A Basic Interpretive Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Empowerment

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SHERRY H. BEASLEY

Ed.S., Valdosta State University, 2006
M.Ed., Georgia College and State University, 1997
B.S., Brewton-Parker College, 1991

This dissertation, "A Basic Interpretive Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Empowerment," by Sherry H. Beasley, is approved by:

Dissertation Committee Chair/Research Member	Rudo E. Tsemunhu, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Curriculum, Leadership & Technology
Committee Members	Robert B. Green, Ph.D. Professor of Curriculum, Leadership & Technology
	William F. Truby, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Curriculum, Leadership & Technology
	Jiri Stelzer, Ph.D. Professor of Kinesiology and Physical Education
Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research	Becky K. da Cruz, Ph.D., J.D. Professor of Criminal Justice
Defense Date	**September 4th, 2018**

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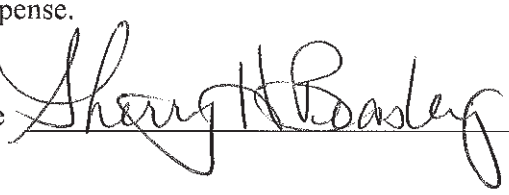
Signature 

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ABSTRACT

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. According to the Turnaround Eligible Schools produced by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017), elementary schools comprise the majority of the historically failing schools in Georgia. The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. This basic interpretive study took place in a historically low performing Title I elementary school in central Georgia. The research site fit the criteria of "historically low-performing" based on the last three consecutive years of scores on the College and Career Readiness Index. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who have the most experience in the teaching profession and the most experience in the school setting. Data were collected through interviews, documents, and memos and analyzed using coding, categorizing, and reflective writing.

Although the participants had unique background experiences, they experienced similarities in their backgrounds. All participants had strong influences either at home or in school who were proponents of higher education. Each member of the study had achieved advanced degrees. The participants were efficacious in their ability to impact the lives of their students, and in that context, experienced job satisfaction. However, their perceptions of morale indicate they did not consider themselves equally efficacious to increase student achievement. All of the participants alluded that the most meaningful information they obtained throughout the year was a result of their own research. Thus, the teachers empowered themselves with the

information they perceived necessary to reach their teaching goals. The participants perceived themselves un-empowered by insufficient instructional resources, limited technology, a lack of funds to purchase consumable supplies, and inadequate support personnel. Each participant had a unique perception of their ability to make meaningful decisions. Some participants perceived themselves empowered to make meaningful decisions while others were not inclined to make decisions or voice their opinions even when given the opportunity to do so. The research site was organized with structures and processes to create a climate of empowerment where teachers had opportunities to share in decision-making and leadership. However, not all teachers in the study experienced empowerment the same, nor did they have the same personal perception of their empowerment.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Topic: Teacher's perspectives of empowerment

Background

Accountability in public schools has been an issue spanning decades. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 sought to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts serving low-socioeconomic students (Klein, 2015). The federal government wrote and enforced regulations to ensure states and districts use federal funds appropriately (Klein, 2015). The reauthorized ESEA morphed into the Improving America's Schools Act. The Improving America's Schools Act implemented key standards, aligned assessments and accountability elements for states and local school districts who receive funding under the law (Robelen, 2005). ESEA was reauthorized again as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB covered numerous federal education programs, but focused mainly on requirements for testing, accountability, and school improvement (Robelen, 2005). Under NCLB, school districts and schools were required to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward a common goal: all students' proficiency in grade-level math and reading by 2014. Students' achievement on standardized assessments determined whether a school or district had attained AYP (Robelen, 2005). In February 2012, the federal NCLB Act granted the state of Georgia a waiver. In May 2013, Georgia implemented a new statewide

accountability system, College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), based on 2012 school year data. In 2012, amidst the transition from NCLB to CCRPI accountability, Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE) identified 78 Priority Schools and 156 Focus Schools across the state (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). A Priority School is a Tier I or Tier II school under the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program using SIG funds to implement school improvement, a Title I high school with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a two-year period, or a Title I school with the lowest achievement on statewide assessments for the "all students" group, showing no progress on those assessments over a three-year period. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2014), a Focus School does not use SIG funds, but is a Title I school with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a two-year period, or a Title I school with large gaps in achievement between subgroups.

In July 2014, Georgia Department of Education released a report identifying 51 schools with the lowest achievement on statewide assessments, having shown no progress on those assessments over a three-year period (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Another report released in December of 2014 listed 141 schools earning less than 60 on the College and Career Readiness Performance Index for three consecutive years, 2012-2014 (Georgia Department of Education, 2014). Governor Nathan Deal proposed to hold schools and districts accountable for the lack of student achievement by taking over the management of those schools. Senate Bill 133 outlined Deal's plan (2015), which would have set up the Opportunity School District (OSD), enabling the state to take over public elementary and secondary schools with failing grades for three consecutive years. The plan was for the Governor's office to take over 20 of Georgia's thrice-failed public

schools in the 2017-2018 school year, increasing the number to 100 schools throughout the state. These schools would have made up a statewide school district called the Opportunity School District**.** Although Senate Bill 133 was voted down on November 8, 2016, it reflects the growing need for education reform.

In March 2017, the House and Senate voted in favor of House Bill 338, also known as the First Priority Act. Gov. Nathan Deal signed the bill into law in April 2017. As outlined in the First Priority Act, the Georgia Department of Education hired a Chief Turnaround Officer who identified which schools throughout the state need intervention. This list, known as the Turnaround Eligible Schools list, replaced the chronically failing schools list that the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) published in prior years. At the time of this study, the Turnaround Eligible Schools list was comprised of all schools with a three-year CCRPI average below 54.0. It included 104 schools from 27 districts, which consist of 66 elementary schools, 28 middle schools, and 7 high schools (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). In accordance with the First Priority Act, the Chief Turnaround Officer will work with "turnaround coaches" who will work with teachers, parents and administrators to improve the turnaround schools.

Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an impact on student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Researchers show a relationship between leadership and school culture as it pertains to learning and achievement (Clayton, 2014; Owens & Hekman, 2013; Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003). Schools need leaders who can inspire and motivate teachers (Barnett & McCormick, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2013) defined effective leadership as the exhibition of five practices, including modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision,

challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) identified effective leadership as knowing not only what to do, but also when, how, and why to do it. They ascertained that effective leaders understand how to balance the implementation of change while protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms. In addition, effective leaders know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align and how to align them with organizational priorities, as well as understand and value the people in the organization, know when, how, and why to create supportive environments for connecting people, and provide the knowledge, skills, and resources their constituents need to succeed (Louis, Leithwood et al., 2010).

Problem Statement

In August 2010, the US Department of Education awarded the state of Georgia $400 million in federal funds as a second round winner for the Race to the Top (RT3) grant. The funds were to be expended over a four-year period for the implementation of a statewide education reform strategy. The strategy focused on many identified needs including standards and assessments for preparing students to be successful in college, the workplace, and the global economy; data systems for measuring student growth and success as well as for providing teachers and principals with information on how to improve instruction; recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals; and, turning around the state's lowest-achieving schools. The Race to the Top grant ended June 30, 2015. Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. According to the Turnaround Eligible Schools produced by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement

(2017), elementary schools comprise the majority of the historically failing schools in Georgia.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information and appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

1. What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions?
3. How effectively do teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive the school is organized, empowering them to do the very best job of which they are capable?

Significance of the Study

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement published the Turnaround Eligible Schools list comprised of all schools with a three-year CCRPI average below 54.0. The list included 104 schools from 27 districts, which consisted of 66 elementary schools, 28 middle schools, and 7 high schools (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived the school was effectively organized to empower them to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. Focusing on teachers' perceptions of the leader's empowerment of teachers may provide local and district level leaders at low performing and failing schools with insight about how their organization's performance can be improved. The information gained from this study may also be beneficial for new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers who are seeking to develop professional leadership practices as well as drive overall school improvement and student achievement. Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of low performing and failing schools. Burns (1978) noted, without knowledge and standards, "we cannot make vital distinctions between types of leaders from rulers, from power wielders, and from despots" (p. 11-12). Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010) argued the need for additional research to examine the specific leadership behaviors most effective on student

learning. In addition, they recommended school leader preparation and professional development programs continue to emphasize both emotional and behavioral aspects of leadership. Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of schools (Precey & Entrena, 2011).

> Transforming schools is a key objective of governments across the world and so careful thought needs to be given to the ways in which current and future leaders can be prepared and supported to be successful in a constantly changing, increasingly complex world. (p. 74)

Conceptual Framework

Personal Interest

As a 26-year veteran teacher in public education, I have taught in all three levels in one school district. I taught middle school for seven years. Because of a frequently disrupted faculty, I taught science, social science, language arts, and math. More often than not, the administration made faculty reassignments during pre-planning and did not afford the teachers the summer to prepare for the change. I taught elementary school, specifically fifth grade, for nine years. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching fifth grade until the administration decided to standardize teachers' textbooks and test schedules. Not only did this standardization limit my ability to provide creative instruction that superseded the teacher's edition, it also hindered differentiated instruction by expecting all students to learn at the same rate through the same modalities. For the last ten years, I have taught high school business education courses. For eight of the last ten years, I have served as the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) director for the system while teaching two classes and coordinating the Work-based Learning/Youth Apprenticeship

program. I am a system level administrator as well as the CTAE director. I have been considered a member of the administrative team while serving under some administrators at the high school. However, another former administrator did not include me at all. Throughout the course of my career, I have worked with 15 different administrators, including principals and assistant principals. I have been empowered and I have been powerless. My personal perception of empowerment as a classroom teacher and as a Tier III school leader is not one of authority over others, but rather one of having the authorization to make decisions on behalf of my students and my program in order to accomplish goals.

Prior Literature

This study is grounded in multiple theories: theories of empowerment, Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1993), and Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1997). Combining these theories may lead to an understanding of how teacher empowerment relates to teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1993). It may also lead to an understanding of how examining teachers' perceptions of their degree of empowerment facilitates transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997) for teachers, new and practicing principals, and anyone else who may be seeking to promote organizational change and/or drive educational reform. In order to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered, it was necessary to first examine the theory of empowerment.

Theories and conceptualizations of empowerment vary across disciplines throughout literature. Altman and Rogoff (1987) conceptualized empowerment as a context-specific transactional process which takes place as individuals participate and interact in various organizational and community contexts. Page and Czuba (1999) defined empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process which fosters power in people for acting on issues they deem important, but noted that it [empowerment] depends on the ability for power to change and expand. Peterson (2014) also acknowledged empowerment as a multi-dimensional construct and warned against using the same theoretical framework while approaching the concept of empowerment in different contexts, stating that such practice could lead to a body of literature containing contradictions and inaccuracies.

Freire (1996, 2005), Brazilian pedagogue and educational theorist, was one contributor to empowerment theory. Freire's idea was to liberate oppressed people through education. His work emphasized providing people with the tools they needed to educate themselves, believing education would empower the people to pull themselves out of oppression. He criticized learning by rote memorization and the teaching of literacy through the transfer of technical skills. Freire advocated for a liberating education based on dialogue between teachers and learners, resulting in a learning process respectful of people as active and creative participants. Freire's philosophy of education included the idea of collective action from the oppressed people in their efforts to liberate themselves. He believed dialogue between teachers and learners resulted in a learning process respectful of people as active and creative participants. This belief is comparable to the concept of a dialog between leaders and followers, specifically

principals and teachers, resulting in a process where the followers become active participants in a given contextual process. Freire's theory of empowerment evolved and has been defined in numerous ways across various disciplines.

