wall stacked with bottles of water, soda, snack items, and other treats for teachers and staff. She said she monitors morale, and when she can tell the staff need a boost in energy, she will put out treats in the lounge. There is a large conference table in the center of her office, and there is evidence of collaboration with many baskets of pens, paper, notepads, and student data. The office is clearly used for many different purposes, and the aura is friendly and welcoming.

Oak Hill Teacher: Ms. Jones

Oak Hill Elementary teacher, Ms. Jones, is a first-grade teacher, and all 14 years of her teaching experience is at this school. She said she interned at the school and had an immediate bond with the staff and school community. She knew Oak Hill was where she wanted to spend her career. She has served under two principals during her time at Oak Hill Elementary, serving the last 10 years with her current principal. She has a definite loyalty and commitment to serving at this school and plans to stay there as long as the culture and staff remain strong.

The interview was conducted in Ms. Jones's classroom, which is very student centered. The desks are placed in small groups. There are several areas for students to gather and work on the floor and at learning centers, and there is evidence of student work on the walls. Everything on the walls is relevant to student learning and instruction. There are two tables for the teacher to work with small groups, and the tables were full of student books, tubs of hands-on manipulatives, and folders for documentation. It is clear Ms. Jones is highly organized and intentional in creating an optimal learning environment for her students.

Oak Hill Teacher: Ms. Franklin

Ms. Franklin has been an intermediate teacher at Oak Hill Elementary for the last eight years and has 15 years teaching experience. She has the unique experience of serving at the site prior to her teaching career as an outside consultant and as a parent. She has over 25 years of memories at this school. Ms. Franklin's previous position brought her into many different school sites over her career, and she identified Oak Hill Elementary as very special during that time period. She says it still remains a very special school, even throughout leadership changes. She talks about the core teachers creating a positive culture and carrying on the school's traditions. She is also the only teacher in the group who is currently working on earning her master's degree in school counseling so she can pursue a different avenue in supporting students. She does not

want to leave Oak Hill Elementary, so she is hopeful an opportunity to become a school counsel will open at this school.

The interview was conducted in Ms. Franklin's classroom. She recently moved to this classroom and is excited about the change. The classroom is very neat and tidy and had a checkered theme. Student desks were placed in small groups and there was one small group work area in the back of the classroom. The walls had inspirational quotes and space remained for student work.

Oak Hill Teacher: Ms. Seymour

Ms. Seymour has the most teaching experience of the group, and has been at Oak Hill Elementary the longest of the teachers participating in the study. She has been a teacher at this school all 24 years of her career and worked under two principals. She is a special needs teacher of and has worked in this type of classroom her entire career. Ms. Seymour enthusiastically talked about how much she loves her job and this school, and how the staff and school community supported her during a time of personal loss. She plans on teaching there for the rest of her career.

Ms. Seymour has been teaching in the same classroom the last 15 years of her career. The bookshelf next to her desk displays all of her class photos from her teaching career. She also has numerous memorabilia from students and their families displayed on her desk and throughout the classroom. Often, she mentioned a lot about the influence she has on the families and the influence they have on her. Ms. Seymour greatly values that connection. Her classroom is very organized, and it is evident she has intentional plans for learning in the classroom. She emphasizes the importance of having high expectations with her students to help them have success in their lives.

Oak Hill Teacher: Ms. Powell

Ms. Powell has taught physical education at Oak Hill Elementary her entire 23 years in education. Initially, she taught half-time at Oak Hill Elementary, and she chose to stay half-time until a full-time position became available. She has a passion for teaching physical education and the relationships she has created with the students and their families over the course of her career. She feels having students and their siblings for multiple years has been very rewarding to her.

The interview initially started in the gymnasium, however, the air conditioning was not working that day. We both agreed we would like to select an alternative location for the full interview, so we moved to a different location. The gymnasium still felt very new, and it is exceptionally maintained with sparkling wood floors and clean walls. The student equipment is stored in various tubs throughout the gymnasium and signage is above each tub with directions. The gymnasium is also used by the before and after care program, and their supplies are stored off the main entryway. A plaque dedicated to one of their students who passed away in an accident over 15 years ago is located outside the hallway to the gymnasium. Each year a student with the same positive traits receives the award, and their name is placed the plaque for display.

Principal Leadership

All the teachers interviewed listed similar qualities in their Ms. Meyer's leadership style: high energy, supportive of teachers in the classroom and their personal lives, and high expectations. It is clear the principal is a hands-on leader with a great deal of passion and energy for the success of the school.

Acknowledgment of Success

The principal at Oak Hill, Principal Meyer, acknowledges both students and staff success in a variety of means. Oak Hill Elementary has a student of the month in every class as well as a "Staffer of the Month." The teachers described the big, all-school assembly where they cheer for students and teachers. Several mentioned how the assembly change last year because of COVID, and rather than invite parents to attend the assembly in person, parents attended virtually. The teachers were all excited for it to resume more normally this year. The "Staffer of the Month" also goes out to lunch with the principal. Staff members said spending time with the principal at lunch is very special, and the staff love that time.

All of the teachers also mentioned how Principal Meyer takes great pride when any of her staff are invited to participate at district or state-level activities or committees, and she always celebrates the accomplishment with the staff. Ms. Meyer also puts "shout outs" in her weekly newsletter to compliment teachers and recognize success. Ms. Meyer shared she tries to be very intentional in noticing her teachers' accomplishments and give accolades as appropriate. Ms. Franklin and Ms. Powell both said sometimes they feel like the "squeakiest wheel" attracts Ms. Meyer's attention, and they would like to see teachers who are behind the scenes doing the hard work receive more attention from Ms. Meyer, not just the neediest or loudest.

Opportunities for Teacher Leadership

Teachers at Oak Hill Elementary described many opportunities available for leadership at their sites. They specifically spoke about team leaders, committee leaders, student-club leaders, and assembly leaders. Team leaders are selected by the building principal and represent their team of teachers at leadership meetings and are involved in decision-making. Ms. Jones reiterated the importance of this role and the teachers know Ms. Meyer values and respects their team's needs and viewpoints. Ms. Jones talked about how she has been the team lead on her team for the past

ten or more years because she really enjoys the position and being involved with the principal and other teachers. Ms. Franklin also has served as a team leader, but she said she has stepped back in the last two years and asked not to have that role. She stepped back because she wants other teachers to develop as well.

The teachers described Ms. Meyer having an open mind and if someone wants to start a new committee or club, she will support them. Ms. Powell has always overseen several student clubs and she shared how Ms. Meyer always finds ways to support her. All the teachers discussed the traditional committees which they feel are important, such as the Veterans' Day assembly committee and the Pumpkin Run committee. Ms. Meyer also talked the importance of not disrupting important traditions, unless absolutely necessary. She stated:

> When I first got to this school I was mindful of sitting back and watching and learning from the teachers and families on what was most important. The teachers and staff had a lot of traditions, and there were a few that I could tell were really important. I did have to stop a couple, the biggest one that could have made teachers mad, but also was just not okay to have school. Once I explained the reason to the teachers, they were okay with it. But, events like the Pumpkin Run, that's a big deal and will always be a tradition here. (Ms. Meyer interview, August 11, 2021)

Effects of COVID-19 on Teacher Morale

Leadership through a crisis is a challenge, and it is clear it was a challenge for the principals and the staff participating in this study. It was essential to spend time discussing the impact of COVID-19 on the school and leadership.

Change of Roles and Practices

All the teachers and principal discussed the obvious changes from the impact of COVID-19, such as distance learning, contact tracing, mask wearing, and deep cleaning. They talked about the amount of time it took to clean, disinfect, and contact trace when needed.

As the conversations progressed, the depth of changes discussed became more related to their roles as teachers. For instance, Ms. Jones talked about how she became more of a leader during COVID-19. She commented on how she does not want to call herself a leader, but she does know colleagues look to her for ideas and support. She explained:

I don't want to say I became a leader. I don't want to be like "I'm a leader" no, but I'm kind of the person that others can come to and get ideas and support and find different ways to teach, like with a mask on and through digital, and distance learning. I was helping people shift what they were already doing, and a lot of it I had already been doing. (Ms. Jones, interview, August 6, 2021)

It is clear Ms. Jones is very modest and does not want to appear as a bragger or overconfident, so I asked her to expand on more examples. She went on to talk about how during COVID-19 she spent extended time helping others convert instruction to a digital format, but still help it be engaging and interactive. She talked about helping the staff by collaborating and working together to find things that would help keep students engaged and participating in school. She said teachers would just show up at her classroom and ask her how to make the changes when they needed her help.

Several teachers expanded on how their roles and practices changed due to COVID-19 with technology. They talked about the time required to learn new components of technology, and then in turn teach the students, and students' families, so everyone could be prepared for distance learning. Ms. Seymour specifically discussed how prior to the pandemic, she took much for granted

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because her position does not require as much depth of knowledge in technology, and then she suddenly had to shift to teaching remotely, or having small groups of students at home on distance learning. She said she worried about the inequities in technology at home for her students, not only the structural parts of technology, but also student's knowledge of how to use the technology.

Similarly, Ms. Franklin noted the impact COVID-19 had on herself and her students in terms of lack of knowledge and preparation for distance learning; however, she complimented the communication within the building and district and how anytime someone needed support or guidance, the principal found someone to support them. She emphasized teachers did not feel alone during the pandemic and they knew it was okay to ask for help.

Ms. Powell had the most changes in instructional practices because of the nature of teaching physical education, in supervision of large groups of students before and after school, and at recess. She networked often with other physical education teachers throughout the district on how they were managing large groups of students while trying to maintain social distancing and other safety practices related to COVID-19. She described it taking a lot of trial and error, and also building student leaders to assist with some of the additional tasks created by COVID-19. She also was touched by the grace and flexibility of other teachers when her schedule would get behind and she needed more time between classes.

Challenges and Support

The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for education and principals, teachers, students and their families had to make adjustments to their daily lives. The teachers and principals shared challenges faced during the pandemic. The greatest challenges presented by COVID-19 at the school sites included technology; relationships; masks; learning curves; and the emotional toll on staff members, parents, and students.

Ms. Jones described the challenges of not having the ability to collaborate with her team members and having students rotate through the classroom like in the past. She described how students were separated at recess to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and would stare at their peers from other classrooms across the playground.

Principal Meyer talked specifically about the challenges of the learning curves of teachers and staff members. She also talked about feeling overwhelmed and defeated:

I would go home and night and just wonder, did I do anything today to really help a student? We didn't have any idea how many things would have to change because of COVID and how things that weren't broken before don't work now. It was really hard. But then the next day I might come in and help a single mom who was crying on the phone asking me not to suspend her kid. It was really up and down. (Ms. Meyer, interview, August 11, 2021)

The teachers described the support they received from the district and their principal as ongoing, understanding, patient, and providing grace. Ms. Jones mentioned the distance learning framework provided by the district and how helpful it was in navigating virtual lessons. Ms. Franklin and Ms. Seymour shared how their principal would go from room to room each day to check on teachers and see what type of support they needed that day to be successful. Ms. Seymour shared how even if the principal did not know how to do something herself, she would find someone else in the building to provide help.

Decision Making

Initially, district leaders made decisions about curriculum instruction. Ms. Meyer discussed how grateful she was to have district leadership guide them during the unknown and create a

united front for the community. Ms. Meyer used the information gained from district leadership and then share it with her team leaders, initially only through Zoom meetings and email. Trust and communication was important to Ms. Meyer during this time. More decisions were made at the site level as the pandemic progressed and the nation as a whole had a better understanding of the situation. She involved her leadership team in these decisions and transitioning back to normalcy.

The team meetings were initially all information based according to the teachers, and their jobs were to share information and make sure their teams understood. Several of the teachers mentioned they liked how their principal began to send the agenda ahead of time for questions and input, especially when they could not meet in person., Ms. Franklin specifically said she liked some of the changes in decision making that came as a result in their changes in practice, such as getting more input on decisions through email ahead of time, and taking feedback on how some of the new practices have improved the operation of the school.

Teacher Morale

Teacher morale is essential to a positive school culture. It is important to understand teachers' feelings about school and how they feel they are a valuable member to the school. The teachers interviewed for the study discussed their feelings about their school and if they felt a vital part of the school.

Feelings about This School

During this question, every one of the teachers' and principal's face lit up with excitement. Feelings were similar in Ms. Jones stating:

I love it here. I've had opportunities to go other places, but this is my home. I love the clientele here and I love seeing my students when they get older and come back to visit me,

and seeing their brothers and sisters come up through the school. The neighborhood

families become part of the school family. I don't want to leave here because I just love it.

(Ms. Jones, interview, August 6, 2021)

Ms. Jones said she plans on staying and having her own child go through this school as a student because of the wonderful relationships she has created. She talked about how she loves to teach her colleagues children and is excited for them to teach her son as well. Similarly, Ms. Seymour spoke at length about her love for the school and the feeling she has when she comes to work. She said she could retire, but as long as Oak Hill Elementary is positive and has a good leader, she will stay until she thinks her work there is done.

Ms. Meyer described her feelings for the school as pride and gratefulness. She said she knows she is in a special place and when she was hired ten years ago all she wanted was to emulate the previous leaders because she knew they were successful. She said she knows they need to improve on their test scores because that's important, but she said they have the most important piece accomplished, and that's creating a good environment for students, teachers, and families. She talks a lot about never wanting to leave and she will work as hard as needed to stay at this school until she retires.

Vital to the School

The teachers all spent more time thinking about their answers when asked what makes them feel a vital part of the school, but then their answers were expansive and provided insight to their value at the school. At first, Ms. Franklin said she did not know that she felt vital, but then as she expanded, she provided the most examples. She specifically mentioned she knows her principal trusts her and gives her added responsibilities because she knows she can handle them and get them done well. She described her principal coming in her classroom and asking her

opinion on ideas and decisions before she shares them with the staff and will tell her she just needed her judgment. She also said she appreciates when her principal comes to her after something occurs to get her feedback and insight. She mentioned she wasn't sure if it was because she was one of the older teachers, or just because they both had similar thinking. She said she has been working on her master's in counseling and her principal continually tells her they need to find a way to keep her there.

Ms. Jones discussed feeling vital because her room always has people coming in and out asking her for help, ideas, or just to confide. She said she knows she's needed because when she has missed work she continues to get calls, texts, and emails. Ms. Seymour shared similar feelings saying how she knows her team needs her and she is the "matriarch" of their team. Ms. Seymour also said she knows her students really need her because they already have so many needs, but with her high expectations and support, they have a better chance of being successful at the next steps.

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Pioneer Elementary

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School History

Pioneer Elementary was established in 1987, renovated in 2015, and is located off a main thorough way street. There is a middle school on the same campus and a public nature park adjacent to the school. Students in adjacent neighborhoods walk to school, with about half of the student population transported by school bus or cars. Pioneer Elementary has almost 400 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The population is 74.6% Caucasian, 8.5% Native American, 7.1% two or more races, 5.8% Hispanic, 2.5% Black, and 1.5% Asian. There are 38.1% students eligible for free or reduced meals. Seventy-five percent of parents or guardians attended parent teacher conferences. Pioneer has a higher than district average rate of volunteer hours per student.

Pioneer Elementary has 25 classroom teachers, three fine arts and PE, one media specialist, one

counselor, and one principal.

School Structure

Pioneer Elementary is similar in structure to Oak Hill Elementary. It is a large one-story

building with a large awning adorning the front of the school. To the left of the entrance is a rock

garden created by fifth grade students. Each year the fifth-grade students paint an individual rock

and leave it in the rock garden. This tradition has been carried on since 2015. There are hundreds of

colorful rocks amongst flowers and bushes as one walks up to the building.

Upon entering the school, the main office is to the left. The principal's secretary and

attendance secretary sit in the front of the office and greet visitors. The secretaries are very friendly

and banter with each other and the principal and other staff. To the left is a security system for

visitors to scan their ID and to the right is a door to the attendance secretary's office and a secured

door to the main hallway. All visitors must be approved through the security system before the door

unlocks.

The main hallway has the district's core values displayed on the north wall and a large

picture of the site teacher of the year on the south wall. The building is clean and the tile floors are

shiny. There is student art work on the walls. All the classrooms have the teachers' college

pennants hanging next to their doorway as well as the teachers' names and a few facts about them.

School Achievement

Pioneer Elementary received an overall score of a C from the 2018-19 school report card.

The overall proficiency academic achievement score was 47%, which was higher than the district

score. Pioneer's academic growth measurement was higher than the district at 57%, but lower than

the state score of 58.6%. They did not receive a score for English language proficiency progress because at the time they did not have enough students to count in the calculation. Chronic absenteeism score was 88.26%, just slightly better than the district score. This indicator shows the percentage of students in good attendance.

Participants

Teachers at Pioneer Elementary received an email inviting them to participate in the study. Initially, interest in participating was slow, but after the principal sent a reminder, there were 11 teachers who completed the survey. Out of those who qualified, names were randomly selected to participate. Those selected were contacted through email and asked for their preferences of dates and times for the interviews. Below, Table 4 offers a summary of Pioneer teachers and the principal who participated in this study.

Table 4

Participant Profile Summary: Pioneer Elementary:

Participant Name	Years' Experience at Pioneer Elementary	Years' Experience in Education	Grade/Specialty Area
Pioneer Principal Ms. Arnold	Three years	17 years	Elementary Principal
Pioneer Teacher Ms. Williams	Nine years	27 years	First grade
Pioneer Teacher Ms. Butler	Five years	Five years	Fourth grade
Pioneer Teacher Ms. Norris	Four years	18 years	2nd grade/SPED
Pioneer Teacher			

Ms. Simon	13 years	15 years	Physical Education

Pioneer Principal: Ms. Arnold

The Pioneer Principal is very matter-of-fact and concise. She has been at the school for the past three years and says she is excited to be returning for a fourth year. She has three children of her own, with two of them attending this school and the oldest attending the middle school on the same campus. Ms. Arnold was a basketball coach and then an elementary physical education teacher for the majority of her teaching career, but when she decided to pursue school administration, she recognized the need to be a classroom teacher. She transitioned to a classroom teacher role for several years so she would have the experience to relate to classroom teachers. She said she thinks both of her experiences have been important to her role as principal and helps her in decision making that impacts the entire school.

The principal's office is directly off the main office with access to the teacher workroom and teacher's lounge. The office was remodeled two years ago and is large and very bright and sunny with big windows on the east wall. It is a very clean and orderly office, with very little décor or clutter. She has a large cabinet with pictures of her children displayed. A large conference table is on the north side of the office and above the table hang her teaching certificates, her diplomas and award for being selected the Crestview Public Schools PTA Principal of the Year in 2019.

Pioneer Teacher: Ms. Williams

Ms. Williams has the most teaching experience of the group interviewed at Pioneer Elementary. Her previous experience was at a smaller district, so she initially had hesitancy in

transitioning to a larger site. However, she said once she made the change she was happy with her decision. She talked a lot about how much she loves teaching and is content being a teacher. She has taught several grade levels, and loved all of them, but her favorite has been first grade. For not having any administrative experience, she demonstrated a global view of the school and all the responsibilities on the school principal.

The interview was conducted in her classroom at her small group table. The table had evidence of student work and supplies on it. The student desks are placed in small groups with student supplies in the middle of each group. It is evident the students share group supplies and work together. The walls have student work, instructional posters, letters, and sight words. There are big windows in the classroom and the view is of the large, spacious back play area. There is a large track and playground beyond a grassy area. Ms. Williams talked about how much students and families in the community enjoy the school grounds.

Pioneer Teacher: Ms. Butler

Ms. Butler has been teaching six years at Pioneer Elementary and has taught both third and fourth grade in her career there. When I arrived at her classroom, she was walking her students to music so she invited me to wait in her classroom for her to return. One of her students lingered in the classroom to explain to me her job was the "lights" person and did I want her to turn off the lights when she left the room. Every student has a job in the classroom and this student definitely took her position very seriously.

The classroom has student work displayed outside in the hallway as well as in the classroom on the walls. The desks are arranged in a big horseshoe and each desk has the student nametag on it. Student work was out on the desks, making it evident they would return to their tasks after music. The teacher and I met at her horse shoe table in the back of the room. Ms. Butler

was wearing a mask so I offered to wear a mask as well and sat away from the table to ensure social distance. She mentioned having students with COVID and how she wanted to be safe for the students. Out of all the teachers interviewed at Pioneer Elementary, she expressed the most concern about health and safety related to COVID.

Pioneer Teacher: Ms. Norris

Ms. Norris was waiting for me in the front office when I arrived for the interview. She is very high energy and said she was so excited to talk about her school and principal. We walked to her classroom together and she greeted everyone along the way. Upon entering her classroom there was a guinea pig named Crinkles to the left and all the supplies for him below his cage. Ms. Norris immediately introduced me to him and said he is the star of the classroom. She said every year her students bond together over caring for him and meeting his needs. She said she's been at the school the past four years, teaching primary grades with special education students, and now she has prior students who come back to check on him regularly. She said she places importance creating relationships with students and families so they can support each other throughout the school year.

Ms. Norris spoke passionately about how much she loves Pioneer Elementary and her principal. She said she has taught at other schools but none have been as cohesive and special as this school. She said she moved to the school to be less stressed and available for more home responsibilities, but she has received so much more from the school. She said she has created lifelong friendships and she plans on staying until retirement.

Pioneer Teacher: Ms. Simon

Ms. Simon has been the physical education teacher at Pioneer Elementary the past 13 years. She talked a lot about how much she loves her role as the PE teacher and finds it the perfect fit for herself and her family. Ms. Simon has great respect and empathy for the classroom teacher and discussed how she tries to support them in her daily job by providing a space for students to come for a brain break, build relationships with some of the more challenging students, and give them a reprieve on challenging days. She said she feels comfortable sharing concerns with her principal and sees her role as a support to the entire school. Ms. Simon has great respect for her principal and discussed how her principal having experience as a physical education teacher helps support her in her role. She said she has had other principals who see the role of physical education and fine arts as being crowd control or relief for the other classroom teachers, but not Principal Arnold. Ms. Simon said her principal will ask her questions about how some decisions will impact physical education and fine arts, and her principal also understands the depth of extra duties required of these positions.

We initially began our interview in the gymnasium, but then Ms. Simon's own children and several additional staff children began a game of indoor soccer in the gymnasium so we elected to move to the media center conference room. The gymnasium is a new addition built in 2015and is very well maintained. There are numbers posted on the walls for activities and after school bus riders. Outside the gymnasium hallway, the custodian was there cleaning up the bus rider signs. She was very welcoming and friendly. Along our walk to the media center conference room we saw student art work in the hallways. Ms. Simon spoke highly of their art teacher and how she continues to inspire students to create amazing projects and displays them throughout the school.

Principal Leadership

Principal Arnold was described by her teachers as being a fair leader with high expectations for everyone. They talked a lot about the equity in the building and there not being favorites. They described her as candid and trustworthy. They also talked about how she is visible everywhere and students and parents know who she is because she's always around. Ms. Arnold said she is straight forward and doesn't mind hard conversations if she needs to have them. She mentioned her visibility as well and said being present with the students and staff is one of her biggest goals. She said she does not want to be known as the principal who is in her office.

Acknowledgment of Success

The teachers discussed how Ms. Arnold does shout outs every week to acknowledge the teachers who are going above and beyond in their classroom. She also has teachers nominate other teachers and they receive certificates at staff meetings. The principal focuses the certificates on the district's core values and asks teachers to be mindful of what they observe.

Ms. Norris said she really appreciates how her principal gives authentic praise and she doesn't just pass out compliments because it is someone's turn. She discussed how the principal will come by a classroom and if she observes something she really likes or is tied to one of their school goals, she will stop and acknowledge it. She will also follow up and include it in her weekly staff email. Ms. Norris also emphasized how much the teachers appreciated the genuine praise and they knew it was heartfelt. Principal Arnold also talked about being authentic in acknowledging success. She said she is not good at the things the other principals do that they see on Pinterest, but she does know she pays attention to the work her teachers are doing and makes a point to acknowledge it regularly and in public.