Kanter (1993) offered another theory of empowerment popular in the public sector Kanter's theory of structural empowerment described empowerment in relation to organizational behavior and promotes a work environment which provides employees with access to information, resources, support, and opportunities to learn and develop. Kanter's theory emphasized that access to information promotes awareness to organizational goals and leads to innovative ideas and collaboration. She also stressed the importance of providing employees with the resources and training necessary to achieve the organizational goals. According to Kanter, individuals who feel supported believe they have a reasonable workload and some control over their work. They also feel rewarded for their contributions to the organization, thereby becoming more engaged and more productive.

Empowerment has many definitions and theoretical frameworks, but a common understanding of empowerment throughout the literature is that the people and the context of a given situation (Altman & Rogoff, 1987; Bailey, 1992; Page & Czuba, 1999; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Peterson, 2014; Rappaport, 1984) can only define it. It is necessary to develop a common understanding of empowerment in the context of education, specifically in relation to teacher/leader relationships. Kanter (1993) described empowerment as a work environment where employees are provided access to information, resources, support, and opportunities to learn and develop. I applied Kanter's description of empowerment to an educational setting in order to examine

teachers' perspectives of empowerment as defined by access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

This study also related to Bandura's (1977, 1993) social cognitive theory, particularly as it pertained to self-efficacy and collective efficacy. According to Bandura, empowerment leads to efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's self to achieve goals and assess effectiveness. Bandura (1977) identified four primary sources of information as contributors to self-efficacy: performance accomplishment, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. Whereas self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in one's self, collective efficacy is an individual's belief about the organization's overall ability to accomplish goals. Both teacher self-efficacy (Caprara, Barnabelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Ross, 1992; Hoy & Davis, 2006) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004) are associated with student achievement. Researchers reflected that teachers with low efficacy focus on high ability students, believing student failures are dependent on factors outside the school and are beyond their control (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Because collective efficacy refers to the belief in the capability of peers, the norms and behaviors of the school organization may contribute to low organizational efficacy. Teachers who believe in their capability to positively impact student learning are more likely to exhibit the behaviors necessary to positively impact student achievement. Thus, positive self-efficacy may affect collective efficacy.

The significance of this study in relation to leader preparation, professional development, and change agents was relevant to Mezirow's (1997) Transformative Theory. According to Mezirow, transformative learning is the process of effecting

change in a frame of reference, such as: associations, concepts, values, feelings, and conditioned responses. Individuals' frames of reference encompass cognitive, conative, and emotional components and comprise of habits of mind and points of view. To facilitate transformative learning, learners must become critically aware of the assumptions of themselves and others (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow suggested learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference, practice using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective, and practice participating effectively in discourse through either speech or writing. In this context, educational stakeholders must become critically aware of their assumptions of themselves and/or the policies governing educational organizations. Mezirow and Associates (1990) identified the following methods for encouraging critical reflection and experience in discourse: critical incidents, metaphor analysis, concept mapping, consciousness raising, life histories, repertory grids, and participation in social action. The focus of these activities was described as the discovery of the context of ideas and the belief systems shaping the way we think about our sources, nature, consequences, and on imagining alternative perspectives.

The practice in discourse proposed by Mezirow and Associates (1990) supported the use of basic interpretive research as a method for obtaining information from teachers about their perspectives of empowerment. The practices and behaviors of school leaders influence school climate and culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004), and teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Jhanke, 2010; Jones & Youngs, 2012; Marston, 2010; Meyer, McMillian, & Nothfield, 2009).

Leithwood, et al. (2004) contended that highly effective, proactive school leadership has a measurable, though indirect, impact on student achievement. A holistic

look at leadership may be beneficial for new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers seeking to develop professional leadership practices and drive overall school improvement and student achievement.

Research Methods

Constructivist researchers rely on the participants' views of the situation being studied, focusing on specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach was best suited for the inductive nature of this study, as I sought to make meaning from the experiences and perceptions of empowerment of the participants. Specifically, I used a basic interpretive study design to understand how people interpret and assign meaning to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). In a basic interpretive study, data collected through interviews, document analysis, and memoing are relevant and dependent on the theoretical frameworks of the study.

Merriam (2002), the Institutional Review Board at Valdosta State University (2007), Maxwell (2013), Saldaña (2013), and Seidman (2013) guided this basic interpretive case study. The research site fit the criteria of "historically low-performing schools" based on the last three consecutive years of scores on the College and Career Readiness Index. I used purposeful sampling to select participants who had the most experience in the teaching profession and the most experience in the school setting. Multiple forms including interviews, documents, and memos were used to collect data. Data analysis included multiple strategies such as coding, categorizing, and reflective writing. Necessary precautions were taken to assure validity of the findings, including

the collection of rich, thick descriptions; triangulation of data; identification of researcher bias and reactivity; and increasing generalizability of the findings.

Limitations

Transferability is a possible limitation of this study. Transferability is the ability to generalize a conclusion within a case, setting, or a group to people, events, times, and settings not directly observed, interviewed, or represented in the data collected through other means (Maxwell, 2013). By limiting the selection of teachers to veterans of three or more years who taught in grades three and four, it increased the risk of limiting the internal transferability of conclusions to other teachers within the setting. External transferability refers to the ability of a study to generalize the conclusions beyond the case, setting, or group to other people, settings, and times (Maxwell, 2013). The sample size was limited to one school within one school district, and may not adequately represent other people and settings.

Another possible limitation of the study is the reluctance of participants to speak freely during interviews. In addition, participants' personal perspectives of observations, or their reservations about being observed, limit data collection. Potential limitations in qualitative research include distorted responses, incomplete or inaccurate documents, and researcher bias (Patton, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Maintaining accountability in public schools is an ongoing challenge spanning decades. Since 1965, policy makers have written, rewritten, and authorized policies to ensure schools and districts use federal funds appropriately. Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student

achievement. Leithwood et al. (2004) determined leadership the second most influential school-related factor to impact student achievement. The behaviors and practices of school leaders directly influence teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy, school climate, and teacher performance and retention, which, in turn, affect student achievement. I examined how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. Because leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of low performing and failing schools, the insights gained from this study may benefit teachers, leaders, preparation programs, and policy-makers.

Definition of Key Terms

Appropriate Resources-For this study, appropriate resources refer to resources the participants perceive necessary to facilitate learning including consumable supplies, instructional materials, personnel and technology.

Code Mapping-Code mapping is a strategy used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of observations (Saldaña, 2013).

Collective Efficacy-This refers to an individual's belief about the organization's overall ability to accomplish goals.

Effective Leadership-Kouzes and Posner (2013) defined effective leadership as the exhibition of five practices, including: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

Focus School-A focus school is a Title I school not using SIG funds, but has a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a two-year period, or a Title I school with large gaps in achievement between subgroups.

Meaningful Decisions-For this study, meaningful decisions are defined as critical decisions that directly affect the participants' work, increased control over the work environment, and shared leadership.

Meaningful Information-For this study, meaningful information is defined as information pertaining to changes in subject content, new instructional methods, advances in technology, changed laws and procedures, and student learning needs.

Memoing-Memoing is writing a researcher does aside from field notes, transcripts, or coding (Maxwell, 2013).

Priority School-A priority school is a Tier I or Tier II school under the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program using SIG funds to implement school improvement, a Title I high school with a graduation rate of less than 60 percent over a two-year period, or a Title I school with the lowest achievement on statewide assessments for the "all students" group, showing no progress on those assessments over a three-year period.

Professional Learning Community-A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a group of four to six teachers or administrators who meet regularly and work between meetings to accomplish shared goals such as increasing teacher knowledge, understanding, and skill in differentiated instruction and, increasing student motivation and achievement as a result (Strickland, 2009).

Response to Intervention-Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs.

School Empowerment Scale (SPES)-The SPES is a survey instrument containing 32 statements about empowerment within six different dimensions of empowerment; self-efficacy, professional growth, impact, collaboration, status, and knowledge.

Self-efficacy-Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in one's own ability to accomplish goals.

Special Populations-Special Populations is a term that is interchangeable with Special Education.

Teacher Empowerment-Teacher empowerment, as defined in this study, refers to access to meaningful information, appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES)-TKEYS is a common evaluation system designed for building teacher effectiveness and ensuring consistency and comparability throughout the state. TKEYS.

Transferability-Transferability refers to the researcher's ability to generalize the research, when he or she can think about what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation and how such knowledge can be transferred to another similar situation, (Merriam, 2002).

Transformative Learning-Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference such as an association, a concept, values, feelings, and conditioned responses (Mezirow, 1997).

Triangulation-Triangulation is a strategy researchers use to ensure validity of research findings.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have not shown significant gains in student achievement. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017) published a report listing schools receiving a failing score for three consecutive years on the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), with elementary schools comprising the majority of the list. The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived the school was effectively organized to empower them to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

The researcher explored the following research questions: What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school? How effectively do teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive the school is organized, empowering them to do the very best job of which they are capable? What are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of

which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions?

This study was grounded in social cognitive theory, specifically of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1993), theories of empowerment (Freire, 1996, 2005; Kanter, 1993), and Mezirow's Transformative Theory (Mezirow, 1997). A focus on teachers' perceptions about their ability to do the very best job of which they are capable (self-efficacy) in regard to their leader's empowerment of them may provide local and district level leaders at low performing and failing schools with insight about how their organization's performance can be improved (transformative learning). The data gained from this study may also benefit new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers who are seeking to develop professional leadership practices, and drive overall school improvement and student achievement. Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of low performing and failing schools.

Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an impact on student learning (Leithwood, et al., 2004). In the review of literature provides deep understanding of the existing body of literature on leadership, leader practices, and their known effects on schools, teachers, and students. It highlights specific, relevant issues including leadership theories, leader practices, school culture and climate, teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy, teacher empowerment, and school reform as they relate to student achievement. New and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers may use this study to take a holistic look

at leadership when seeking to develop professional leadership practices and school improvement plans for student achievement.

Leadership Theories

Federal, state, and local education agencies search for innovative professional leadership practices and school improvement plans to improve student achievement. It is important to look at the evolution of leadership theories and leadership styles before we can develop future leader practices for moving in the direction of effective school reform. The evolution of current leadership theory is comprehensive and recurring definitions and themes are varied. One researcher identified 221 different definitions and concepts of leadership (Rost, 1993).

The Great Man Theory of leadership is based on the study of people who were already great leaders (Hall, 2013). These people were often from the aristocracy since few people from lower classes had opportunities to lead. This study of aristocratic leaders contributed to the impression that leadership had something to do with good breeding. It also implied that great leaders were born with qualities that made people want to follow them (Lippitt, 1969). Based on the assumption that great leaders are innately equipped with leadership skills, this theory suggests that leaders will arise when needed, take control of the leadership situation, and that people will automatically trust and follow. This theory gave way to the Trait Theory of leadership in the 1940's and 50's (Germain, 2012).

A century of research supports the Trait Theory of leadership, giving it strength, endurance, and a measure of credibility (Germain, 2012). The Trait Theory places emphasis on specific physical characteristics such as height, physique, appearance and

age; abilities such as intelligence, knowledge, and fluency of speech; and, personality traits such as dominance, emotional control, expressiveness, and introversion versus extroversion (Bryman, 1992). Still, the Trait Theory implies that leadership is innate – what the leader is – as opposed to the leader's actions. Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) proposed that leaders possess six traits: drive, the desire to lead, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business. However, they recognized that traits alone are not sufficient for successful leadership and that requisite traits combined with actions such as skills, formulating a vision, role modeling, and setting goals are essential for successful leadership.