Opportunities for Teacher Leadership

Teachers at Pioneer Elementary have opportunities for leadership in a variety of ways. They have team leaders, committee leaders, student club leaders, and other leadership opportunities. One leadership opportunity all the teachers discussed was how Ms. Arnold rotates the team leader every year. The teachers said they felt like the way she rotated team leaders was unique to their school and they all really liked it. Ms. Norris mentioned,

> We have a teacher on our team who never would have volunteered for any type of leadership role. The past year was her turn to be team leader and she was really nervous, but she did great. By the principal having her serve in that role, she actually helped create a leader. This teacher never would have been considered a leader, but by the end of the year she was one, and it has carried on to this year too. (Ms. Norris, interview, September 1, 2021)

Ms. Simon discussed rotating the team leaders to give everyone's voice an opportunity to be heard. She said her principal is really good at trying to get people to share their thoughts and opinions. Ms. Norris also talked about how the principal tries to hear everyone's ideas and told about how the principal took time to meet with every staff member before school started asking them questions about what they like at their school, what changes they'd like to see, and talked about how they'd like to be a bigger part of the school.

Ms. Butler described how her principal develops leaders by getting people out of their comfort zones. She said when she talks to the teachers she's always encouraging them to try something new at school, take a risk with their teaching, and asking them how she can support them in their careers. She said she started her master's in reading after visiting with the principal because she was inspired.

The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated effects throughout the world. In the realm of education, the effects continue to evolve. The teachers and principals at Pioneer Elementary discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the school and identified changes of roles and practices, challenges and support, and decision making.

Change of Roles and Practices

The teachers and principal at Pioneer Elementary all had similar feedback on the change of roles and practices during COVID-19. The most obvious changes were the physical changes, such as mask wearing, social distancing, no water fountains, hand sanitizer dispensers, and cleaning supplies throughout the building. Ms. Williams also talked about how they had to change the cafeteria and recess procedures, and even things as simple as how they walked their students to fine arts.

The teachers and principal all talked about their roles changed, especially at the beginning of the year, to one of a safety manager constantly lecturing students to pull up their masks and keep their social distance. Ms. Williams described how she would think she had her students all trained on how to be a first grader, and then they would have to suddenly transition to distance learning and they would forget all the routines. She said she felt like the whole first half of the year she was re-teaching procedures because the students would be out for quarantining and would forget.

Ms. Butler and Ms. Simon both discussed how they appreciated the principal thinking outside the box on ways to keep the students and staff safe. They described how the principal changed how the students would attend fine arts so they went to the same class every day for a

week. They said how this helped them when it was time to contact trace and try to keep students in school.

The teachers and principal also discussed how hard it was to explain to the students they couldn't play with other classes at recess and really needed to keep their distance. The principal said their large playground was very helpful for keeping classrooms separate, but by the end of the school year a lot of students were getting tired of playing with the same students in their classroom all year long.

Challenges and Support

The greatest challenges presented by COVID-19 included understanding distance learning; new technology; relationships; time; learning curves; and the emotional toll on staff members, parents, and students.

The teachers at Pioneer Elementary said learning how to teach for distance learning, and the new technology associated with it were their greatest challenges. The teachers at this school had not created their online learning platform, therefore creating a learning curve at the beginning of the pandemic. The principal described how she has wonderful teachers, but not all of them were tech savvy at the beginning of the pandemic. She discussed learning how to create the online pages herself and then going from room to room to make sure teachers were learning. The teachers emphasized how meaningful it was to them that Ms. Arnold didn't leave them stranded and would check on them daily. They described her reassurance that they would be okay and she would assist them however she could.

Principal Arnold discussed the challenges of maintaining relationships during the pandemic because they had to be so cautious. She talked about at one point her entire office staff was on quarantine and she was so worried about the rest of the staff getting exposed she took all the chairs out of the lounge to prevent congregating. She said it was one of the hardest decisions she made, but she needed to keep the teachers and students safe and learning in-person. Ms. Williams also discussed the challenges of relationships. She said it was hard to really get to know the parents of the students through COVID-19 and some of them she never saw their faces because of the mask requirement. She said it was hard to have parents relate to her when she was wearing a mask all the time, but she knew it was for the safety of her students and herself.

The teachers all mentioned how the principal offered them a lot of grace and patience during the school year. The talked about how she would check on them every day, send encouraging emails, leave notes on their desks, and go out of her way to make sure they knew she was there to support them. They also talked about how they supported each other. Ms. Simon said she knew how hard it was on the classroom teachers to have the students in class all day, trying to teach, and also make sure they were all safe, so she would try to help out by taking some of their students, or doing some of their duty to give them a break.

Decision Making

Ms. Arnold said she was very grateful for the district taking the initial steps in the decision making. She said she was overwhelmed at first with trying to balance her working and personal life with three children of her own. She said it was a relief to have some guidelines to follow and then as school progressed she had clearer ideas on how to improve her own school's situation. She talked about including teachers in the decisions they could help, but being clear with them on

district expectations. She said she doesn't ever want to waste their time if they really don't have a voice in a decision.

The teachers had the same opinions on decision making. They talked about how at the beginning of the pandemic Ms. Arnold would share the information with them and they would bring it back to their teams, but as time continued, they had more meetings about changes and ideas for improvement. Ms. Butler described how at first they had to keep students in their desks and social distanced at all times, but as they got in the routine of school, the teachers talked about allowing students to work in the same small groups to they could have small group instruction. She said she respected how Ms. Arnold listened to their ideas and as long as they could make it work effectively, she would support it. The teachers generally appreciated the autonomy allowed in decision-making when it was possible.

They also discussed how some changes have been an improvement and through their leadership meetings they have made decisions to keep some of the changes. For instance, the students used to congregate in the gym before school, but during the peak of the pandemic they started sending students directly to class. The teachers realized this practice actually improved student behavior and the tone for the entire day was better so they discussed changing it permanently at leadership. Ms. Norris said how much this has improved the start of the whole day and the principal was appreciative they brought her the idea.

Teacher Morale

Teacher morale is essential to a positive school culture. It is important to understand teachers' feelings about school and how they feel they are a valuable member to the school.

Feelings about This School

It was very clear all these teachers and the principal are genuinely happy at this school. When I asked the principal to share her feelings about this school she started crying. She immediately got embarrassed and said she didn't know why she was crying, but then she expanded,

> I feel very lucky, very lucky. I'm in a good place. We all take care of each other, and even though last year was hard. I mean, it was really hard, I still loved coming to school every day. I loved seeing the teachers and staff, and the students. This is a really special place. (Ms. Arnold, interview, September 6, 2021)

The teachers feel equally as passionate about Pioneer Elementary. All four of the teachers said they do not plan on leaving the school unless something drastic should change. Ms. Williams and Ms. Norris both said they will stay at the school until they retire, and Ms. Butler and Ms. Simon, even though they are early in their careers, said they have no intention of leaving. Ms. Simon stated,

> This school is a family. We all care about each other. We do things outside of school together as a whole staff. Nobody is left out. Not everyone comes all the time, but everyone is invited. That's the way we are. (Ms. Simon, interview, August 9, 2021)

Vital to the School

The teachers had similar answers in they know their opinions count and their voices are heard. Ms. Butler discussed how even though she is young and hasn't taught as long as other staff members, the principal will come by her classroom and get her thoughts and ideas on things. She will listen to her and ask her if she agrees with things, or if new ideas are feasible. Ms. Butler said this has really made her feel like she her opinion matters. Similarly, Ms. Simon talked about how

her principal constantly tells her she appreciates all she does for the entire school, and hears her when she has concerns about the fine arts not being as valued by some teachers as other classes. She also said the principal includes her and the other duty teachers before making big changes to schedules because she respects their input.

Ms. Norris discussed how she knows she's vital when she gets feedback from the principal and the parents. She described she knows she's vital when a parent calls her and thanks her for making a difference in their student's life. She said that's why she goes to work every day, and working in a positive and special place makes it all that much better.

Summary

Chapter IV described the background of the school district and details the two elementary sites, the teachers, and principals who participated, and then narrows to tell the stories of the two school sites collected and their responses to the interviews. The description of the scenes in this chapter are used to provide a clear picture of the teacher morale at each site. Chapter V analyzes the two schools in reference to the literature reviewed and Douglas' (1982) Grid and Group typology. The analysis will explore the perceptions of teachers explore through the lens of Cultural Theory how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Chapter IV presented case studies of Oak Hill Elementary and Pioneer Elementary developed from data collected through a variety of sources including interviews, observations, school tours, documents, artifacts, and school website information. This chapter provides an explanation of the cases through the lens of Cultural Theory.

A survey questionnaire was used as a data source in this study to identify two sites with similar grid and group categories. The 24-question grid and group questionnaire was shared with seven elementary principals to request teachers to volunteer to complete the survey. The first 12 pairs of statements on the grid and group survey represent the grid considerations, and the remaining 12 pairs of statements represent the group considerations. On the continuum, from one to eight, participants marked the bubble that represented the degree to which the statement best applied to their school site. The grid score was calculated by dividing the sum of the grid consideration responses by 12. The group score was calculated by dividing the sum of the group consideration responses by 12. These scores were plotted on the grid and group graph to determine the cultural typology of each school site selected (Harris, 2015).

The results of each questionnaire are discussed below. The results of the survey convey the initial, approximate grid and group cultural typology of each school. After the presentation of the survey results, participant's answers to the interview questions are explained though the lens of Cultural Theory.

Grid and Group Questionnaire Results

Oak Hill Elementary

Using the grid and group assessment tool, Oak Hill Elementary was categorized as a corporate environment. Thirty-one teachers completed the assessment tool in the allotted time period. The grid preference score was 4.1 and the grid assessment score was 4.8. The majority of the grid assessment scores were above a 6.0. However, there were four responses below 3.5, which impacted the overall score. The lowest grid assessment scores were on the questions regarding teachers having full autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms, full autonomy in selecting instructional methods and strategies, students encouraged to participate in and take ownership of their education, and instruction is personalized for each student. Oak Hill Elementary showed highest grid answers on authority structures, roles and job descriptions are explicit, hiring decisions, class schedules and rules and procedures.

The group preference score was 5.8 and the group assessment score was 5.3. The majority of the group assessment scores were above a 5.0 with only two questions scored at 4.7 and one question at 3.0. The question asking about teaching and learning are planned and organized around individual teacher goals and interest scored a 4.7 as well as the question about instructional resources are controlled or owned individually or collaboratively. The lowest score 3.0, asked about how teaching performance is

evaluated. The questions that most clearly indicated strong group included instructional activities initiated collaboratively, members working together on goals and objectives, curricular goals, communication flows through formal networks, allegiance to the school, and responsibilities are clear and communal.

The preferences and assessment are important to understand as each preference has its own distinctive characteristics. The grid and group preference and assessment scores for Oak Hill Elementary are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Oak Hill Elementary Grid and Group Survey Results

Oak Hill Elementary	Preference	Assessment
Strong Grid Scores	Authority structures are centralized/hierarchical Roles are specialized/explicit job descriptions Hiring decisions are centralized/controlled by administrator Class schedules are determined through institutional rules/routines Rules and procedures are numerous/explicit	Authority structures are centralized/hierarchical Roles are specialized/explicit job descriptions Hiring decisions are centralized/controlled by administrator Class schedules are determined through institutional rules/routines Rules and procedures are numerous/explicit
Strong Group Scores	Instructional activities are initiated/planned by all educators working collaboratively	Instructional activities are initiated/planned by all educators working collaboratively Members work collaboratively toward goals and objectives

	Members work collaboratively toward goals and objectives	Curricular goals are generated collaboratively
	Educators' socialization and work are incorporated/united activities	Communication flows primarily through corporate, formal networks
	Educators and students have much allegiance/loyalty to the school	Educators and students have much allegiance/loyalty to the school
	Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear/communal with much accountability	Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear/communal with much accountability

Pioneer Elementary

Pioneer Elementary was also given the grid and group assessment tool and was categorized as a corporate environment. Seventeen teachers completed the assessment tool in the time period provided. The grid preference score was a 4.1 and the grid assessment score was a 4.9. The grid scores fluctuated with the highest score being a 7.4 and the lowest score a 1.6. There were two other scores significantly lower than the average. The 1.6 score was regarding students are encouraged to participate and take ownership in their education. The question about teachers having autonomy in selecting instructional methods and strategies scored a 2.5 and the question about instruction is individualized and personalized for each student scored a 2.9. Items with the highest grid response are included in Table 6.

The group preference score was a 4.9 and the group assessment score was a 5.7. The group assessment scores were fairly consistent and there were only two answers

below a 5.0. Teachers scored a 4.5 on the question focused on teachers have full autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms and they scored a 3.0 on the question if they have autonomy in selecting instructional methods and strategies. Pioneer Elementary teachers and principal answers with the highest group scores on collaboratively work on instructional activities, extrinsic rewards benefit everyone, members work collaboratively towards goals and objectives, curricular goals are collaborative, communication flow through formal networks, high allegiance to the school, and responsibilities of staff are clear and communal.

Grid and group preference and assessment scores for Pioneer Elementary are displayed in **Table 6**.

Pioneer Elementary Grid and Group Survey Results

Pioneer Elementary	Preference	Assessment
Strong Grid Scores	Authority structures are centralized/hierarchical Roles are specialized/explicit job descriptions Teachers obtain instructional materials through administrative allotment Hiring decisions are centralized/controlled by administrator Class schedules are determined through institutional rules/routines Rules and procedures are numerous/explicit	Authority structures are centralized/hierarchical Roles are specialized/explicit job descriptions Individual teachers have no autonomy in textbook selection Hiring decisions are centralized/controlled by administrator Class schedules are determined through institutional rules/routines Rules and procedures are numerous/explicit

Strong Group Scores	Instructional activities are initiated/planned by all educators working collaboratively	Instructional activities are initiated/planned by all educators working collaboratively
	Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit everyone at the school	Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit everyone at the school
	Members work collaboratively toward goals and objectives	Members work collaboratively toward goals and objectives
	Curricular goals are generated collaboratively	Curricular goals are generated collaboratively
	Educators and students have much allegiance/loyalty to the school	Communication flows primarily through corporate, formal networks
	Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear/communal with much accountability	Educators and students have much allegiance/loyalty to the school
		Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear/communal with much accountability

Similarities of Survey Results.

Oak Hill Elementary and Pioneer Elementary had many similarities in the survey results. Teachers at both schools preferred school culture with strong group and grid. More specifically, Oak Hill and Pioneer teachers all preferred centralized or hierarchical authority structures, explicit job descriptions and roles, centralized hiring decisions, class schedules determined through rules and routines, and numerous and explicit rules and procedures. They also preferred instructional activities planned by educators working collaboratively, working towards goals and objectives together, allegiance and loyalty to the school, and responsibilities of teachers and administrators clear and with

accountability. Autonomy is important to the teachers and it is evident in their feedback regarding how they appreciated being part of the decision-making process when possible.

The cultural assessment survey results were also very similar. Oak Hill and Pioneer teachers assessed the grid dimension of the school as having centralized or hierarchical authority structures, specialized roles and job descriptions, hiring decisions controlled by the administrator, class schedules determined through rules and routines, and numerous and explicit rules and procedures. For the group dimension, both sets of teachers said instructional activities are planned collaboratively, members work collaboratively towards goals and objectives, curricular goals are generated collaboratively, educators and students have allegiance and loyalty to the school, and responsibilities of teachers and administrators are clear and with accountability.

Differences of Survey Results

The teachers at the two schools did have some differences in their preferences on the survey results. The Pioneer teachers said they preferred to obtain instructional materials through administrative allotment where that was not significant with the Oak Hill teachers for the grid dimension. For the group dimension, the Oak Hill teachers differed from the Pioneer teachers because the Oak Hill teachers believed socialization and work are united activities, but the Pioneer teachers said they preferred extrinsic rewards and extrinsic rewards benefit everyone at the school. Pioneer teachers also thought curricular goals were generated collaboratively.

The only differences between the assessment of the schools was Pioneer teachers said they have no autonomy in textbook selection in the grid area, and in the group area Pioneer teachers said extrinsic rewards primarily benefit everyone at the school.

Significance of Survey Results

The results are significant because they show both schools had similar preferences and assessments of their cultures, so the study could focus on the principals' leadership and impact on teacher morale, rather than the overall cultural influences. The results are also significant because they demonstrate the teachers and principals share a mutual agreement about the overall cultural context of the school. Harris (2015) emphasized the importance of considering cultural preferences and to note whether the majority of stakeholders are in concert with the way things are done. That is, cultural preferences that are not in concert with the overall cultural context could make a difference in the morale of each school.

Teacher and Principals' Perceptions

Oak Hill Elementary

Grid Considerations

Teacher Morale. The teachers and principal have an appreciation and respect for the norms and daily practices in the district and at Oak Hill Elementary. Ms. Franklin shared she is thankful to have a school administration that is supportive of teachers and understanding it takes time to institute new initiatives. Ms. Meyer appreciates the support from her supervisor and the district as well. Ms. Meyer commented, "We know expectations from the district are high, but we also know they're going to give us the resources and time we need to get there. And that feels good" (Ms. Meyer, interview, August 11, 2021). In a school with high grid, there is centralized power and authority (Harris, 2015). The teachers also discussed how they always felt supported by Ms. Meyer, especially in dealing with challenging students and parents. "It feels good to

know you have a principal who has your back when you need her," (Ms. Jones, interview, August 6, 2021).

      Leadership. In a strong-grid environment, there are low levels of autonomy and roles are specifically defined and positional. Oak Hill Elementary has a strong grid dimension where the staff has clear positions and roles in place to support the staff and students. It is clear Ms. Meyer is a strong leader at her site. Her clear vision of how she leads and manages her staff creates a strong team, and her big personality attracts followers. The principal can and does clearly communicate the rules and roles in the building and has set ideas on how the building should operate, including: written rules and expectations posted throughout the building, teacher schedules, defined committees, timelines for projects, and descriptions of following district protocols and procedures. In weekly emails and newsletters to staff, she clearly outlines any changes in the regular schedule and also includes any changes in her calendar. Ms. Meyer shared her belief in the importance of holding herself to the same expectations and standards as her teachers.

      The teachers and principal discussed orderly committees and clearly defined opportunities when discussing leadership opportunities at their sites. As Ms. Franklin shared, if a teacher wants a leadership role, they know how to be in one because of the way the school operates. Ms. Powell talked about how teachers bring ideas or concerns to their leadership meetings, and the team leads discuss with the principal. She said, "but we know at the end of the day, Ms. Meyer has the final say," (Ms. Powell, interview, August, 2021).

      Ms. Meyer holds monthly staff meetings for the teachers and staff of Oak Hill Elementary. The meeting is conducted in the library media center and all staff are

expected to attend. The staff members may choose where they sit, but it was apparent by the way they filtered to their seats, they sit in similar spots each month, sitting near their similar grade level teams. Ms. Meyer leads the meetings with a clear agenda on the Smartboard. The meetings occur before school starts so they are constrained by the start of the school day. Prior to the end of the meeting, a few teachers and staff members slipped out quietly to attend to students on the campus. The meeting flowed smoothly and ended promptly on time. (Observation, September 22, 2021).

Navigating COVID-19. When discussing how their roles had changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the teachers and principal mainly focused on physical changes such as mask requirements, social distancing, distance learning, and cleaning protocols. These were defined for teachers, and it was clear the teachers and principal knew the expectations and adhered to them. As stated by Harris (2015), in strong grid environments the power is positional. One feature of high grid is that it is characterized by role distinction and explicit classification which keep them apart (Douglas, 1982). Several teachers discussed their principal provided clear directions for how to handle the changes required due to the pandemic and they followed her lead. Ms. Franklin stated, "Things have been more rigid since COVID, but we just had to do what it took to get through it" (Ms. Franklin, interview, August 6, 2021).

Ms. Jones shared examples of positional power decision-making during COVID-19; specifically related to team leader meetings,

> As a team leader, I was the one who got to attend the team leader meetings. Ms. Meyer would have an agenda, she would send it to us beforehand, and then we would just go through it and give our thoughts and opinions. I liked how she

shared information with us but took our ideas. She would be okay with us trying

to pitch our ideas, but sometimes she would shut things down, because she's the

boss and knows more about the big picture. She knows so much more of what

goes on behind the scenes. (Ms. Jones, interview, August 6, 2021).

Ms. Seymour discussed Ms. Meyer's ability to support hard decisions that come

from the district level leadership. She said Ms. Meyer will not deviate from directives

from district level leadership and she will share with the leadership team when decisions

are mandates and not negotiable. Ms. Seymour said the teachers generally understand

when Ms. Meyer has that stance because she does listen and consider their ideas when

it's an option.

Group Considerations

Teacher morale. Harris (2015) stated that in strong groups there is strong

allegiance to the community's educational institution, and this allegiance is often passed

from generation to generation. There are many examples of traditions at Oak Hill

Elementary. Ms. Meyer shared how her first year as a principal she spent time observing

and was diligent in trying to ensure she didn't make changes to important traditions. Ms.

Meyer, Ms. Franklin, and Ms. Powell all referred to the Turkey Run as a favorite

tradition. Ms. Jones and Ms. Franklin shared the importance of the monthly student

assemblies and the traditions the students and staff always enjoy. The teachers shared

how the students of the month get to run through a giant balloon filled tunnel and all the

teachers go to the front of the audience and cheer for them. This was a tradition that

started with Ms. Meyer and the teachers talked about how much fun the students, staff,

and parents have each month.

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Ms. Jones and Ms. Franklin also talked about how much they enjoy having the same families over the years they've taught at Oak Hill Elementary. Ms. Jones said as a first-grade teacher she loves watching her students getting older, returning to visit her, and then getting to teach their younger siblings. There is a pride in having taught at the site for many years and having that family connection.

Ms. Meyer shared how she observes her teachers and staff taking note of when she perceives the morale to be low and how she addresses it. She commented on how teachers become quieter and keep to themselves when they are feeling stressed, she won't see them visiting in the hallways or lounge, and the overall school feels less energized. "You just see it in their faces, that things are hard, really hard," (Ms. Meyer, interview, August 11, 2021). She said that's when she will work with her office staff to show them appreciation. These signs of appreciation may include anything from tangible goods, to handwritten notes on their classroom windows. She described the time she and her previous assistant principal wrote a note on every staff member's classroom window with three attributes that made them special. Ms. Meyer glowed as she described how the teachers were so excited and were all outside their classrooms reading their notes and the notes on their colleagues' windows. She noted how special something so simple made them feel. She emphasized how important it is to show your appreciation and value of them because the teaching profession can be so challenging.

Leadership. Teachers at Oak Hill Elementary described their principal as hands-on, caring, energetic, supportive, and always available when needed. Ms. Seymour discussed how she knows her principal supports the teachers and goes above and beyond to support them with students and parents. Ms. Seymour talked about having difficult

students or a time she was struggling to get a parent on board and Ms. Meyer went out of her way to meet with the parents and her together and discuss ways they could be a team. She said it was clear Ms. Meyer was vested in the success of this relationship and wanted to make sure she knew she was supported (Ms. Seymour, interview, August 6, 2021).

The teacher as leader holds meaning in schools with strong group (Harris, 2015). The Oak Hill teachers discussed the importance of teacher voice and leadership. Ms. Jones and Ms. Seymour shared how much they value having a voice on committees and in leadership roles. Ms. Meyer stressed the importance of having teachers understand and support hard decisions and to be a part of the process when it is possible. She has a document with all of the school committees and reviews it annually to ensure all the teachers serve on a variety of committees. In addition, she said she seeks out those teachers with strong leadership skills and develops them. She talked about how hard it is to run a school, but with the right teacher leaders it can be done more effectively.

Navigating COVID-19. Teachers and the principal at Oak Hill Elementary discussed how they knew they were supported by each other and their principal through all the challenges of COVID-19. Principal Meyer referred to her staff as "my team" throughout the interview and reflected on how she felt like she wasn't doing enough to help them get through each day. Ms. Jones discussed how she would spend extra hours at school because she wanted to make sure everyone was successful with all the changes brought on because of the pandemic. Comments such as these are evident of strong group in which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the group (Harris, 2015).

It was a challenge for Ms. Meyer to keep morale up during the pandemic. She shared how she started to notice a decline in the staff morale in the middle of the pandemic, so she assembled her leadership team and discussed ideas on how to improve it. She said they devised an idea of showing support to others in the district. They led the teachers and staff in providing goodies for sunshine boxes for the different departments in the district because they knew if the schools were struggling, the district leaders were probably feeling the same way. She described by having her staff lean in to support others, it automatically improved their own demeanor. She said by working together and thinking about others' needs the staff overcame a tough period.