Situational Leadership theorists of the 1960s argued that great leaders emerge as a result of place, situation and time (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Hartog & Koopman, 2011). The contingency theory, which emerged in the 1960s and 70's, accepts that the leader's environment determines which style of leadership is best suited for the situation, understanding that no specific leadership style is best suited for all situations (Germain, 2012). Bass and Stogdill (1990) relayed two theories in relation to situational leadership. The first theory is similar to contingency theory in that a particular situation plays a large part in determining the necessary leadership qualities for that situation. The second theory describes leadership qualities as products of the leader's experiences with a particular situation, that the situations themselves have "developed and molded" the leader (Bass and Stogdill, 1990, p. 39).

Greenleaf (1970) introduced servant leadership theory, which suggests community, as opposed to institutionalization, is created within organizations. His principle of a leadership-service combination is in direct opposition to the traditional

models of leadership where the leader is visible and obeyed by the subordinates within the organization. Proponents of servant leadership believe it is through acts of service and stewardship that a leader is identified by the people to be a leader among equals (DePree, 1989; DePree, 1992; Greenleaf, 1976). Perry (2010) defined servant leadership as a "long-term, transformational approach to life and work – in essence, a way of being – that has the potential for creating positive change throughout society" (p. 118).

Parris and Peachey (2013) conducted a systematic review of literature on servant leadership theory in order to systematically examine and organize the research literature that explored servant leadership theory in a given organizational setting. The research was guided by the following questions: a) How was servant leadership defined? b) In what contexts was servant leadership theory empirically investigated? c) How was servant leadership examined (methodology)? and d) What were the results of the examination? After two rounds of screening, a total of 39 empirical articles published between 2004 and 2011 met the criteria for the study.

Parris and Peachey (2013) found that their sample of empirical studies demonstrates that servant leadership is a justifiable theory. They also ascertained through cross-cultural studies that servant leadership is practiced across a variety of cultures, but that its meaning varies among cultures. The researchers found the benefits of a servant-led organization to include the enhancement of leader trust and organizational trust, organizational citizenship behavior, procedural justice, team and leader effectiveness, and collaboration between team members. Findings from this study suggest that servant leadership creates a trusting, fair, collaborative, helpful culture that can positively affect

individual and organizational effectiveness, as well as follower wellbeing (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

As the first comprehensive summary of empirical studies to explore servant leadership theory, the systematic literature review is a significant contribution to educational research. Benefits of servant leadership that include enhancement of leader trust and organizational trust, organizational citizenship behavior, team and leader effectiveness, and collaboration between team members are important to school improvement efforts (Parris & Peachey, 2013). Those same benefits are important to this study of teachers' perceptions of empowerment as they are factors that may impact teachers' perceptions of their school's organization and about their own empowerment to do the very best job of which they are capable.

Transformational leadership was conceptualized by Burns in 1978. According to Burns (1978) a transformational leader recognizes an existing need in a potential follower and exploits needed to motivate and engage the potential follower. Burns described the outcome of this practice as one that mutually stimulates and elevates, converting leaders into followers. Using transformational leadership qualities, Bass and Stogdill (1990) developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ featured over 100 statements relating to transformational leadership. U.S. Army officers used the questionnaire to rate their superior officers. Bass and Stogdill (1990) used the information to develop his theory that leaders transform followers through charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Burns (2003) distinguished between the verbs change and transform to emphasize the difference between transactional leadership and transformational leadership. He defined change as

substituting one thing for another, making an exchange, and attributed it to transactional leadership. He defined the word transform as a metamorphosis in form or structure, a change in outer form or inner character. Burns subsequently described transformational leadership as basic alterations in entire systems, replacing one structure of power with another. He added that continuous transactions could gradually lead to transformations. Burns also related transformational leadership to collective efficacy in that when leaders take the initiative to mobilize people for participation in the processes of change, they encourage a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy (2003). He described this process of mobilization as one in which leaders do not exercise power over the followers, but rather champion for and inspire the followers. Burns identified this process as empowerment (2003).

Perry (2010) defined a transformational leader as one who can create change in deep structures, major processes, or overall structures. He characterized a transformational leader as one who may be capable of compelling vision, having brilliant technical insight, and charismatic personality. Though transformational leaders have been described as charismatic (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Perry, 2010) and are thought to be more likely followed because they inspire intrinsically motivated change, Burns (2003) warned that charisma also has the potential to distort constructive, mutually empowering leader-follower relationships. Charisma can potentially cause followers to mimic leader behaviors or redirect leader initiatives back on the leader, resulting in a lack of empowerment for both leaders and followers. Burns described this form of leadership as confusing and undemocratic. Transformational leaders also seek to develop interpersonal relationships with followers as a way of building trust. Because the interpersonal

relationships are key to achieving the vision, transformational leaders must lead by example in order to maintain the level of trust among followers and inspire others to share the vision (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Burns, 1978, 2003; Perry, 2010).

Effective Leadership Style, Leader Behaviors, and Leader Practices

Hartog and Koopman (2011) identified leadership style as a trend and defined it as behavioral actions which may be learned. In my review of the leadership literature (Bass, 2008; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Blunt, 2004; Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990; Germain, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Perry, 2010; Rost, 1993), I have determined that the terms leadership style, leader behaviors, and leader practices have been used interchangeably. Therefore, this study uses those terms interchangeably as well in order to protect the integrity of the original sources.

Hartog and Koopman (2011) identified the "new leaders" in terms of transformational, charismatic, transforming, inspirational, visionary leaders as opposed to managers, and values-based leaders. Kouzes and Posner (2006) proposed that leadership is not about one's personal characteristics, but rather about one's actions. Leadership models and leadership practices are as abundant as leadership theories. Bass and Stogdill (1990) catalogued more than five thousand definitions of effective leadership. Bass (2008) contended that it is pointless to search for a single definition of leadership. In this section, I identified behaviors associated with effective leadership.

Gardner (1990) identified nine tasks of leadership including: envisioning goals, affirming values, motivating, managing, achieving workable unity, explaining, serving as symbols, representing the group, and renewing. Blunt (2004) identified the capabilities needed by leaders as behaviors, mindsets, skills, and attitudes. Collins (2005) described a

leader who embraces both personal humility and professional will as a "Level 5" leader (p. 11). He went on to acknowledge that a great leader knows how to put the right people in the right positions. Collins (2005) described "getting the right people on the bus" as a metaphor for putting the right people in the right positions, people who are compulsively driven to do the best and be the best without personal gain (p. 13). According to Leithwood et al. (2004), effective leadership is not only knowing what to do, but also when, how, and why to do it. Effective leaders understand how to balance the implementation of change while protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms. Effective leaders know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align and how to align them with organizational priorities; understand and value the people in the organization; know when, how, and why to create supportive environments that connect people; and provide the knowledge, skills, and resources that their constituents need to succeed (Leithwood et al., 2004).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2006) exemplary leaders are more interested in the success of others than in their own and leadership is a relationship between those who desire to lead and those who choose to follow (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). This belief is aligned with the teachings of Greenleaf (1970), whose essays on the characteristics of servant leadership include ways to serve the individuals within an organization and of the organization as a whole. Kouzes and Posner (2006) compiled a list of values-based practices of exemplary leadership, including model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

The practice of modeling the way can be defined in part by practicing what one preaches (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). Leaders demonstrate by their actions that they live

by the values they profess. The consistency between their actions and their words builds credibility. Greenleaf (1970) explained the need for leaders to show initiative to seek out new ways of doing things and then leading others to follow in new directions. He further explained, leaders who do not show initiative cling to the ideals of the past, thus preventing growth within the organization. If one is going to take initiative to move forward within the organization, he must set goals for doing so (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf described goals as a sense of overarching purpose that is just out of immediate reach, something that one must always work toward, something visionary.

Inspiring a shared vision refers to enlisting others to work toward a common set of goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). The way leaders go about achieving this is what can make them exemplary. With energy, optimism, and hope and through strong appeals and quiet persuasion, leaders attract followers and develop enthusiastic supporters. Without the trust of followers, one cannot inspire others to work toward achieving visionary goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). Greenleaf's (1970) concepts on serving an organization as a whole include showing initiative and setting goals. Showing initiative and setting goals will not single-handedly promote achievement of said goals. A leader also needs to communicate in a way that provokes the imagination of the followers (Greenleaf, 1970). An effective leader communicates enough information so as to inspire the hearts and minds of others, enough to evoke imagination and elicit a reaction, thus empowering the people in the decision-making process (Greenleaf, 1970). Greenleaf identified persuasion as a concept of servant leadership. Perry (2010) corroborated that servant leaders are effective at building consensus among group members through persuasive communication.

Challenging the process refers to taking risks for the sake of making progress and treating failure and disappointments as opportunities for learning and growth (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). Enabling others to act is described as considering the needs and interests of others, nurturing self-esteem so that constituents are comfortable making decisions, and acting to carry out commitments.

Leaders encourage the heart by inspiring others with courage and hope and by recognizing their contributions to a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). Creating a spirit of community lets people know they mean something beyond the achievement of organizational goals and ensures loyalty. Perry (2010) suggested that listening, coupled with reflection, is essential to the growth of a servant leader (p. 118). Greenleaf (1970) identified listening, understanding, acceptance, and empathy as behaviors of servant leadership. Greenleaf suggested that by listening the leader may gain intuitive insight which resolves whatever issue is at hand. Though Greenleaf wrote about acceptance and empathy separately from listening and understanding, the concepts are not disconnected. As a servant leader, one listens to the needs of others, reflects on those needs in an attempt to clarify, or understand, and also accepts and empathizes with the followers. Acceptance in this case does not mean the acceptance of poor workmanship or failure. It refers to the acceptance of human nature, the tolerance of imperfection. Healing and serving are concepts of servant leadership that logically follow empathy and acceptance. An effective leader can accept the human nature of followers and empathize with their challenges. Perry (2010) recognized that leaders have the potential to "help make whole" those with whom they are in contact. Greenleaf (1970) suggested that although wholeness is something that is never completely attained, but rather continuously sought,

the understanding that the leader and followers are seeking the same goal (wholeness) leads to healing on some level. Greenleaf (1970) advised that love, though undefinable, is the key to building community. The concept of building community is two-fold. First, when listening and understanding are followed by empathy, acceptance, and healing, love, or in the least, caring, is implicit. This alone builds a sense of community among an organization's members. The second nuance of this concept is accountability. In a situation where everyone is held accountable for the wellbeing of the community and its members, solidarity is more likely achieved. It is the responsibility of the leader to see that the followers feel they are a part of such a community; to feel they are valuable, or loved, and that their needs will be met, and that they are not solely accountable (Greenleaf, 1970).

Akin to the servant leadership behaviors of Greenleaf (1970) and the exemplary practices of Kouzes and Posner (2006), is the concept of humble leadership. Humble leadership is viewed as an innate virtue rather than a set of learned behaviors (Kouzes and Posner, 2006). Researchers suggest leader humility involves self-awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, the ability to look past one's personal agenda, and to be open to new ideas and to learning from others (Morris, Brotheridge & Urbanski, 2005; Nielsen, Marrone & Slay, 2010).

Owens and Hekman (2012) conducted a qualitative case study in the business sector to explore what leader behaviors were considered humble, the mental models and personal theories relating to those behaviors, and the observed outcomes in various leadership contexts. They created an interview guide for eliciting anecdotes or critical incidents of humble behavior and its consequences and contingencies. Next, they

conducted 51 in-depth interviews with leaders in banking, manufacturing/industry, military leaders and religious leaders. Interviewees shared their personal leadership practices, observations of others they considered to be humble leaders, and accounts of incidences they viewed as the opposite of humble leadership. All interview statements were organized into coded categories by organization type to show similarities and differences in humble leadership in different organizational contexts. Three general categories included acknowledging personal limits, faults, and mistakes; spotlighting follower's strengths and contributions; and modeling teachability. In the first category, interviewees expressed a perspective contrary to the "great man" theory, recognizing that the humble leaders' strength is the ability and willingness to admit weakness and accepting blame for failures. However, participants insisted that traits such as intelligence, resolve, and persuasiveness needed to work in conjunction with humility for a leader to be seen as effective or competent.