Ms. Meyer expressed concern at possible low-test scores due to the pandemic. She said the scores will make her sad because she knows how hard her teachers worked during the pandemic. She shared stories of the teachers collaborating on how to use their online learning support, Canvas, and distance learning strategies to ensure the students were receiving quality instruction. "I've never seen my teachers work as hard as last year," (Ms. Meyer, interview, August 11, 2021) was one of the statements she made about the challenges of COVID. It was evident she worries and cares about them and owns their successes and failures.

Pioneer Elementary

Grid considerations

Teacher morale. All the teachers mentioned part of the reason they are so happy is because of the dependability, reliability, and high expectations of Ms. Arnold. Ms. Williams spoke about how she really likes the high expectations Ms. Arnold has for her teachers and students because she knows they are fair and consistent for everyone (Ms.

Williams, interview, August 9, 2021). Ms. Butler shared how she appreciates a principal who encourages and challenges her teachers to continue to grow professionally. She talked about how she started in her master's degree and Ms. Arnold was very supportive and told her she would help support her in any way she could (Ms. Butler, interview, September 1, 2021).

Ms. Arnold also talked about how much she appreciates having the district's core values guide in her decision-making and hard conversations. She said knowing the district's expectations has helped her in handling challenging situations. She referred to a specific example of a teacher arguing about having a challenging student in her classroom and saying she didn't feel supported by Ms. Arnold or the district. Ms. Arnold shared how after they discussed it and she referred to the core values of the district, the teacher started to understand and eventually had a complete turnaround in how she felt about having the student and supporting him. Ms. Arnold said now this teacher is on board with helping all students and has a completely different attitude.

Leadership. The school and district's goals play a big focus at Pioneer Elementary. The district's mantra: 100 Percent Literacy, Engagement and Graduation – Every Student, Every Day, is displayed in the teacher workroom and the school-wide goals are posted. Ms. Arnold talks about how she was disappointed in the academic achievement of students last year due to COVID19, but she is sure this year she will see an improvement. "Last year wasn't the year to focus on scores, but we will improve student growth and achievement this year now that COVID numbers are going down" (Ms. Arnold, interview, September 1, 2021).

The school district has an expectation for all principals to work with their site leadership team and develop school goals. In schools with high grid, central office staff administrators, site administrators, teachers, students and parents work cohesively to benefit all involved (Harris, 2015). Ms. Arnold shared her goals which focus on student academic achievement and growth. She talked with passion about not leaving any student behind and making sure her teachers knew these goals were non-negotiable. The teachers were part of the process, but Ms. Arnold clearly has a focused vision for all of her students to make academic progress this year.

Navigating COVID-19. In a strong-grid environment, the power authority is hierarchal with defined roles, rules, and responsibilities (Harris, 2015). Ms. Arnold talked about how at the beginning of the pandemic she followed all district guidelines as prescribed. "There wasn't a lot of room for flexibility at the start of the pandemic so I just communicated expectations with teachers and we all followed them," (Ms. Arnold, interview, September 1, 2021). She shared how she would get information from district leaders, consider the best way to disseminate the information, and then move forward with communication. Several of the teachers interviewed mentioned they knew Ms. Arnold did not have much flexibility with decision-making at the beginning of COVID19, and teachers simply followed her directions. During the beginning of the pandemic, teachers described the environment as very structured and rigid. Ms. Butler said she appreciated Ms. Arnold being very specific and consistent in the expectations for the staff and students (Ms. Butler, interview, September 1, 2021). Ms. Simon said she was very careful in following the protocols set forth by the district and Ms. Arnold and was very mindful of wearing her mask, keeping her distance at car rider duty, and

reminding the students to have on their masks before getting out of their cars for school. It was very in hearing from the teachers the rules and expectations were clearly defined as evident in a strong-grid environment.

Group considerations

Teacher Morale. In a strong group environment, the focus is on a common purpose and organizational goals and norms are part of the group accountability (Harris, 2015). The teachers at Pioneer Elementary all talked about how the school is a family. Ms. Simon shared how they have staff gatherings outside of school hours and everyone is invited and there aren't staff cliques. She said not everyone attends each time, but everyone is always included. Ms. Simon shared how she felt a place of belonging at Pioneer Elementary from the first time she started at the school.

> "I knew from the first day I got to this school that I was at a special place. My previous school was good, but Pioneer is really special. I mean, the entire staff gets along, and people try to include everyone. The staff kids get along great and are part of our extended family. We all want each other to be successful," (Ms. Simon, interview, August 9, 2021).

Ms. Simon and Ms. Arnold shared another example of strong-group at Pioneer Elementary when talking about the teachers wanting to improve student engagement so they initiated after school student clubs and activities. Ms. Arnold said, "I was shocked at the number of teachers who volunteered to sponsor a club or activity, because this wasn't required. It was just an idea to get kids more involved in their school" (Ms. Arnold, interview, September 1, 2021).

Leadership. At the staff meeting at Pioneer Elementary, the tables were arranged so the teachers were in a big rectangle and everyone could see each other. Teachers and staff were very jovial and visiting until the start of the staff meeting. Ms. Arnold led the staff meeting, but had intermittent breaks where staff members could share with each other, call out ideas, and brainstorm together. She also provided opportunities for various committee leaders to share with the group (Observation, September 16, 2021).

The teachers talked about Ms. Arnold being very intentional of making her rounds throughout the building and every classroom daily. Ms. Norris said she sees Ms. Arnold every day unless she is out of the building. She described Ms. Arnold poking her head in the door and greeting the students and commenting on something she observed in the classroom. She said you feel her presence because she is so intentional on connecting with students and teachers. Ms. Norris said the teachers will know if Ms. Arnold is going to be out of the building because she sends her weekly update with her schedule on it for everyone to see.

Navigating COVID-19. In a strong group environment, group interests are prioritized over individual interest (Harris, 2015). Ms. Arnold was described as checking in on all the teachers and staff every day, asking how she could support them, and looking for ways to make their jobs easier. Ms. Arnold shared the length of hours she worked because she was spending the majority of the day checking in on teachers and helping them with all the new technology and distance learning framework.

Ms. Arnold shared an experience during Covid19 where her entire office staff was either home with Covid19 or quarantined. She laughed as she said she was the only one working in the office, answering phones, taking students in the health office, and trying

to find substitutes for teachers. She described how she must have looked crazy, but she knew she had to do whatever it took to keep the school afloat.

Ms. Simon shared her experience of having an idea to change their normal fine arts and PE schedule to a full week rotation and bringing it to Ms. Arnold for discussion. Ms. Simon described Ms. Arnold as being open to the idea and always looking for ideas from her staff on ways to improve. Schools with strong-group consider and give priority to group goals.

Similarities and Differences of Oak Hill and Pioneer

The teacher morale is similar at both sites. According to Douglas (1982), the morale of a corporate group is typically one of unified coordination among groups, well established bonds between community and the school, and strong unity and identity. The Oak Hill teachers generally expressed great satisfaction and contentment in their working environment and leadership. The Pioneer teachers all shared their love for the school and each other. The teachers at both sites shared the feelings of commitment and dedication to their schools, and how much they valued the success of the other teachers, students, and the school in general. In a corporate environment, teachers, administrators, students, and parents all work together in a cohesive manner to benefit all involved (Harris, 2015).

Oak Hill and Pioneer Elementary principals both acknowledge teacher and student success regularly and authentically. At Oak Hill, this was done by the principal, Ms. Meyer, stopping by classrooms daily and noting how hard the teachers and students were working. In addition, she included highlights of their work in daily announcements, weekly emails, staff meetings, and assemblies. At Pioneer, this was done by Ms. Arnold, the principal, giving the teachers specific feedback on what she liked in their classrooms,

commenting on appropriate behavior of students, and being a daily presence in their school day. Teachers shared how much they value feedback from their principals and how they appreciated the time the principals took to acknowledge their hard work. In schools with strong group, the regular customs and rituals are an important part of school culture and teacher morale.

Leadership styles were very similar in many components. The Oak Hill principal was described as hands-on, direct, and supportive by her teachers. The Pioneer principal was described as present, hands-on, authentic, involved, and relational by her teachers. Both the Oak Hill principal and Pioneer principal understand teachers and staff are motivated by group goals and collaborative work. Successful corporate school principals understand members are motivated by working together on group goals (Harris, 2015).

The school leaders facilitated teacher morale very similarly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both principals discussed initially following district guidelines and procedures at the beginning of the pandemic. The teachers interviewed talked about how their principals were committed to following the district's directions during the start of the pandemic. In a corporate environment, decisions rarely contradict the consensus of the overall school community (Harris, 2015). Ms. Meyer and Ms. Arnold discussed how they were both intentional on following district procedures and protocols. They both said they would listen to their teachers' ideas and needs, but there were some non-negotiables.

As noted in Table 7, the greatest difference between the two leaders was the amount of hands-on leadership described by Ms. Arnold's teachers and herself. She described as being in every classroom, every day, to ensure the teachers had everything they needed for distance learning. Another difference was the value Oak Hill Elementary

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places on the traditions they have passed on throughout the years. They specifically

mentioned the importance of traditions like the turkey run and the big energy filled

student assemblies. Pioneer teachers didn't mention traditions.

Table 7

Grid and Group Factors

School Site/Grid and Group Factors	Oak Hill Elementary	Pioneer Elementary	Explanation (similarities)	Explanation (differences)
Teacher Morale	Group goals Strong sense of school community Teachers feel supported Proud of traditions	Group goals Strong sense of school community Teachers feel supported	School-wide goals are a focus PLC's, schoolwide activities, staff outside activities Discipline, parent concerns, district initiatives	School-wide traditions, turkey run, student assemblies
Leadership	Clear communication of rules and roles Site leadership team School committees Input from staff	Clear communication of rules and roles Site leadership team School committees Input from staff	Master schedules, regular newsletters Regular meetings, teacher-leaders, collaboration Teacher -led, based on goals Teachers on committees, regular feedback, collaborative setting	
Navigating COVID-19	Adhered to districts' rules and procedures Listened to staff feedback on ideas	Adhered to districts' rules and procedures Listened to staff feedback on ideas Hands-on leadership	Followed procedures and practices Regular zoom meetings at beginning of pandemic, staff meetings, made changes based on feedback	Learned how to use online learning platform, went classroom to classroom helping teachers navigate distance learning

Summary

In this chapter, information was presented and analyzed that was collected through interviews, observations, and documents. Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions. Implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed, and recommendations for future research are offered.

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CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to explore through the lens of Cultural Theory how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two elementary sites were selected for the study. Throughout the research process, data were collected and analyzed using multiple forms of data sources, including interview transcripts, artifacts, field notes and rich description. In addition to the collection of multiple forms of data, triangulation occurred through colleague peer review and member checks.

Data analysis and data collection occurred throughout the research process. Triangulation of data was accomplished by seeking multiple sources, such as questionnaire responses, documents, interview transcripts, observation field notes, purposive sampling, and rich description. Peer debriefing from colleagues and member checks from participants in the study were also utilized as a strategy for triangulation. New information, which resulted from triangulation feedback, was integrated into the study as appropriate.

Chapter VI presents findings of the study through answering the research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and implications for research, theory,

and practice are addressed. Recommendations for future research are offered, followed by a summary of the study.

Findings

The primary findings of this qualitative case study were that teachers' morale was impacted by principal leadership during the COVID19 pandemic. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How is teacher morale described at this school?
2. How do school leaders facilitate teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic?
    a. How is teacher morale facilitated through the grid (role and policy) dimension of the school?
    b. How is teacher morale facilitated through the group (social commitment and incorporation) dimension of the school culture?
3. How do cultural preferences affect teacher morale during the pandemic?

Based on the cases presented in Chapter IV and the data analyzed in Chapter V, these research questions are answered below.

Research Question One: How is teacher morale described at this school?

Oak Hill Elementary

Teacher morale at Oak Hill Elementary is positive, enthusiastic, and there is an air of confidence. According to Lambersky (2016), job satisfaction may be described as a positive demeanor and an upbeat attitude toward a person's position or work.The teachers at Oak Hill were emotional when discussing their feelings about school. Oak Hill teacher, Ms. Jones talked about how much she loved her school, and she calls it her home. Ms.

Meyer, the principal of Oak Hill, said she knows how lucky she is to be at this school and how good she feels going to work there. Ms. Jones shared how she has great satisfaction in her work at Oak Hill and knows that she is a valued member of the staff by the way Ms. Meyer is intentional in recognizing her contributions. Ms. Jones said Ms. Meyer makes an effort to recognize the hard work put in by teachers and staff and goes out of her way to ensure they all know how much she values them. Ms. Meyer recognizes staff members at staff meetings, in her weekly updates to staff, and communication with parents.