The second category, spotlighting followers' strengths and contributions, revealed that humble leaders were deliberate in communicating the value of followers' contributions. Interviewees described humble leaders as "students of their own followers" and "experts on the human capital around them," continually shifting positive attention to others and taking responsibility for negative events. The effectiveness of such behavior is contingent on the leader's perceived sincerity. Descriptions of "false humility" were accompanied by contempt and suspicion, reportedly making followers defensive and cautious. The third category, modeling teachability, described leaders as being open to new ideas and information, effective listeners, and receptive to feedback. Teachability was also modeled when humble leaders initiated role reversals allowing the

followers to take the role of leader while the leader modeled follower tasks and sought feedback from the follower. Modeling enabled the humble leaders to nurture a proactive attitude about learning new things and gaining a deeper understanding of how to help followers overcome challenges. The effectiveness of modeling teachability was contingent on the current situation. In situations of extreme threat and time pressure, interviewees described a need for stability and immediate leadership action. The learning culture of the various organizations influenced the perceptions of modeling teachability. This behavior was seen as more effective in an organization that encouraged and reinforced learning than in one where competition and rivalry existed.

Owens and Hekman (2012) also found that hierarchical adherence, with emphasis on chain of command, centralized power, and explicit signals of leadership authority influenced all three types of humble behaviors. In hierarchical contexts, humble leaders were described as self-aware but not as likely to acknowledge limitations. The researchers revealed that because leader humility is less common in hierarchical contexts, it seemed to have a greater payoff in terms of follower engagement, trust, and loyalty.

Owens and Hekman (2012) suggested that humble leaders possess high moral character, exemplify courage or quiet charisma, and believe in personal and follower "malleability." Leader humility involves leaders encouraging and reinforcing mutual leader-follower development by openly engaging in learning and growing. Humble leaders model how to grow followers. Owens and Hekman (2012) showed an increase in relational satisfaction, loyalty, and trust among the outcomes produced by humble leader behaviors. The humble leader behaviors influenced the followers' ideas about the shaping or growth of their developmental identity as members of the organization.

Leader humility not only fostered a sense that mistakes are a part of development, but also reinforced follower accountability for acknowledging one's own mistakes. The humble leader behaviors led to psychological freedom, or psychological empowerment. Followers did not feel threatened by the leaders' evaluations of their work and felt free to show their stage in a developmental process. Humble leaders' admissions of limitations and mistakes demonstrated interest in follower development and not just performance. Thus, followers did not feel the need to hide inexperience and mistakes.

Participants in the study often responded to humble leader behaviors with increased job engagement and motivation. The legitimization of personal development led to enhanced intrinsic motivation to master job tasks and shifted follower focus from external performance standards to internal performance standards. Participants reported that a small, humble leader behavior could stimulate a vast amount of work effort from the follower. Conversely, non-humble leader behavior was demotivating to followers. Participants also reported that humble leaders enabled and encouraged followers to vocalize their uncertainty and doubts. The humble leaders encouraged the followers to experiment through trial and error without fear of failure. Humble leaders were more open to feedback and less likely to adhere to inept decisions for "self-validation" and "self-enhancement," leading to fluidity and continuity in organizational change (Owens & Heckman, 2012, p. 805). Leader humility helped the leaders recognize the need to change their own approach and/or leadership styles in order to keep their organizations evolving. Concurrently, followers of humble leaders were more receptive to change. Teams led by humble leaders functioned favorably with small, continuous changes such as updates and matching team member strengths with the changing environmental

demands which enabled them to more easily adapt. The teams also reported being more receptive when the humble leader initiated a change from bottom up leadership to a top down leadership based on situational demands. In contrast, the teams reported less fluidity in the organizational structures led by non-humble leaders. Team members described being suspicious and apprehensive of participation when non-humble leaders decided to try a bottom up approach.

Owens and Hekman (2013) followed up their original study by developing and testing a theoretical model based on the assumptions that team leader humility positively predicts collective humility in teams, that collective humility positively predicts collective promotion focus, and that collective humility and collective promotion focus enhances team performance. The three assumptions were tested using three separate quantitative studies in three unrelated locations. Leader humility was tested using a nine-item humility scale that reflected three dimensions of humility. A nine-item peer report scale designed for assessing individual humility was used to measure collective humility. Team collective promotion focus was assessed using an adapted version of a previously tested measure used by Keef, van Trijp, and Luning (Owens & Hekman, 2013). The third study also measured team performance using an adapted four-item scale. In all three studies, Owens and Hekman (2013) measured and controlled average team size, gender, and age. They also controlled for employee ratings of leader transformational leadership as a way to observe the impact of leader humility. Transformational leadership did not predict collective humility or collective promotion focus and was seen as evidence of the impact of specific behaviors of leader humility. The path analysis suggested that all three hypotheses were positively predicted. Leader humility was

related to collective humility; collective humility was related to collective promotion focus; and, collective promotion focus was related to team performance.

Owens and Hekman (2013) found that humble leader behaviors foster interpersonal characteristics of collective humility, in turn promoting a collective regulatory team focus. It shows that leader humility helps teams surpass a comparative-competitive mentality in which members focus on self-promotion. The researchers suggested that followers are aware of leaders' behaviors and how those behaviors can affect team interaction and performance. Positive member comments reiterated the importance of leading by example. They also explained why leader hypocrisy and insincerity produce negative emotions toward the leader. In addition, the researchers suggested that leader humility empowers individuals to aspire to reach their fullest potential and enables them to make the incremental improvements toward their potential goals. Finally, the researchers indicated the relevance of virtue-based leadership. Though Owens and Hekman (2012, 2013) conducted this study in the public sector, their findings may also apply to leader behaviors within the educational realm. As they stated, ". . . leaders model a behavior, followers emulate it, a strategic orientation is created, and this strategic focus influences performance" (Owens & Hekman, 2013, p. 1103).

Owens and Hekman's (2012, 2013) leadership studies provide examples of leader behavior and the subsequent effects of those behaviors on the organizations' members, and ultimately, on organizational effectiveness. The connection between leader humility and the encouragement of mutual follower development through learning and growing supports the notion that leaders can empower their followers through access to meaningful information. Humble leadership also resulted in teams that efficiently and

effectively initiated and adapted to change (Owens & Hekman, 2012). The findings of this study are important to note when asking teachers' perceptions about the degree to which they are empowered through the ability to make meaningful decisions, as meaningful decisions affect change in instructional practices, classroom activities, school organization, and student achievement. Owens and Hekman's notion that leader humility predicts collective promotion focus relates to teachers' collective efficacy and their perceptions of empowerment to do the very best job of which they are capable.

Yukl (2012) ascertained that the driving principle in organizational leadership is influencing and facilitating individuals and teams to accomplish shared objectives. To improve the performance of the team or organization, the leader needs to improve the processes that define performance. Thus, identifying the aspects of behavior that explain leader influence on the performance of a team or organization is an objective of leadership research. In order to review what has been learned about effective leadership behavior from decades of research, Yukl (2012) designed a hierarchical taxonomy using four broad meta-categories and 15 specific component leader behaviors. The four meta-categories of behaviors included task-oriented behaviors, relations-oriented behaviors, change-oriented behaviors, and external behaviors. Yukl gathered data from a multitude of sources, including survey studies, incident and diary studies, multi-case studies, comparative case studies, field experiments, laboratory experiments, and an executive team simulation.

Yukl's (2012) primary objective of the first meta-category, task-oriented behaviors, was to accomplish work efficiently through four component leader behaviors. The four component leader behaviors were planning and organizing work-unit activities,

clarifying roles and objectives, monitoring operations, and work-related problem solving. The objective of the second meta-category, relations-orientation, was to increase the quality of human relations and human resources by enhancing member skills, leader-member relationships, and organizational identification and commitment. The four corresponding component leader behaviors were identified as supporting, developing, recognizing, and empowering (Yukl, 2012). The objective of change-orientation, a third meta-category, was to increase innovation, collective learning, and environmental adaptation through four component leader behaviors identified as advocating change, envisioning change, encouraging innovation, and facilitating collective learning (Yukl, 2012). The fourth meta-category, external leadership behaviors, supported the objective to acquire necessary information and resources, and to promote and defend the interests of the team or organization through three component leader behaviors identified as networking, external monitoring, and representing (Yukl, 2012).

In order to improve the performance of the team or organization, the leader needs to improve the processes that define performance (Yukl, 2012). Identifying the aspects of behavior that explain leader influence on the performance of a team or organization is an objective of leadership research. Yukl's (2012) research resulted in a hierarchical taxonomy using four broad meta-categories and 15 specific component leader behaviors that explain leader influence on the performance of a team or organization.

Decades of research on leadership indicate recurring themes of effective leadership behaviors, such as leader trust (Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1970; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2013; Louis, Dretzke, et al., 2010; Owens & Hekman, 2012, 2013; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Waters et al., 2003; Yukl, 2012), leader

humility (Collins, 2005; Greenleaf, 1970; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Morris et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2010; Owens & Hekman, 2012, 2013), inspiring, motivating, and sharing vision (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1990; Greenleaf, 1970; Hartog & Koopman, 2011; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2013; Louis et al., 2010; Perry, 2010, Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003; Yukl, 2012), and setting goals (Collins, 2005; Gardner, 1990; Greenleaf, 1970; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2006, 2013; Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003; Yukl, 2012). Researchers also indicated a correlation between leadership behaviors and organizational commitment (Owens & Hekman, 2012, 2013; Parris & Peachey, 2013). The research conducted in the public sector by Owens and Hekman (2012, 2013) indicates that leaders' behaviors, specifically, humble leader behaviors, lead to follower empowerment, follower job satisfaction, and increased follower performance.

Educational Leadership

Researchers show a significant correlation between student achievement and leadership practices (Louis, et al., 2010; Robinson, et al., 2008; Waters, et al., 2003). Waters, et al. (2003) ascertained that prior research on school effectiveness found leadership to be a defining characteristic of successful schools, but none of the studies were derived from a large sample of quantitative data. Thus, the researchers conducted a meta-analysis of studies that were conducted over a 30-year period, studies that were conducted for the purpose of examining the effects of leadership practice on school success. Of the 5,000 studies completed during that time period, Waters et al. (2003) chose 70 studies that met their criteria for design, controls, data analysis, and rigor. The criteria included quantitative student achievement data; student achievement measured on

standardized, norm-referenced tests or other objective measures; student achievement as the dependent variable; and, teacher perceptions of leadership as the independent variable. The 70 studies involved 2,894 schools, approximately 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers.

Waters et al. (2003) concluded that there were two primary variables that determine a positive or negative impact on achievement. First is the emphasis on change and whether leaders properly identify and focus on effective classroom practices and improvement strategies. The second variable is whether leaders understand the magnitude or order of change they are initiating and adjust leadership strategies accordingly. The results of their meta-analysis of 70 studies demonstrate one standard deviation of improvement in leadership practices and a 10 percentile gain in student achievement. Waters et al. (2003) also identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities associated with student achievement and used them to develop a balanced leadership framework that describes the knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools leaders need to positively impact student achievement (Waters et al., 2003). The researchers referred to this combination of knowledge and skills as balanced leadership. According to Waters et al. (2003), effective leaders:

- understand how to balance pushing for change while protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms worthy of preservation
- know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align and how to align them with organizational priorities
- know how to gauge the magnitude of change they are initiating and how to adjust their leadership strategies accordingly

- understand and value the people in the organization
- know how, when, and why to create learning environments that support and connect people, and provide them with knowledge, skills, and resources they need to succeed

The meta-analysis conducted by Waters et al. (2003) was the first developed from a comprehensive analysis of research on school leadership and student achievement and move educational research beyond abstract theories and perspectives to identify concrete responsibilities, practices, knowledge, strategies, tools, and resources that principals and other leaders need to be effective. Their study demonstrates a correlation between principal leadership and student achievement.

Robinson, et al. (2008) conducted a two-phase meta-analysis to examine the relative impact of different leadership styles on students' academic and nonacademic outcomes. The researchers examined the impact of variables on student achievement. The variables included sample characteristics; leadership theory and instrumentation, including whose leadership was assessed; student outcomes and assessment tools; contextual variables; and indirect leadership effects.

Robinson et al. (2008) found that the mean effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes is three to four times that of transformational leadership. The researchers attributed this result to their understanding that transformational leadership is more focused on the relationship between leaders and followers, the building of collegial teams and a loyal cohesive staff, and inspiring a shared vision, than on the work of school leadership. Although interpersonal skills, motivation, and collaboration are essential to improving teaching and learning, educational leadership should also involve focusing

those relationships on pedagogical work (Robinson et al., 2008). The second phase of the analysis was conducted using only 12 of the studies and involved identifying types of leadership based on a detailed analysis of the meaning of items included in the measures of leadership practices used in those studies. The researchers found that in schools with higher achievement or higher achievement gains, academic goal focus was both a leadership behavior and a quality of the schools' organizations.

Robinson et al. (2008) found that an analysis of two different types of leadership produced similar results; the closer educational leaders are to the core of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on student outcomes. Although instructional leadership resulted in greater effect sizes on student outcomes than did transformational leadership in phase one, the five leadership dimensions derived in phase two all included leadership practices that integrated both task and relationship skills. The researchers demonstrated that an effective leader must integrate more than one leadership style.

Louis, et al. (2010) conducted a study to explore the influence of educational leadership on teaching and learning in schools. The study was based on two assumptions: first, principal-teacher relationships and teacher-teacher relationships affect classroom practice. Second, classroom practices affect student learning. Louis et al. randomly selected 45 districts including 180 schools from the four quadrants of the United States. The sample was stratified for variation in organization size, socioeconomic status, and achievement trajectories. The sample included 157 schools and their members. The researchers utilized teacher surveys and student achievement

and demographic data. Surveys were administered in the winter of 2005-06 (representing 4,491 teachers) and again in the spring of 2008 (representing 3,900 teachers).

Louis et al. (2010) found that student math achievement scores were significantly associated with focused instruction, Professional Learning Communities, and teachers' trust of principals, but were not significantly associated with principal behaviors such as instructional leadership and shared leadership. These researchers suggested that relationships among adults may be important factors of student performance. They also ascertained that teachers whose experiences with other adults were positive on one measured dimension tended to have positive responses in others. However, the researchers recommended further analysis to investigate how the relationships among variables combine to affect teacher practices and student learning. Louis et al. (2010) also learned that instructional leadership had significant effects on teachers' working relationships and professional communities, but its effects on instruction were limited. Shared leadership had an indirect effect on instruction through professional communities as catalysts for teacher leadership efforts on improvement. The researchers discovered that, as opposed to the impact of leadership behaviors, trust had a limited impact on professional community. However, the researchers pointed out that previous studies show a strong relationship to student outcomes. Thus, they recommended further study of this relationship. Building level relationships had a strong effect on professional community and on achievement, but not on focused instruction. Finally, the researchers found that professional community had a significant indirect effect on achievement because of its strong relationship to focused instruction.

The analysis conducted by Louis et al. (2010) is significant to educational research because it provides a comprehensive empirical "test" of the idea that a combination of instructional leadership, shared leadership, and trust in the principal are positively related to student learning (p. 330). Louis et al. strengthened the concept that, although indirectly related, shared leadership and instructional leadership are important to student achievement because of their strong relationships to the organization of professional communities that provide unity of values and norms, reflective discussions of instruction, and collective responsibility for student learning. Their analysis confirmed an indirect impact of shared leadership on student achievement, thus supporting teacher empowerment through the ability to make meaningful decisions. It also confirmed that leader behaviors have a significant impact on teachers' working relationships through the development of effective professional communities. In turn, professional communities have a significant effect on student achievement. Professional Learning Communities are a way to provide teachers with access to meaningful information and appropriate resources.

Educational researchers state that a successful leader can organize and unify the school staff; articulate, reinforce, and inspire a shared vision; organize professional committees; facilitate professional learning; and stimulate increased academic achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis et al., 2010; Mosley, Boscardin, & Wells, 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). Thus, a successful leader can establish a culture for teaching and learning and a climate that supports and enhances teacher performance and student achievement.

School Culture and Climate

Leadership style plays an important role in the school culture and school climate as it leads to learning and achievement (Clayton, 2014; Gülşen & Gülenay, 2014; Owens & Hekman, 2012; Waters et al., 2003). School culture and school climate are often described as overlapping, but the distinction is clear. School culture is defined as the beliefs, values and norms of the organization (Gruenert, 2008; Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Hoy, 1990) and is viewed from an anthropological perspective. School climate refers to the shared perceptions and attitude of the organization (Gruenert, 2008) and is viewed from a psychological perspective. Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) defined school climate as the quality and character of school life based on patterns of people's experiences. They identified experiences in terms of norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Organizational theorists suggest that the most important action performed by a leader is giving attention to the organization's culture (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009). School principals are not only responsible for, but are also essential in, establishing a culture of teaching and learning in their respective schools in order to mediate learning and improve student achievement (Barth, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2001). In order to drive school reform and implement change, the principal must understand the concept of school culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990) and be able to identify the school's existing culture (Bulach, 2001). A vital point of school improvement is an understanding of the characteristics of culture and climate, which positively contribute to organizational efficacy (Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia Superintendents Association, 2010). This understanding, followed by an

assessment performed by all stakeholders of the culture and climate in their respective educational organizations, will enable leaders to arm themselves with the change strategies necessary to develop characteristics for optimal organizational efficacy. DuFour and Eaker (1998) cited the failure of past school reforms as the inability to address the importance of school culture and climate. Gruenert (2008) argued that school culture, or a common set of norms, can be transformed only by addressing the climate. Climate is the preferred construct used to measure a school's organizational health (MacNeil et al., 2009). Thus, it is important to determine what characteristics of school climate most directly affect student achievement.

There has been a half century of research on the characteristics of school climate. Halpin and Croft (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2002) developed the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), a framework and measure of school climate that has been used for decades. Hoy's Organizational Climate Index includes four dimensions: principal leadership, teacher professionalism, press for student achievement, and vulnerability to the community (Hoy et al., 2002). Principal leadership in this instance is characterized as collegial leadership, directed toward both meeting the social needs of the faculty and achieving the goals of the school. They explained that the principal treats teachers as professional colleagues while at the same time setting clear expectations and standards for teacher performance. They defined teacher professionalism as respect for colleague competence, commitment to students, autonomous judgment, and mutual cooperation and support. Hoy et al. (2002) described the press for student achievement as an environment where high but achievable standards and goals are set, and where students strive persistently to achieve and are recognized and respected for their

achievements. In this environment the parents, the teachers, and the principal work together to emphasize high standards and school improvement. The fourth dimension, vulnerability to community, suggests that both teachers and principal are subject to scrutiny by parents and other members of the community.

A positive school climate is one where students, families, and educators feel emotionally, socially, and physically safe; where they are engaged and respected, and where they share the school's vision (Cohen et al. 2009). In 2010, the Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia Superintendents Association identified collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, and unity of purpose among the characteristics necessary for building a positive school climate. The National School Climate Center defined school climate as the quality and character of school life based on the patterns of students, parents, and school personnel's experiences reflective of norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Our Approach-National School Climate Center, 2017). It described a sustainable, positive school climate as one that "fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society" (Our Approach-National School Climate Center, 2017). The NSCC stated school climate assessments need to include four major dimensions: safety (physical), relationships, teaching and learning, and the external environment.

The school principal is largely responsible for establishing a school culture in which a clear vision is established and communicated; and, for providing the faculty and staff with access to the support, resources, and professional development needed to fulfill the vision (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et

al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). The principal does this while fostering positive attitudes and building relationships among the faculty and staff who support effectively working and learning together (Cohen et al., 2009; Our Approach-National School Climate Center, 2017). The school principal is also responsible for encouraging the use of supportive teaching practices that not only promote academic achievement, but also provide opportunities for students to develop social skills and a sense of civic responsibility necessary to be successful, productive members of society (Cohen et al., 2009; NSCC, 2017). Sweetland and Hoy (2000) described an "open climate" as one where the principal and faculty are genuine in their behaviors. In this open climate, the principal leads by example, and provides an appropriate blend of structure and direction with support and consideration depending on the situation. Leadership in the open climate schools emerges from both teachers and the principal. Members are not preoccupied with task achievement and satisfaction of social needs, but both freely emerge.

MacNeil et al. (2009) conducted a study in 29 Texas schools using the 10 dimensions of the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) in order to investigate whether Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, and Low-Performing schools differ in their school climates. The sample included 24,684 students and 1,727 teachers from 29 schools in a large suburban school district in southeast Texas (MacNeil et al., 2009). The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) is a criterion-referenced test that is used to measure the academic skill levels of students in reading, mathematics, and writing. It is also used to determine the accountability rating of schools. The students' achievement scores on the TAAS were used as the basis for the school ratings—Exemplary,

Recognized, and Acceptable. MacNeil et al. (2009) found no Low-Performing schools in their study. Exemplary schools were identified as schools with at least a 90% passing rate on the TASS and a 1% or fewer dropout rate. Recognized schools had a pass rate of 80-89% and a 1.1-3% dropout rate, and Acceptable schools a 50-79% pass rate and 3.1-5.5% dropout rate. Low-Performing schools had a less than 50% pass rate and over 5.5% dropout rate.

The teacher participants rated the organizational health of their respective schools using the OHI (MacNeil et al., 2009). The OHI consisted of 80 likert-type items, divided equally among 10 dimensions that characterize aspects of climate which address the successful interaction among members of the organization and its [the organization's] ability to deal with environmental stresses (MacNeil et al., 2009).

MacNeil et al., (2009) used descriptive statistics, based on NCE scores, to report the means and standard deviations on each of the 10 OHI dimensions across the three categories of schools. The researchers found that each of the schools demonstrating higher student achievement, as indicated by their Exemplary rating, also consistently demonstrated higher ratings across the 10 dimensions on the OHI. However, post hoc comparisons do not indicate a statistically significant difference. The researchers identified a pattern in the dimensions of goal focus and adaptation, suggesting that goal focus and adaptation are significant to the academic achievement of students.

MacNeil et al. (2009) demonstrated a relationship between a healthy school climate and student achievement. Although the relationship was not statistically significant, a larger sample size might show a greater effect. This study also supports previous research in relation to setting goals and organizing and initiating change without

causing additional stress as indicators of effective leader behaviors (Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003).

In the review of literature on school culture and school climate there is insight into the relationships between leadership and culture and climate, and between culture and climate and student achievement. The school principal affects the organization's culture and climate (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004), which affect student achievement (Hoy et al., 1990; Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Maslowski, 2001; MacNeil et al., 2009).