The teachers interviewed all talked about the length of their time teaching at Oak Hill and how the majority of staff members rarely leave Oak Hill Elementary for another teaching position in the district or surrounding areas. Ms. Franklin shared how she had worked other places, but her ultimate desire was to be at Oak Hill and spend her career there. Ms. Jones seemed almost apologetic when she talked about only having taught at Oak Hill, but never wanting to leave because it is such a special place. Ms. Meyer said her teacher turnover is the lowest in the district and most of her staff have spent their entire career at her school because they are happy there.

The teachers and principal shared similar thoughts about why they are vital to their school. Ms. Franklin at Oak Hill shared how she knows she is trusted by her principal and is often used for consulting with her principal for ideas and feedback. Several of the teachers shared how important it was to them to be part of the decision-making process and how that made them feel like an important part of the school's success. Teacher morale can be directly tied to participation in decision-making (Willis & Varner, 2010). Ms. Jones and Ms. Franklin talked about the many opportunities

teachers have at Oak Hill to be involved in decision-making providing examples such as the leadership team, committee leaders, and grade level team leaders. Ms. Jones also shared how she feels comfortable going to Ms. Meyer with ideas or concerns and Ms. Meyer is always open to feedback.

Pioneer Elementary

Pioneer Elementary teacher morale is very similar to Oak Hill Elementary. There is a definite positive and upbeat environment and teachers are satisfied and confident with their roles and their leader. Literature shows personal and professional daily relationships in the school building and with colleagues are directly related to teacher job satisfaction (Senechal et al., 2016). The Pioneer teachers talked a lot about how their school is a big family and everyone cares about each other. They shared examples of socializing both inside and outside of the school day and including all staff members. The principal and teachers value the group as a whole and talk about making the school an extended part of their families. The teachers and principal both spoke to how they value each person as individuals, but they also recognize how important each person contributes to the success of the overall school. Ms. Simon shared how the teachers find it very important to include the entire staff in activities. She said participation in events can fluctuate from all the teachers attending, to just a few, but they all know it's important everyone is included because they consider themselves a family.

The principal and teachers at Pioneer Elementary expressed their love for their school as they shared their feelings about their school. The principal, Ms. Arnold, had tears when she described how happy she is at her school. She shared how she knows she is very lucky to be there and how much she loves it. Ms. Norris and Ms. Williams both

talked about how going to work every day made them feel happy. Ms. Norris said she looks forward to each day because Pioneer is such a special school. The Pioneer teachers talked about how much they love it there and have no intention of leaving. Ms. Williams, Ms. Norris, and Ms. Simon have all worked for previous leaders at Pioneer, and they said Ms. Arnold has been their best leader because of the culture she has created.

Teachers at Pioneer Elementary shared how similar experiences of making them feel vital. Ms. Butler talked about how her principal, Ms. Arnold values every employee and constantly tells them how important they are to the functioning of the school. Ms. Butler said even being fairly new to education, Ms. Arnold treats her with respect and values her ideas and experience. Similarly, Ms. Simon shared the way teachers are consulted for feedback from Ms. Arnold and how they are treated with great respect. Ms. Simon talked about one of the things she likes best in the school is how each team of teachers, regardless of the grade level or content area, are treated equally and with respect. She also talked about the feedback she gets from families and how much they appreciate what she does for their children. Ms. Simon described parents coming back to visit her after their children have moved on to another grade level and reiterating how much they loved their time at Pioneer Elementary and the teachers.

Similarities and Differences in Explanations of Morale

The teachers and principals at Oak Hill and Pioneer had many similarities in the verbiage when explaining their perceptions of morale. The most common descriptors included feelings such as happy, love, satisfaction, lucky and trust. Both sets of teachers talked about how much they appreciated their principals asking for and receiving

feedback, participation in decision-making, and recognition of contributions to the school.

The differences were minor but Oak Hill teachers did speak more about the amount of recognition Ms. Meyer provided to staff members. They specifically shared the various avenues Ms. Meyer used to recognized staff members and their accomplishments to the school and district. A difference expressed by Pioneer teachers and staff was the importance placed on socialization with the staff members both inside and outside of school and the value of ensuring all staff members were included. Ms. Simon talked about how it was important for everyone to be invited even if they could not attend. The inclusion of all staff members was one of the things she found most special about her school.

Research Question Two: How do school leaders facilitate teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Facilitating teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic initially started with ensuring student and staff safety. Corporate schools are influenced by both high-grid and high-group and leaders spend time on communication on district goals and objectives (Harris, 2015). Both principals shared how at the beginning of the pandemic they took all their guidance from the district level and followed all practices and procedures completely, to include instructional expectations. In addition, the principals shared how important it was to communicate with staff regularly. The facilitation is described in greater detail in the below paragraphs in regard to the grid and group dimensions of the schools.

Research Question 2a: How is teacher morale facilitated through the grid (role and policy) dimension of the school?

Oak Hill Elementary

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Oak Hill principal, Ms. Meyer, facilitated the teacher morale through the grid dimension by communicating rules, procedures, and expectations often and clearly. Oak Hill teachers shared how much they appreciated their principals' leadership, detailed expectations, and clear communication. They described how they were thankful to have Ms. Meyer leading them during the pandemic and her ability to be upfront and decisive. The teachers said they knew when decisions could be collaborative, and when they were non-negotiable, sharing how Ms. Meyer would email directions and agendas and get to business as needed. Successful principals of corporate environments solicit input from their staff when appropriate (Harris, 2015). The teachers described Ms. Meyer taking time to email all agendas ahead of time, providing more details than prior to the pandemic, and being specific about expectations for teachers and staff.

Ms. Jones described feelings of apprehension at the thought of trying to teach remotely, addressing students' needs, and welfare at the onset of the pandemic, but she said Ms. Meyer's expectations and communication helped ease the concerns. Ms. Seymour described Ms. Meyer setting the expectations and then being available for as much support as needed. The teachers were appreciative of the direction provided by Ms. Meyer and expressed how it gave them a sense of safety and support.

Teachers expressed thankfulness for their principal's decisiveness and leadership during the pandemic. They talked about what a difficult time everyone was having and to

have a leader step up and guide them was very comforting. They gave specific examples of strong grid during the outset of the pandemic. There strict guidelines and procedures in place for student and staff safety, such as mask wearing, social distancing, assigned seats in the cafeteria, no large group congregations, and there were also specific expectations for instruction and learning. The district developed set guidelines for distance learning protocols and teachers were trained on the expectations. All families were notified of the expectations and were assured the practices were consistent district wide. It was Ms. Meyer's responsibility to make sure all staff and students had the tools needed for success and to provide clear communication and guidelines.

The Oak Hill teachers clearly understood and were grateful for Ms. Meyer's leadership and appreciated the procedures and rules she implemented throughout the pandemic. They all expressed relief in having a strong leader who set and followed clear guidelines and procedures.

Pioneer Elementary

The Pioneer Elementary principal, Ms. Arnold, led in a decisive and clear manner with attention to details during the pandemic to navigate the expectations of the district and the needs of the teachers and students. Ms. Arnold shared how prior to the COVID-19 pandemic she wasn't as intentional on the structure of staff meetings and communication, but she knew she needed to be more deliberate with the changes created by the pandemic. She said before the pandemic it was more natural for her to develop her staff meeting agendas at the last minute, and if she forgot to share something at a staff meeting, she would walk the building and talk to teachers about it. She said once the pandemic started, she had to become more intentional on communication, preparing for

staff meetings, and become more digital. Ms. Arnold said at the onset of the pandemic she started to share meeting agendas ahead of time and was intentional on communicating with her staff more often and through email and zoom. She felt it was important for teachers to understand when they could have a voice and when they needed to move forward with directions. Ms. Arnold said she appreciated the district's guidance on handling issues during the pandemic and described how she tried to be as straightforward with her staff hoping it would reassure them as well. She said the safety guidelines were easier to follow and support her teachers, but she felt the pressure of trying to support the district's instructional expectations and supporting her teachers on the learning curve.

A change for elementary teachers during the pandemic was all teachers were expected to use the online learning platform, Canvas, to provide instruction for students at home on distance learning. In corporate environments, relationships are mutually supportive, and everyone has a vested interest in the success of the school (Harris, 2015). Ms. Williams, at Pioneer Elementary, shared how she knew she needed to learn how to load her lessons on Canvas and have them ready by the time school started in August of 2020. She said her principal, Ms. Arnold, was by their sides during the entire learning curve and assured them she would help them until they mastered it. Ms. Williams described Ms. Arnold stopping by her classroom daily to see how she was making progress and how she could support her and other teachers. She said that was huge in helping her and many others stay calm and positive.

Ms. Simon, the physical education teacher, shared how Ms. Arnold had strict rules regarding student drop-off in the mornings and car line in the afternoon. Students,

staff, and parents were all expected to wear masks and maintain social distance throughout the sidewalks, entryway and hallways. Ms. Simon said at first she was very nervous about enforcing the new rules because student supervision is one of her main duties, but Ms. Arnold was there to support her the entire time. She shared how Ms. Arnold modeled the expectations and had conversations with the parents and students who may not agree or understand, so it made it easier for Ms. Simon to have the same expectations. Ms. Simon talked about how much she appreciated a principal who is alongside of you to support you.

Research Question 2b: How is teacher morale facilitated through the group (social commitment and incorporation) dimension of the school culture?

Oak Hill Elementary

The teachers talked a lot about the appreciation and gratitude they felt for Ms. Meyer leading them during the pandemic and maintaining their positive school dynamic. In a hierarchical system, members understand and appreciate what is best for the group benefits all those involved (Harris, 2015). The teachers shared how their principal shared information, processes and procedures and they understood there had to be times decisions were not negotiable. The teachers described Ms. Meyer specifically sharing with them that some decisions were going to be implemented and not an option, but she would always include them on decision-making when possible.

The teachers at Oak Hill also shared how important it was to see their principal daily, especially during the pandemic. The Oak Hill teachers talked about how Ms. Meyer checked in on them daily and asked if they were okay. The teachers said this was one way they knew they were a valued part of the school. Ms. Meyer shared how she

knew it was hard on the teachers not having their regular schedules, getting to eat lunch together as groups, and having to keep their distance from the students and each other, so she described being very intentional on communicating with the staff, students, and parents on what was happening throughout the school community. Ms. Meyer talked about how taking the time to notice the small things, and sharing about them during the pandemic, was important. She said she knew it was part of her responsibility to keep the positive school culture during the pandemic.

She talked about noticing when she teachers' morale seemed low and being very intentional to create team opportunities. Ms. Meyer said the activities may have looked different than pre-pandemic, but working towards a group goal helped her staff. One specific activity Ms. Meyer talked about was having the teachers and staff work together to create boxes of encouragement for district leaders and their teams. She described her intentionality of having the teams of teachers work together on a project for others to create that team building and group cohesiveness that was missing during the stress of COVID-19. Research shows principals who consider the needs and feelings of staff members have been positive effects on motivation and teachers' desire to perform their responsibilities (Finnigan, 2010).

Ms. Meyer also worked diligently to maintain the school's rituals, celebrations, and traditions. Ms. Powell described the way Ms. Meyer and the leadership team adapted monthly assemblies to a virtual format during the pandemic to ensure students, staff, and the community were still able to be recognized. In addition, Ms. Meyer worked with the Turkey Run committee to find a way to still have the annual school-wide fun run, but in a safe environment. Several of the interviewed teachers shared how important it was to

keep those traditions and how much they appreciated their principal doing her best to keep some normalcy during the pandemic. They talked about how the teachers and staff rallied together to make sure students had some of those experiences and how important it was to them.

Pioneer Elementary

Ms. Arnold facilitated teacher morale through the group dimension of school culture in several ways. She described how during the onset of the pandemic when everyone was on distance learning she made a point to email, text, or zoom teachers daily to try to emulate a regular day of school. She said visibility is always important to her. Consequently, she did her best to replicate her presence virtually. She said once the school re-opened, she tried to go to all the classes daily. The Pioneer teachers also shared how much it meant to them that Ms. Arnold made a point to come by their classrooms every day and give them feedback. Ms. Norris described how Ms. Arnold would take the time to go to every classroom, see students, and provide feedback on what she saw daily. She said she knew it had to take a lot of Ms. Arnold's time, but how much the students and staff appreciated it. The teachers all commented on Ms. Arnold's visibility and presence during the pandemic and how important that was to them. Ms. Arnold also took the time to provide authentic praise during morning announcements and staff meetings. She acknowledged and presented certificates to teachers who were demonstrating the district's core values.