Teacher Self-efficacy and Teacher Collective Efficacy

School climate and teacher morale have the makings of a chicken/egg question. Which comes first? In terms of a positive school climate, it is easy to say that positive teacher morale is fostered in a positive environment (Cohen et al. 2009), but do positive attitudes create the positive environment? A negative school climate can negatively affect an individual's or a group's positive morale (Cucchiara, Rooney, and Robertson-Kraft, 2015), but why is the climate negative in the first place? It is difficult to discern a starting point in the cycle of attitudes to environments and back to attitudes, but it is clear that each affects the other. Teachers' attitudes about their careers either positively or negatively influence the environment of the school and its students (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Bentley and Rempel (1980) defined teacher morale as "the professional interest and enthusiasm that a person displays toward the achievement of individual and group goals in a given job" (p. 2). Bruce (2003) defined morale as the way one feels about work and the organization through which he or she is employed. Bruce (2003) also

described a connection between morale and productivity. An employee with low morale will participate less and do only what is required, whereas an employee with high morale will be more passionate and exhibit commitment above and beyond what is required (Bruce, 2003). Teachers are more likely to refer to their perceptions of their school's climate in terms of high or low morale than they are in terms of efficacy. Bandura (1997) ascertained that an individual's self-efficacy, the belief in one's own ability to accomplish goals, affects how much effort the person is willing to expend, how long he will persist through difficulties, his ability to recover from failures, and the stress he experiences while coping with demanding situations. It is understandable that efficacy and morale go hand in hand. Teachers' attitudes have been defined throughout educational literature in terms of teacher morale and teacher efficacy (Bentley & Rempel, 1980; Bruce, 2003).

The construct of teacher efficacy evolved from Rotter's locus of control theory and Bandura's social cognitive theory (Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy, 2000). Goddard et al. (2000) explained Rotter's locus of control theory in relation to teacher efficacy as the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the reinforcement of their actions. "Student motivation and performance were assumed to be major sources of reinforcement for teachers. Hence, teachers who believed they could influence student achievement and motivation were seen as assuming that they could control the reinforcement of their actions and thus having a high level of efficacy" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 481). Self-efficacy affects teachers in the same way it affects people in other organizations. This theory assumes that teachers who fail to believe in their ability and/or their group's ability to accomplish goals also have low morale and do not exhibit

professional interest and enthusiasm toward individual and group achievement. Bandura (1977) defined teacher efficacy as a type of self-efficacy—the outcome of a cognitive process in which people construct beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of competence. The existence of the two separate but intertwined concepts derived from two theoretical perspectives contributed to some confusion about the nature of teacher efficacy. Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) proposed a model of teacher efficacy that integrated both perspectives. Their model was consistent with social cognitive theory in that the major influences on efficacy beliefs are attributed to four sources: mastery experience, physiological arousal, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion, (Bandura, 1997). However, Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) argued that teachers do not feel equally efficacious for all teaching situations. Teachers who feel confident, or efficacious, about their abilities to teach particular subjects or topics to one group of students may not feel as efficacious about their teaching abilities under different circumstances (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Therefore, when making an efficacy judgment, consideration of the teaching task and its context is important. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) made the following analyses about efficacy judgements: 1. When analyzing their own efficacy in relation to the teaching task and its context, teachers consider the importance of factors that make teaching difficult or act as constraints and weigh them against an assessment of the available resources necessary to facilitate learning. 2. When assessing their self-perceptions of teaching competence, teachers judge personal capabilities such as skills, knowledge, strategies, or personality traits and balance them against personal weaknesses or liabilities in the particular teaching context.

Goddard et al. (2000) intertwined the four major influences on efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997) with the two dimensions of task analysis and teaching competence (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) to develop a model of collective teacher efficacy. Comparable to teacher self-efficacy, teacher collective efficacy is associated with the tasks, level of effort, persistence, shared thoughts, stress levels, and achievement of groups. Goddard et al. (2000) theorized that the effects of high collective teacher efficacy are the acceptance of challenging goals, strong organizational effort, and a persistence that leads to better performance, and that lower collective efficacy leads to less effort, the propensity to give up, and a lower level of performance.

Using their theoretical model of collective teacher efficacy, Goddard et al. (2000) conducted a theoretical and empirical analysis of the construct of collective teacher efficacy that served multiple purposes: extending the concept of teacher efficacy to the organizational level; exploring the theoretical nature of collective teacher efficacy; developing a reliable and valid measure; and examining the effects of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement. Items in their scale were worded so that teachers would consider both group competence (GC) and task analysis (TA) in their efficacy assessments. The result was the identification of four types of items to assess collective efficacy beliefs: group competence/positive (GC+), group competence/negative (GC-), task analysis/positive (TA+), and task analysis/ negative (TA-). The instrument underwent two separate validity tests before being used in a pilot study, one conducted by researchers and a second conducted by a panel of teachers.

The next step in the development of the instrument was to conduct a pilot study. The pilot study involved a sample of 70 teachers. One from each of 70 schools in five

states was selected to test the psychometric properties of the Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale. The convenience sample consisted of schools recommended as being high or low in conflict among the faculty. Of the 70 teachers contacted, only 46 teachers returned usable responses, representing 24 low-conflict schools and 22 high-conflict schools. To provide an additional validity check on the efficacy measure, teachers were asked to respond to a sense of powerlessness scale, an individual teacher efficacy scale, and a measure of teacher trust in colleagues (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Hoy & Sabo, 1998). The pilot analysis supported the validity and reliability of the collective efficacy measure (with the exception of several minor weaknesses which were later deleted from the measure) and led to the development of new items about perceptions of group competence and task analysis (Goddard et al., 2000).

After developing the Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale, Goddard et al. (2000) used it to test their predictions about collective teacher efficacy and student achievement in urban elementary schools. Based on prior studies of the relationship between teacher efficacy and student achievement, the researchers hypothesized that collective teacher efficacy is positively associated with differences between schools in student-level achievement. The study sample consisted of 452 teachers from the 47 elementary schools within one large urban mid-western school district that was selected to hold constant differences in teacher efficacy which might occur between urban and nonurban districts. Student achievement data in mathematics and reading and demographic data for all 47 elementary schools in the sample were obtained from the central administrative office of the district, and teacher surveys were researcher administered.

Goddard et al. (2000) gathered the collective teacher efficacy data along with additional data measuring other social processes in schools. The additional data provided the researchers the opportunity to perform further tests of criterion related validity for the collective teacher efficacy scale. The criterion variables examined included personal teaching efficacy, faculty trust in colleagues, and environmental press (the extent to which teachers experience pressure from parents and the community). Collective teacher efficacy when aggregated to the school level was found to have a moderate and positive correlation to personal teaching efficacy, a positive and significant relation to faculty trust in colleagues, but no statistically significant relationship to environmental press (Goddard et al., 2000). Within each school, Goddard et al. (2000) modeled the variance in student mathematics and reading achievement associated with student-level demographic variables representing socioeconomic status (SES), African American status, and gender. They determined a school's SES by the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. The researchers began their multilevel analyses with an estimation of the proportion of variance in the dependent variables that occurs between schools. The estimates later provided a basis for assessing the proportion of variance explained by collective teacher efficacy in the full multilevel model. As predicted, Goddard et al. (2000) found a statistically significant proportion of variance between schools in both students' mathematics (19%) and reading (15%) achievement. Not only was collective teacher efficacy determined to be a significant predictor of student achievement in both mathematics and reading achievement as had been predicted, it was also greater in magnitude than any of the demographic controls for both achievement variables. It is important to note the consistency with Bandura's (1993)

assertion that collective teacher efficacy has a greater effect on student achievement than does student SES because SES is often thought to be a predictor of student achievement (Goddard et al., 2000).

Goddard et al. (2000) reported several important findings from their study. The theoretical elements of collective teacher efficacy, group competence and task analysis, were highly related in schools. The empirical results were consistent with their model of collective efficacy, suggesting that both analysis of the task and assessment of group competencies interact to create collective teacher efficacy in a school. A single measure of collective teacher efficacy consisting of items that assess both analysis of the task and group competency was supported by the factor analyses of both pilot study and final study data. As predicted, collective teacher efficacy was positively associated with the differences in student achievement that occur between schools.

The multilevel analysis demonstrated that a one-unit increase in a school's collective teacher efficacy scale score was associated with an 8.62-point average gain in student mathematics achievement and an 8.49-point average gain in reading achievement. Consistent with Bandura's (1993) study, which indicates that collective efficacy is significantly and positively associated with school-level student achievement, collective teacher efficacy perceptions are predictive of student achievement. The theoretical conceptualization of teacher efficacy could finally be extended to the organizational level to explain collective teacher efficacy. Their empirical findings are consistent with the theoretical argument that collective teacher efficacy is a unified construct that promotes student achievement. The theoretical analysis suggests that the assumptions of social cognitive theory can be applied to the overall organization to explain the influence of

collective teacher efficacy on between school differences in student achievement. In other words, schools with a high level of collective teacher efficacy are more likely to have teachers who purposefully work to enhance student achievement, resulting in organizational agency that influences a school to intentionally pursue its goals.

Goddard et al. (2000) contributed the empirical analysis data used to develop a reliable and valid measure of collective teacher efficacy, the Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale. The Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale provides a standard measure for collective teacher efficacy; a one-unit increase in collective teacher efficacy demonstrates an increase of more than 40% of a standard deviation in student achievement. The researchers also documented initial evidence that collective efficacy perceptions are systematically and statistically related to student achievement. This extension of the concept of teacher efficacy to the organizational level enabled schools to identify, select, and monitor collective school-wide efforts that drive school improvement and student achievement.

Çalik, Sezgin, Kavgaci, and Kilinç (2012) conducted a study to examine the relationships between school principals' instructional leadership behaviors and teacher self-efficacy and teacher collective efficacy and to observe the direct and indirect effects of instructional leadership through teachers' self-efficacy on teachers' collective efficacy. The study was conducted in public primary schools in Ankara and consisted of 328 teachers whose average teaching experience was 10 ½ years.

Çalik et al. (2012) used an adapted version of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) to measure teachers' self-efficacy. Çalik et al. (2012) used the Collective Efficacy Scale to gather data about teachers' collective

efficacy. They also used an instructional leadership scale developed by Sisman (2002) to evaluate school principals' leadership behaviors.

Çalik et al. (2012) observed the highest level of correlation was between collective efficacy and the fourth dimension of instructional leadership, supporting and developing teachers. The highest correlation between teachers' self-efficacy and instructional leadership was between using instructional strategies (teachers) and evaluating teaching process and students (leaders). The researchers also found significant relationships between teachers' self-efficacy and collective efficacy. They reported a significant positive relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' self-efficacy. The researchers also reported a significant positive direct effect of self-efficacy on collective efficacy and found instructional leadership to have a positive significant and indirect effect on collective efficacy through self-efficacy. Based on this analysis, the researchers concluded that teachers' self-efficacy plays a mediator role between instructional leadership and collective efficacy, and teachers' self and collective efficacy increase depending on their perception of instructional leadership (Çalik et al., 2012). The researchers ascertained that when school principals demonstrated instructional leadership behaviors, the teachers' perceptions about their own self-efficacy increased, which then increased collective efficacy.

Çalik et al. (2012) asserted that their study findings could add significantly to the literature about students' academic achievement since prior literature revealed a connection between teachers' self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2006; Ross, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Davis, 2006) and collective efficacy (Bandura 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard et al., 2004) and student achievement.

Angelle and Teague (2014) conducted a quantitative study in three school districts located in a southeastern US state to examine the relationship between teacher perceptions of the extent of teacher leadership and the extent of teacher collective efficacy. The researchers sought to answer two questions: 1. Do teachers who perceive a strong sense of collective efficacy also perceive a greater extent of teacher leadership in their schools? and 2. Are there differences in perceptions of collective efficacy and the factors of teacher leadership, specifically, sharing expertise, shared leadership, supra-practitioner, and principal selection?

Angelle and Teague (2014) collected data from 363 teachers in three districts using two instruments. The majority of the teachers (approximately 80%) were veteran teachers with more than five years of teaching experience. Participating districts were labeled District A, consisting of 19 schools; District B, seven schools; and, District C, only three schools. The first instrument, the Teacher Leadership Inventory (TLI), was previously developed through a multi-stage process. The TLI was designed to measure teacher perceptions of the extent of teacher leadership in schools and consisted of likert-type items divided into four factors. The first factor, sharing expertise, refers to teachers' willingness to help each other with teaching or instructional issues. Shared leadership, the second factor, refers to teachers' ability to make meaningful decisions even when they do not hold leadership positions. Supra-practitioner is the third factor, describing teachers' willingness to stay after school hours to work on school improvement activities. Principal selection is the final factor and refers to teachers serving in leadership positions only because they were selected by the principal. Angelle and Teague (2014) also explained that shared leadership, shared expertise, and supra-practitioner are informal

teacher leadership constructs, but principal selection is a construct of formal leadership which reflects the teachers' perceptions that a principal controls the avenues to teacher leadership by appointment. Thus, principal leadership is a path to teacher leadership only for those given the opportunity (2014). The second instrument used by Angelle and Teague (2014) was the Teacher Efficacy Belief Scale-Collective Form (TEBS-C). The TEBS-C is a ten-item likert-type instrument designed for assessing teachers' perceptions about collective efficacy.

Angelle and Teague (2014) found a strong relationship between collective efficacy and the extent of teacher leadership. The highest mean scores on the TEBS-C included the beliefs that the faculty could meet high levels of student achievement and that they were capable of maintaining an environment conducive to learning. Mean scores on the TLI revealed the importance of teacher leadership demonstrated through teachers' willingness to help colleagues and share new ideas. A sense of collective efficacy was tied to a greater extent to teacher leadership both across and within the three districts. Although the researchers (Angelle & Teague) claimed no causality, they ascertained that teachers who perceive a greater extent of teacher leadership in their school also perceive a greater collective efficacy. Teachers who perceived a stronger belief in collective efficacy for meeting high levels of student learning also perceived that more teachers in their school were willing to lead beyond their classroom activities (Angelle & Teague, 2014). When the TLI data were examined, the researchers found that the items with the highest mean scores were from District B where teachers expressed a belief that other teachers are willing to offer assistance when they have questions about how to teach a new topic or skill, discuss ways to improve student

learning, and share new ideas for teaching with other teachers. Responses from the TEBS-C indicated that District B scored significantly higher means in the teacher leader factors of sharing expertise, shared leadership, and supra-practitioner than did Districts A and C. In addition, District B teachers had the highest percentage of participants indicating they had leadership roles in their schools. Conversely, teachers in Districts A and C reported a higher mean score in the area of principal selection. District C reported the highest mean score on principal selection and the lowest mean score on shared leadership factors. Angelle and Teague (2014) deduced that teachers who perceive their school to empower them to take responsibility for teaching and learning at the school level are not as likely to perceive that leadership tasks and people responsible for those tasks controlled by the principal. They also noted that, though principal selection is a form of teacher leadership, the factors that are inversely related to principal selection (shared expertise, shared leadership, and supra-practitioner) are the factors that share a connection to collective efficacy.

Angelle and Teague (2014) recognized the small sample size in their study as a possible limitation, and warned about generalizations, but did not diminish the study's contribution to educational research because the findings from the study do point to a strong relationship between collective efficacy and the extent of teacher leadership. The researchers provided evidence that teacher leadership and collective efficacy are connected variables, thus providing support for developing teacher leadership and providing mastery experiences which can positively impact collective efficacy. The researchers also confirmed that leaders who believe in the power of shared leadership also believe in shared decision-making, and shared responsibility.

There is a significant amount of research relating principal leadership practices to concepts affecting teacher performance and student achievement (Louis et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). Some leadership behaviors can be effective in determining teachers' perceptions of self and collective efficacy (Cagle & Hopkins, 2009; Ross & Gray, 2006). Jhanke (2010) identified the following factors as effective in developing collective efficacy: positive and supportive environment, clear and understandable vision, high expectations, professional development, and shared leadership. Research relating principal leadership practices to teacher morale (Jones & Youngs, 2012; Marston, 2010; Meyer et al., 2009) and the principal's ability to motivate and encourage classroom teachers can be directly associated with teacher effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2004). Studies on teacher self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2006; Ross, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Davis, 2006) and on collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al, 2000; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy et al., 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo et al., 2004) reveal effects on student achievement. Beliefs of efficacy help drive the level of an individual's motivation (Graham & Weiner, 1996; Maehr & Pintrich, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). There is also a correlation between teacher morale, teacher performance, and student achievement (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Jones & Youngs, 2012; Meyer et al., 2009).

Teacher Empowerment

If leadership is second only to teaching among the school-related factors that impact student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004), and if teacher morale (Jones & Youngs, 2012; Marston, 2010; Meyer, McMillian, & Nothfield, 2009), teacher self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2006; Ross, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy & Davis, 2006) and collective

efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, et al., 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo et al, 2004) are known to have an impact on student achievement, then building teacher morale by fostering teachers' individual and collective efficacy is a logical goal for principal leadership. The question is, how is this achieved?

Kanter's (1993) theory of structural empowerment describes empowerment in relation to organizational behavior and promotes a work environment which provides employees with access to information, resources, support, and opportunities to learn and develop. Kanter emphasized that access to information promotes awareness to organizational goals and leads to innovative ideas and collaboration, that providing employees with the resources and training is necessary to achieve the organizational goals, and that individuals who feel supported believe they have a reasonable workload and some control over their work and feel rewarded for their contributions to the organization. There is much research to support Kanter's theory of empowerment. Empirical evidence from the private sector indicates that employee empowerment positively affects employee productivity, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and innovativeness (Guthrie, 2001; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Lawler, Mohrman, and Ledford, 1992, 1995; Spreitzer, 1995). Additional studies of management in the public sector show efficacy of empowerment practices that result in higher levels of job satisfaction, performance, and innovation (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011; Kim, 2002; Park & Rainey, 2007; Wright & Kim, 2004).

There are two perspectives of employee empowerment. One perspective describes the act of empowerment performed by an authority figure (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; 1995; Kanter, 1993) and includes behaviors such as sharing authority, resources,

information, and rewards with employees (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The second perspective refers to the feeling of empowerment and relates to increased feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2011) described employee empowerment as a ". . . *process* involving a set of management practices (sharing authority, resources, information, and rewards with employees) that directly affects work outcomes (quality, productivity, customer satisfaction) and also indirectly affects them by influencing employee cognitions (self-efficacy, motivation, job satisfaction)" (p.3).

The work of Short and colleagues made teacher empowerment a focus of educational reform, leadership models, and teaching effectiveness over two decades ago (Short and Rinehart, 1992; Short, Greer, & Melvin, 1994; Short and Johnson, 1994; Short 1998). Their early work formed the foundation for current, relevant studies. Short and Rinehart (1992) developed a survey instrument, the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES), to determine "the extent to which teachers perceive a sense of self-efficacy in the workplace, perceive that they have impact within the school, enjoy collaborative relationships, perceive that they have high status, and believe that they function with a strong knowledge base about teaching and learning" (p. 9). Factor analysis of the 32-item instrument revealed six dimensions of empowerment: self-efficacy, professional growth, impact, collaboration, status, and knowledge.

Short (1992) provided a working definition of each of the six dimensions of empowerment measured by the SPES. Decision-making relates to the participation of teachers in critical decisions that directly affect their work, increasing their control over the work environment. Autonomy, as a dimension of empowerment, is relative to the

dimension of decision-making. Whereas decision-making increases control over the work environment, autonomy increases control over specific aspects of the work life as it relates to teaching and instruction (i.e., curriculum, textbook choices, instructional planning). Impact refers to teachers' perceptions that the decisions they make have an effect on the school. In other words, teachers felt supported for their efforts and saw the results of their decisions in a time when shared decision-making could have been a strategy used in name only. The dimension of self-efficacy deals with the teachers' perceptions that they have the knowledge, skills, and ability necessary to affect student learning. Professional growth as a dimension of empowerment is defined as the teachers' perceptions that their schools provide them with the opportunities necessary to grow professionally and expand their skills through continuous learning. Finally, the empowerment scale measured status as a teacher's sense of respect as recognized by superiors, colleagues, students, parents, and community members.

It is important to emphasize that teacher empowerment involves both personal issues and organizational issues (Short et al., 1994; Short, 1998). Personal issues include the development of personal competence in individuals. Organizational issues involve providing individuals with opportunities within the organization to demonstrate personal competence. The empowerment of teachers as a personal issue is a process through which individuals develop the ability to direct their own growth and solve their own problems (Short et al., 1994). Teachers believe themselves to be empowered when their school provides them with opportunities for professional development and continuous learning; when they believe themselves to have the skills and ability to help students learn (Short et al., 1994; Short, 1998); when they are involved in decision-making in

relation to critical issues and believe that their opinions are valued and critical to outcomes (Short, 1992, 1998); when they believe themselves to positively affect school life—impact (Short, 1992, Short et al., 1994); and when they have the professional respect of colleague—status (Short, 1992, 1998). When teachers recognize the high level of expertise and abilities of their colleagues, the school emerges as a more professional environment (Short et al., 1994).

According to empirical evidence, there is a relationship between leader practices and teacher perceptions as well as between leader practices and empowerment (Short and Johnson, 1994; Short et al., 1994). Empowering principals are leaders who create problem-solving teams of teachers and students focused on specific issues, leaders who model risk taking and innovation, leaders who recognize teacher expertise and involve teachers in critical decision-making, and leaders who value community involvement (Short, 1998). Teachers who perceive themselves as participating in the school decision-making process give the principal power because of the teacher's personal belief in the good will of the principal (Short and Johnson, 1994). Principals who replace legitimate power with referent power are also likely to create more decision-making opportunities in the faculty. Additional evidence indicates a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of empowerment and their perceptions of how principals frame the organization and provide leadership that relates to and supports the frame (Short, 1998; Short, Rinehart & Eckley, 1999). Teachers believe they are more empowered in schools where the principal frames the organization as a human resource and displays leadership behaviors in support of that frame by recognizing people, their attributes, and their contributions as the greatest resources of the organization (Short et al., 1999).

Conversely, when leaders do not promote teacher empowerment or organizational empowerment, they also fail to promote other aspects of organizational change (Short et al., 1994). Efforts to create an empowered school culture are critical if schools are to restructure in order to address critical student needs (Short et al., 1994).

Empowered schools are organizations that create opportunities for competence to be developed and displayed (Short et al., 1994). Teachers who perceive a greater sense of empowerment believe they impact the work of the organization, recognize their power to identify problems, institute change efforts, and take responsibility for organizational outcomes (Short and Rinehart 1992). Empowered teachers may be more open to evaluate the work of the organization when they assume ownership of the organizational problems and solutions. Schools that value expertise and trust are more likely to be empowered (Short et al., 1994). Empowered schools provide greater opportunities for addressing problems related to student learning and success. When participants have many opportunities to voice their opinions and believe that their decisions make a difference, and when the problems identified are important to the participants and they have opportunities to solve those problems, then the quality of problem solving increases (Short et al., 1994). A school that has an empowerment ideology for teachers and students will be better at finding and developing resources to improve teaching and learning (Short, 1998). Empowered schools result in a high level of trust among teachers and leaders, a focus on students to drive decision-making, a zealous attack on issues that obstruct student learning, beliefs of competence among teachers (efficacy) and the initiative to increase competence, an environment that values and supports student empowerment, and increased community involvement (Short, 1998). Empirical evidence

supports the relationship between empowered individuals, school cultures, and school improvement efforts (Short and Rinehart, 1992; Short et al., 1994; Short, 1998).