Ms. Arnold also covered for the entire office staff when they were home quarantined because of COVID-19. She talked about the importance of everyone doing their part and she wanted to ensure the school could stay open for students and staff. She

described teachers and parents stopping into the office asking how they could help and telling her how much they appreciated all she was doing for the school. Ms. Simon said the teachers and parents all knew they had a principal who genuinely cared about the good of all the school.

Ms. Arnold and several of the teachers commented on how even during the pandemic they tried to find ways to get together socially as a staff. The teachers said Ms. Arnold talked to them about how they could allow the staff children to play before and after school in the gym and teachers could visit as long as they kept on their masks and social-distanced. Ms. Simon said it meant a lot to them that Ms. Arnold recognized how important being together was for them and her finding creative ways with them to support their relationships. The staff at Pioneer clearly appreciated Ms. Arnold's commitment to supporting them throughout the pandemic.

Similarities and Differences in Facilitating Morale

Oak Hill principal, Ms. Meyer and Pioneer principal, Ms. Arnold, have similarities in facilitating morale. Both principals maintained a positive school culture by trying to maintain a sense of normalcy and regularity in school. Teachers at Oak Hill described how Ms. Arnold ensured they had regular communication and feedback from her. Similarly, the teachers at Pioneer commented on how much they appreciated Ms. Arnold sending out daily emails with communication, announcements, feedback, and trying to make sure the routine didn't change too much. Both sets of teachers described how much they valued their principals being highly visible and a regular presence in their classrooms and throughout the building during the pandemic.

A difference noted was the attention Ms. Meyer placed on ensuring the annual traditions continued during the pandemic. Several teachers discussed how much they appreciated the way Ms. Meyer found solutions to continue to have annual traditions and provide those special opportunities and memories for students. This was clearly very important to the teachers. Ms. Meyer was also intentional on noticing teacher morale and made a point of having special treats and activities for teachers when she observed a decline in morale. Another difference was the attention Ms. Arnold placed on providing opportunities for teachers to socialize safely. She shared how she knew it was important for her to find solutions on how they could still get together. She worked with her staff to seek activities they could do as a group if they were interested.

Research Question Three: How do cultural preferences affect teacher morale during the pandemic?

Oak Hill Elementary

Leading a school during any time is a challenge, but especially so during a crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Oak Hill teachers' cultural preferences were a corporate environment and the principal, Ms. Meyer, continued that style of leadership throughout the pandemic. The teachers were grateful for this style of leadership and expressed how Ms. Meyer did the best job she could under the circumstances. Cultural preferences are important for leaders to understand as they navigate conflicts and promote an atmosphere conducive to learning (Harris, 2015).

The teachers at Oak Hill Elementary prefer an environment with rules, procedures, and norms explicitly stated, and Ms. Meyer continued this type of leadership throughout the pandemic, resulting in the morale of the teachers staying positive. They

trusted the district to make the make the best decisions for the greater of the group, which created a calm and cohesive work environment. Ms. Meyer shared how she was intentional on sharing staff meeting agendas and being specific on expectations. The teachers talked about how they appreciated knowing the expectations and rules during the pandemic.

Oak Hill Elementary has strong allegiance to the group and Ms. Meyer was very intentional on ensuring they still had those strong ties during the pandemic. She was strategic in the traditions and activities they could have during the pandemic and altering the ones that were most important to the teachers. The teachers expressed appreciation for the continuity of traditions, even when they had to look different from pre-pandemic. This group of teachers clearly values the traditions and rituals and by finding a way to maintain them impacted teacher morale positively.

Pioneer Elementary

Teachers at Pioneer Elementary were pleased with how Ms. Arnold led during the pandemic and many of the strengths they described were based on their cultural preferences. For example, the teachers were pleased with how Ms. Arnold communicated through daily and weekly updates, providing them with the expectations and procedures. They also were happy with the way she managed virtual meetings and tried to maintain a sense of normalcy. The teachers at Pioneer preferred an environment with strong grid, and Ms. Arnold continued to lead in that manner, and the teachers noticed and appreciated it. They appreciated Ms. Arnold communicating expectations but also modeling and participating in them alongside the teachers. Several mentioned it was

impressive to them to see Ms. Arnold doing the same things she was expecting out of them.

The teachers also preferred an environment with strong group. They commented on how much it meant to them Ms. Arnold made time to come to their classrooms daily and support them. They felt supported as they worked on expectations and goals collaboratively. This resulted in teachers buying into the expectations and experiencing a feeling of success as they navigated new expectations. Several of the teachers said they knew Ms. Arnold wouldn't let them fail and they would learn together. They described her working non-stop to make sure they were supported and successful.

The teachers also appreciated Ms. Arnold making sure they had time together and continuing some of their regular activities within the confines of the pandemic. Strong-group environments value collective relationships (Harris, 2015). The teachers at Pioneer expressed the importance of time together and how much they value their relationships. Ms. Arnold met their needs and boosted morale by creating opportunities for them to be together.

Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate that there are many similarities and few differences between the how the two principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures at Oak Hill Elementary and Pioneer Elementary during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results from the grid and group surveys indicated both elementary schools had a corporate school culture and a preference for corporate school culture.

Findings from the study indicate teacher morale in both Oak Hill and Pioneer was described as positive, supportive, and collaborative. The research on teacher morale

shows in schools where principals were part of the instructional process and had high expectations for good teaching, the teachers' perspective of the school was much more positive (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Ms. Meyer and Ms. Arnold were both described as supportive and the teachers gave specific examples of them assisting them before and during the pandemic. Teachers at Oak Hill said they know Ms. Meyer supports them and gave examples of her helping them with both student behavior and parental conflicts. Pioneer teachers shared how Ms. Arnold worked directly with them on learning the online instruction platform and staying by their sides until they were comfortable. In studies on principals, those that are seen as supportive rather than authoritative task managers were identified as essential to job satisfaction. (Willis & Varner, 2010). In addition, teacher morale is directly related to the amount and type of recognition they receive (Willis & Varner, 2010). Ms. Meyer and Ms. Arnold both provide regular feedback, recognize students and teachers in announcements on the intercom, emails, and assemblies. Teachers at both schools shared how they appreciate the recognition they receive from their principals.

This study found the principals facilitated teacher morale similarly during the pandemic. In a corporate environment, the role of the principal is to lead an interdependent, hierarchical system. Ms. Meyer and Ms. Arnold demonstrated both strong grid and group in their leadership and decision-making throughout the pandemic. Both principals had strong grid scores and the feedback from teachers aligned. They were described as decisive as needed, provided specific expectations for student and staff safety, instruction, and learning, and set clear and concise rules and procedures. Ms. Meyer communicated regularly, and the teachers talked about how much they appreciated

her being explicit in the expectations. Teachers at Pioneer described Ms. Arnold in similarly and shared how she was a model for the rules and procedures at the onset of the pandemic. Both principals shared the importance of clear and regular communication.

Ms. Meyer and Ms. Arnold both demonstrated collaborative and community-oriented leadership that fosters teacher morale. Both principals continued to make teacher and student relationships a priority, checking in with them daily, being visible and present in both distance and in-person learning, and continuing with student and staff recognition. According to research, teachers with positive morale typically feel connected personally and professionally to the community of the school (Senechal et al., 2016). A difference between the two leaders was the intention Ms. Meyer placed on ensuring previous school traditions and rituals continued throughout the pandemic. Teachers at Oak Hill shared how much they appreciated continuing valued traditions such as the annual Turkey Run and school-wide monthly assemblies. Ms. Meyer said she knew it was important to figure out a way to maintain the traditions even during the pandemic. Corporate environments value traditions and rituals (Harris, 2015).

Findings from the study indicate the cultural preferences of teachers affect teacher morale during the COVID-19 pandemic. Oak Hill and Pioneer teachers both prefer a corporate environment and the two principals continued with the same type of leadership. The stability of culture made a difference in the perceptions of the teachers and impact on school culture. The teachers at both sites appreciated the feeling of security the high grid environment created, and a sense of autonomy in being given input on decision-making and changes when feasible. The cultural preferences and leadership of the principals had a positive impact on teacher morale. Conflict generally happens when cultural

preferences and the environment are not in sync. Leaders who understand their teachers'

perceptions and the dominant cultural preference may be more effective in conflict

management (Harris, 2015). Ms. Franklin did share a little about how she perceived Ms.

Meyer listening to the voices of some teachers more than others, but overall described her

as fair and consistent in decision-making. The other teachers at Oak Hill gave examples

of Ms. Meyer making sure everyone knew they were valued and appreciated. Ms. Arnold

was described by her teachers and treating fairly and consistent and always seeking

solutions for problems. The teachers at both schools expressed appreciation that there

principals tried to maintain a sense of normalcy throughout the pandemic.

Table 7

Differences in Oak Hill and Pioneer Principals' Leadership

Grid and Group Factors		Oak Hill Elementary Ms. Meyer	Pioneer Elementary Ms. Arnold
Grid	**Policy and Procedures**	Kept all policies	Kept all policies and created new
	Teacher Role Recognition	Intentional Scheduled regularly	More organic
Group	**Principal/Teacher Socialization**	Socialization with teachers primarily in school	Socialization with teachers both in and outside school
	Group Traditions	Maintain traditions throughout the pandemic	Maintain traditions and created new ones
	Group Interests and Goals Prioritized over Individual Interests and Goals	Generalized support of teachers to be successful with online instruction	Working extra hours to provide one to one support with teachers to ensure online instructional success

Implications

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory, and practice. These implications and applications cannot be generalized but may possibly be transferrable based on likeness of a similar context. Examples of these implications are offered below.

Implications for Research

This research extends the body of knowledge on principal leadership and teacher morale. The findings in this study indicate leadership is a factor in teacher morale and understanding cultural preferences is important. Research could be conducted on whether there is a difference in teachers' preferences when there isn't a crisis in place and could be analyzed to determine if teachers prefer a stronger grid environment during a crisis. One could also research specifically how a crisis impacts the preference for grid and group environments and how it is effected after a crisis. Additionally, because principal leadership during a crisis is relatively new, this study can open the door for further research in this educational context.

Implications for Theory

Findings demonstrate Douglas' (1986) grid and group theory is relevant to understanding the impact of principal leadership on teacher morale during a crisis. Grid and group theory has been used in the past to understand leadership and teacher morale, but to understand it during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, contributes to it. The theory was useful in understanding and explaining the teacher morale at the two schools during the pandemic because it provides a framework for understanding the experiences of the teachers and the behaviors and interactions in the school setting. It was helpful both schools had similar corporate environments in order to analyze cultural

preferences and impact on teacher morale during a pandemic. The consistency of corporate leadership was found to be key in facilitating teacher morale. Self-determination theory could also be a useful theory in a similar study with a focus on the feelings teachers have surrounding autonomy and competence.

Implications for Practice

The greatest implications are regarding practice. Principals have many challenges as leaders, so understanding how their decisions and leadership impact teacher morale is very important. This study is significant and serves to enlighten teachers and school leaders on the importance of leadership during a crisis and how it impacts teacher morale. The findings from this study may prove useful in many ways.

First, principals need to know their school culture so they are able to understand the values, beliefs, and behaviors that drive the school (Harris, 2015). By understanding the culture, a leader can be more strategic in their leadership choices and how they get support from the school community.

Second, as the world of education is ever evolving, to understand the school culture will be helpful as building leaders have the immense pressure of keeping up with the changes.

Third, by understanding the school culture and establishing positive teacher morale, if and when a crisis should occur, the principal will be better prepared to navigate successfully. It will also be important for the principal to understand not to suddenly shift leadership style during a crisis and to try to adapt to the crisis but maintain consistency in leadership.

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Recommendations for Future Research

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The following recommendations for further research are provided as possible extensions of this research study. This study, through a qualitative approach, examined how principal leadership during a crisis impacted teacher morale. This same study could be applied to other school districts with different demographics, grade levels, or school programming to observe the impact of leadership on teacher morale, and during different types of crisis. In this study, the cultural typologies of both of the schools were the same, which was corporate (strong-grid/strong-group). A study doing a comparison between two different types of cultural typologies, and the impact of principal leadership on teacher morale within the different cultures, would be beneficial. This study focused on the interview responses of four teachers and one administrator for each school, observations, and artifacts. To gather more perspectives, a future study could include more participants, greater length of observations, and historical artifacts for a greater comprehensive picture of the school.

A quantitative research study could be developed to measure the grid and group of more schools or an entire district. The data from the cultural assessment and cultural preference tools could be used to compare and contrast the culture at the schools. The data could be studied in depth to analyze each answer in the assessment tools and delve into specific items. Another theory that may be interesting to study the school culture and teacher morale is Herzberg's Motivation Two Factor Survey. The researcher could look at principal leadership during a crisis and the impact on job satisfaction and how that impacts teacher morale.

Summary

Chapter I of this study focused on the introduction and importance of the study. By finding what teachers find most important in school culture, principals may have a better understanding of where to invest their time and energy in school leadership, thereby creating a better culture and overall school success. This study was a qualitative study using the Grid and Group Culture Theoretical Framework developed by anthropologists Mary Douglas, Michael Thompson, and Steve Rayner.

Chapter II provided an in-depth review of the literature and the need for continued research and study on the topic. First, the literature focused on the importance of teacher morale and how poor teacher morale can impact teacher attrition, attendance, and student achievement. Next, the literature review discussed evidence of how even though principals may be able to describe and identify a positive school culture, they do not always know how to create it at their own site. Finally, the literature review centered on school culture, creating a positive school culture, maintaining a positive culture during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, different types of leadership, and reviewing cultural theory to analyze and identify factors contributing to school culture.

Chapter III described the research methodology used for the study focusing on two sites with similar demographics, data and personnel chosen on select criteria. In addition this chapter introduced the researcher's role, potential bias, ethical considerations, and data selection and analyzation process.

Chapter IV presented the data in thorough detail. A rich and detailed description was included of the interviews and observations. Chapter V analyzed the data and related it to the theoretical framework. Chapter VI concluded with implications for research, theory, and practice, as well as recommendations for future research

Researcher Reflection

As a previous elementary principal, and current district level administrator, I thought I had a solid understanding of school leadership and teacher morale, but then to throw in a global pandemic, I had no experience in leading in a major crisis. I also had no previous knowledge of cultural theory or the importance of understanding teachers' preferences as a school leader.

Through my research and study, I have learned more about what really matters to teacher morale and how to navigate through a crisis. In my own experience as a principal and district leader, I have heard many principals talk about how tired they get from trying to keep and maintain positive teacher morale. Many spend a lot of time on tasks with little impact, when if they spent more time understanding their teachers' preferences they would be able to learn, adapt, and grow more quickly. Adaptive practice is deliberate with the purpose of having a proactive and positive impact on the school environment rather than adapting to existing circumstances (Harris, 2015). Then, if a crisis does occur, the school leader is already focused on the right work.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Email to Superintendent to Conduct Research

To: Superintendent

Subject: Request to conduct research

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Karla Dyess and I am a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University in Tulsa. I

am in the Educational Leadership program and preparing to begin my study for my doctoral dissertation.

This email is being submitted to you for consideration to allow me to conduct my research study in your

school district at two elementary schools. The purpose of the study is to investigate how selected

principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the

study is approved, I will identify two elementary schools with similar demographics in your school

district.

The study initially consists of submitting the Grid and Group Cultural Assessment and Preference

surveys to the following elementary sites: Pioneer, Oak Hill, Disney, Roosevelt, Mission, United, and

Clark. The principals will be asked to forward an email with two google form surveys regarding teachers'

preferences and assessments of their school culture. Upon receiving the survey results, two of the

schools with similar positive survey results, demographics, and school report cards will be identified and

selected for the study.

The study will consist of one to one or zoom interviews with the building principal and teachers who meet criteria and volunteer for the study. The study will also consist of informal observations at staff meetings, PLC's and informal gatherings of staff, but will not involve students or instruction. The time spent in the building will be limited, and interviews will be limited to 45 minutes at a time. I have included a copy of the research study along with any of the other requirements to conduct research in your district.

I am seeking your consent to conduct research in your district effective upon approval and extending through the fall semester of 2021. Upon completion of the study, all findings will be shared in my dissertation through Oklahoma State University. If you have any questions, you may contact me through email dyess@okstate.edu or my cell phone. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Karla Dyess
Doctoral Candidate
Oklahoma State University

APPENDIX B

Initial Email to All Eligible Principals

Dear Principal,

My name is Karla Dyess and I am a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University in Tulsa. I am in the Educational Leadership program and preparing to begin my study for my doctoral dissertation. This email is being submitted to you for consideration to allow me to conduct a survey with your teachers. The purpose of the study is to investigate how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study has been approved by your superintendent, and I have identified your elementary school as one of the initial sites to survey for this study.

The survey is a screener regarding the teachers' perceptions and preferences of school culture. If you agree to participate, I will send you an email with two google form links with the survey to forward to your teachers. Completion of the surveys is voluntary. Once the data from the surveys are compiled, two elementary schools with similar school culture will be asked to participate in the study. That portion of the study consists of one to one or zoom interviews with the building principal and teachers who meet criteria and volunteer for the study. The study will also consist of informal observations at staff meetings, PLC's and informal gatherings of staff, but will not involve students or instruction. The time spent in the building will be limited, and interviews will be limited to 45 minutes at a time and not interfere with instruction or learning. If your site is one of the two which meets the criteria I will contact you again.

I am seeking your consent to conduct research with your staff effective upon approval and extending through the fall semester of 2021. Upon completion of the study, all findings will be shared in my dissertation through Oklahoma State University. We have already spoken directly, but if you have questions, you may contact me through email dyess@okstate.edu or my cell phone. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

APPENDIX C

Email to Selected Principals

Dear Principal,

As a follow up to my first email to you and your staff, upon analyzing the survey results from the Grid and Group Survey, your site has been identified as an elementary school with a positive school culture. This email is being submitted to you for consideration to allow me to conduct my research study at your elementary school. The purpose of the study is to investigate how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study has been approved by your superintendent, and I have identified your elementary school as one of the sites to fit in this study.

The study consists of one to one or zoom interviews with the building principal and teachers who meet criteria and volunteer for the study. The study will also consist of informal observations at staff meetings, PLC's and informal gatherings of staff, but will not involve students or instruction. The time spent in the building will be limited, and interviews will be limited to 45 minutes at a time and not interfere with instruction or learning. I have included a copy of the research study for your information.

I am seeking your consent to conduct research with your staff effective upon approval and extending through the fall semester of 2021. Assuming you are still comfortable with the study, I am requesting you forward the email below to your teachers. Participants in the study will remain anonymous and information shared will not divulge any personal identifiers. Upon completion of the study, all findings will be shared in my dissertation through Oklahoma State University. We have already spoken directly, but if you have questions, you may contact me through email dyess@okstate.edu or my cell phone. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Karla Dyess

APPENDIX D

Email to Site Teachers

Dear Teacher,

My name is Karla Dyess and I am a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University in Tulsa. I am in the Educational Leadership program and preparing to begin my study for my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of the study is to explore how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am very excited this study has been approved at your school and I am seeking teachers to volunteer for the study.

Teachers in the study need to have taught at this elementary school for at least the last three consecutive years under the leadership of your principal. Participation consists of a one to one, or zoom, interview with the researcher at a time of the participant's choice. The interviews will be limited to 45 minutes at a time, should only take one session, and not interfere with instruction or learning. The interview questions focus actions and events at the school only, and any question may be skipped. Participants will remain anonymous, and no personal identifiers will be shared in the study.

I am asking for volunteers to participate in this valuable study. Once I have heard from volunteers, the interviews will begin immediately and continue through the fall semester of 2021. Please complete the link to the information form if you are interested in volunteering for the study.

Upon completion of the study, all findings will be shared in my dissertation through Oklahoma State University. If you have any questions, you may contact me through email dyess@okstate.edu or my cell phone. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Karla Dyess

APPENDIX E

Staff Questionnaire

Name:

Site:

Position/Grade level:

Number of years working at this site:

APPENDIX F

Consent to Participate
Educational Leadership Program

Exploring Cultures of Positive Teacher Morale during a Pandemic: A Qualitative Case Study Using Cultural Theory

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study of how selected principals facilitated teacher morale through their school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview/survey at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment at this school or within the district. All participants will remain anonymous throughout and after the course of the study.

This study is being conducted by: Karla Dyess, an Educational Doctoral Candidate, at Oklahoma State University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, under the direction of Dr. Edward Harris, Educational Leadership, Oklahoma State University.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participate in a one to one personal interview, or a Zoom interview, with the researcher, Karla Dyess. The interview will be conducted at a time and location that accommodates the interviewee, and will not extend past 45 minutes. Questions focus on school culture and leadership. Interviewees may skip any questions and stop the interview process at any time. With approval of the interviewee, the interviews will be audio recorded, and the interviewer may take some handwritten notes. All audiotapes will be destroyed immediately upon transcription and will not be shared. All notes will be destroyed after the study concludes as well.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: The interview will last approximately 45 minutes or less, and will be one session, unless both parties agree to go longer or add an additional meeting.

Compensation
You will receive a $5.00 Sonic gift card as compensation for your participation.

Risks

There is a potential risk of breach of confidentiality which is minimized by password protected devices, keeping all notes locked in a secure setting, and destroying all documents at the conclusion of the dissertation.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report

I will collect your information through in person one to one, or Zoom, interviews. This information will be stored in a password protected device and a locked cabinet in a secure setting. All identifiers will be destroyed at the conclusion of the dissertation in approximately May 2022. The audio/video recording will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately until May 2022.

Contacts and Questions
The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 918-633-6163,kdyess@baschools.org. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.

     ___Yes ___No

I give consent for my data to be used in future research studies:

     ___Yes ___No

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

APPENDIX G

One to One Teacher Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as an educator.

2. How has your role changed from before the COVID-19 pandemic to now?

3. How have daily practices at this school changed from prior COVID-19 to now?

4. What challenges have you experienced this school year that are different from the past?

5. What type of support was provided for teachers during the pandemic?

6. How are decisions made at this school regarding COVID-19 adjustments?

7. How does your principal acknowledge success?

8. How would you describe the leadership style of your principal?

9. What types of roles are available at your school for your teacher leadership?

10. What do you feel when you think about working at this school?

11. Do you feel a vital part of the school? If you do, what makes you feel that way? If not, why not?

12. Is there anything else you think is important to share with me about your school?

APPENDIX H

One to One Principal Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences as an educator.

2. How has your role changed from before the COVID-19 pandemic to now?

3. How have daily practices at this school changed from prior COVID-19 to now?

4. What challenges have you experienced this school year that are different from the past?

5. What type of support was provided for teachers during the pandemic?

6. How are decisions made at this school regarding COVID-19 adjustments?

7. How do you acknowledge success?

8. How would you describe your leadership style?

9. What types of roles are available at your school for teacher leadership?

10. What do you feel when you think about working at this school?

11. Do you feel a vital part of the school? If you do, what makes you feel that way? If not, why not?

12. Is there anything else you think is important to share with me about your school?

APPENDIX I

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	06/09/2021
Application Number:	IRB-21-255
Proposal Title:	Exploring Cultures of Positive Teacher Morale During a Pandemic: A Qualitative Case Study Using Cultural Theory
Principal Investigator:	Karla Dyess
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Ed Harris
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt
Exempt Category:	

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which <u>continuing review is not required.</u> As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Karla Lynn Dyess

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: EXPLORING CULTURES OF POSITIVE TEACHER MORALE DURING A PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY USING CULTURAL THEORY

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Curriculum and Instruction at University of Colorado, Denver, Colorado in 1992.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education at University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado in 1988.

Experience:

Deputy Superintendent, Broken Arrow Public Schools, present
Associate Superintendent, Broken Arrow Public Schools, 2017-2022
Executive Director of Elementary Education, Broken Arrow Public Schools, 2013-2017
Elementary Administrator, Broken Arrow Public Schools, 2001-2013

Professional Memberships:

Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration
American Association of School Administrators
Association for Supervision of Curriculum Development