More recent studies (Bogler and Nir, 2012; Gozali, Thrush, Soto-Pena, Whang, and Luschei, 2017; Powell, Cantrell, and Correll; 2017) continue to support the concepts of teacher empowerment established by Short and colleagues. Bogler and Nir (2012) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the mediating effect of teacher empowerment on the relationship between teachers' perception of their school support and their intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction. From a random sample of 4,351 teachers affiliated with 153 Israeli elementary schools, the researchers collected data from 2,565 respondents. A quantitative questionnaire, combining four-point Likert scales measuring Perceived Organizational Support (POS), job satisfaction and teacher empowerment was distributed to the participants. Bogler and Nir measured perceived organizational support using a 22-item instrument of Survey Perceived Organizational Support, shorter version (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986). They measured teacher empowerment using the SPES (Short and Rinehart, 1992) and teacher job satisfaction using Bhal and Ansari's (1996) scale.

Bogler and Nir (2012) found teachers more likely to be both intrinsically and extrinsically satisfied when they consider their school a place that values their contribution and cares about their wellbeing. In this respect, POS is a critical factor in affecting organizational outcomes, helping behavior, and role-based performance. The researchers also found within the subscales of teacher empowerment differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction. Bogler and Nir explained intrinsic satisfaction by variables emphasizing one's self perception of one's own ability and

autonomy to act, and extrinsic satisfaction by variables that primarily stress one's status within the organization, and how teachers perceive they are viewed by others (2012). Bogler and Nir (2012) determined self-efficacy the most influential dimension of empowerment as a predictor of teacher intrinsic job satisfaction, and earned status and respect as the most powerful dimension of empowerment that predicts extrinsic job satisfaction. They found professional development to be a statistically significant predictor of both types of satisfaction.

Bogler and Nir (2012) found teacher empowerment to be a strong mediating effect on job satisfaction when it takes place in an organization perceived to support individuals. The researchers recommended that leaders need to make concerted efforts to create a school culture which emphasizes respect and status within the school community. They also suggested this culture may occur when the organization supports teachers' personal and professional growth while simultaneously enabling individual autonomy and status in the school community (Bogler & Nir, 2012).

Gozali et al. (2017) conducted an exploratory study to capture the voices of teachers from around the world by interviewing international teachers participating in the Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) program, a highly selective professional development program in the United States. The participants included teachers from 14 different countries and four continents. The researchers sought to examine the content and nature of teachers' voice when engaged in discussions on education access, equity, and quality in relation to their respective countries. They did not frame their study in terms of empowerment, but rather by using the framework of "teacher voice." They defined teacher voice as teachers' expressions of knowledge or opinions pertaining to

their work. Gozali et al. (2017) referred to Gyurko's three domains of teacher voice: educational, employment and policy. Gozali et al. (2017) explained teachers' educational voice as speaking on teaching and other classroom related issues including pedagogy and curriculum, student progress and assessment, professional development, and classroom management. They described teachers' employment voice as focused on issues surrounding compensation and benefits, working conditions, scheduling, promotion, and job evaluation (Gozali et al., 2017). Teachers' policy voice examines topics such as school governance, state and federal funding, and statutes affecting pay and evaluation (Gozali et al., 2017).

Gozali, et al. (2017) found that the character of teacher voice in relation to education, employment, and policy is shaped by teachers' own characteristics, experiences, and qualifications. The researchers demonstrated through their findings the critical necessity of including teacher voice in decision-making and reform in order to minimize negative ramifications from inadequate policies. However, they ascertained that providing teachers a voice in policy involves more than providing them an opportunity to speak; it also requires the right conditions and reactions from authority figures (Gozali et al., 2017). Teachers will be more likely to voice their perspectives when they feel listened to, supported, and taken seriously by authority figures (Gozali et al., 2017). Education agenda needs to emphasize collaboration, interaction, and exchange of information among all stakeholders (Gozali et al., 2017).

Powell et al. (2017) conducted a study that described teachers' perceptions when they became un-empowered by the implementation of a scripted reading program. The phenomenological study was designed to investigate the impact of a scripted program in

an urban, culturally and linguistically diverse, low socioeconomic elementary school. The phonics-based scripted curriculum was first recommended by the district administrators, so school level administrators made the decision to purchase the program (Powell et al., 2017). The materials arrived during the third month of school and teachers were required to abandon their established literacy instructional practices which included reading and writing authentic texts. The purchased program included a coaching component through which a company coach observed in teachers' classrooms and provided feedback in their implementation of the program. The lessons consisted of scripts and gestures that teachers and students were required to repeat exactly as scripted. During training, the teachers were told not to deviate from the scripted manual.

Powell et al. (2017) used purposive sampling in order to elicit data relevant to teachers' perceptions of the implementation of a scripted reading program. The researchers chose 17 teachers who taught at different levels with a variety of expertise in order to get a wide range of perspectives. Using an interview guide, the researchers conducted unstructured interviews to explore the experiences of teachers as they experienced the scripted reading program. Interviews were conducted in pairs or small groups to allow for more productive conversations in which participants engaged in exchanges on the topic. The researchers analyzed the data by transcribing the interviews, applying coding protocols and assigning units of meaning, and writing narrative descriptions of the meaning units.

Powell et al. (2017) developed four higher-order themes. First, the teachers acknowledged the support the reading program provided for their very lowest readers. The teachers noted the program's structure and infusion of phonics skills as particularly

helpful for struggling readers. Based on teacher responses, this theme reflected the only positive outcome of the scripted program.

The second theme described how teachers perceived that their forced enactment of the program led to negative outcomes for the students (Powell et al., 2017). Teachers made statements expressing their frustration over the way the program defined reading, resulting in many students being placed below their actual reading levels. Because reading levels were determined by a single entry test that was built-in to the program, teachers had no say so in the students' reading placements. Teachers expressed the following concerns about the scripted program: it did not promote higher level thinking at a time when new, more rigorous common core language arts standards were being implemented; students felt the work was not intellectually challenging; it resulted in a lack of student motivation; students were unable to develop social skills; it was a hindrance to English learners because the program prohibited the use of authentic texts (Powell et al., 2017).

The third theme related to the program's negative impact on teachers' psychological wellbeing (Powell et al., 2017). Teachers were angry and resentful about being stripped of the autonomy to make instructional decisions for their students. The teachers expressed frustration at not being able to "practice their craft" (Powell et al., 2017, p. 107) in order to meet the needs of their students when they were aware the scripted program was not meeting them. The researchers found expressions of outrage at being treated like unskilled workers, the lack of autonomy, and the tedium of implementing the program throughout the data (Powell et al., 2017). Teachers acknowledged that scripted programs were viewed as antidotes for teacher incompetence.

The fourth theme provided evidence that teachers are impacted by a hierarchical system that dictates who has the decision-making power in an organization (Powell et al., 2017). Teachers expressed frustration about the mandate to follow the script without deviation, inflexibility in student placements, lack of materials, administrators' choice on which components of the program to purchase, inconsistency in program implementation (p. 107). Teachers also understood the decisions were made from the top down beginning with the central office administration.

School Reform

In 2009, the U.S. Secretary of Education announced draft requirements for $3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement Grants (SIGs) to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools. The Obama administration's proposal included: "identifying and serving the lowest-achieving Title I schools in each state; supporting only the most rigorous interventions that hold the promise of producing rapid improvements in student achievement and school culture; providing sufficient resources over several years to implement those interventions; and measuring progress in achieving results" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Under this proposal, states were required to identify three tiers of schools. Tier I schools were defined as the lowest-achieving five percent of Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring in a state, or the five lowest-performing Title I schools, whichever number was greater. Tier II schools were equally low-achieving secondary schools that were eligible for, but did not receive, Title I funds. Tier III schools were the remaining Title I schools in improvement, corrective action, or restructuring that were not Tier I schools in the state. Also under the plan, each

school district with a Tier I or Tier II school would be required to choose one of the following intervention models (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

- Turnaround Model–This would include replacing the principal and at least 50 percent of the school's staff, adopting a new governance structure, and implementing a new or revised instructional program.
- Restart Model–School districts would close failing schools and reopen them under the management of another organizational structure such as a charter school operator, a charter management organization or an educational management organization.
- School Closure–The district would close a failing school and enroll its students in other high-achieving schools in the district.
- Transformational Model–Districts would address four specific areas: 1) developing teacher and school leader effectiveness, including replacing the principal who led the school prior to the initiation of the transformational model; 2) implementing comprehensive instructional reform strategies; 3) extending learning and teacher planning time and creating community-oriented schools; and 4) providing operating flexibility and sustained support.

The turnaround approach is one school reform model that has received attention. The school turnaround approach to reform originated in the private sector as a set of strategies used to reorganize or rejuvenate struggling companies (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Whereas most approaches to reform initiate change incrementally, school turnarounds strive for quick and dramatic transformation. The turnaround approach is based on the assumption that real improvement can occur only when schools are relieved from patterns

of failure and dysfunction. Advocates of turnaround suggested that in chronically failing schools, leadership is often inadequate and teachers lack the skills and the will to create meaningful change; nor, are systems of teacher support and evaluation in low-performing schools designed to facilitate improvements in classroom instruction (Cucchiara et al., 2015). The turnaround approach involved replacing the principal, rehiring no more than 50% of the teachers, implementing new governance structures and curricula, and making other programmatic changes (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Cucchiara et al., (2015) examined teachers' perceptions of the social and organizational conditions within their schools during the early stages of the turnaround model of school reform. They collected interview and focus-group data from teachers at 13 schools which were a part of a turnaround initiative in a large urban district in the Northeastern United States. All 13 schools served predominately low-income minority populations. Teacher conversations led to school groupings reflective of teacher perspectives, positive schools and challenging schools. All schools intensively focused on instructional improvement, use of student achievement data, targeted curriculum and extra support for struggling students, and new systems for monitoring and improving teacher practice (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Cucchiara et al. (2015) focused their study on the early stages of the turnaround process because it is during this period that school culture is established, expectations for performance, behavior, and routines are established, and staff decide whether or not they think the reform will be successful. The researchers sought to find out what aspects of teachers' working conditions mattered most to teachers in the early stages of school turnaround, and how school-level working conditions affect teacher support for the

turnaround process. The implications are that the quality of working conditions has consequences for the task of turning around low performing schools and that the extent to which teachers believe turnaround schools provide supportive and positive working environments may be crucial to the success of this reform strategy (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Cucchiara et al. (2015) identified issues that characterized teachers' experiences in each school: instability and lack of support at the challenging schools, and consistency in programming, clarity about instructional expectations, and support for improvement at the positive schools. The researchers found a common theme for teachers at all the schools. They all described their work as extremely rigorous, emphasizing long hours and multiple demands such as raising test scores, addressing students' emotional needs, and implementing new programs. The differences in perspectives were relevant to the quality of working conditions within the schools. Cucchiara et al. (2015) attributed the differences in working conditions between the positive schools and challenging schools to organizational function and organizational culture. Organizational function referred to the schools' ability to operate smoothly, the level of stability in schedules and programming, the clarity of roles and expectations, and institutionalization of key values and priorities. Organizational culture, the second attributed difference in working conditions between the positive schools and challenging schools, refers to the quality of social relations, particularly the relations between teachers and administrators.

In the positive schools, the teachers appreciated the organizational stability and clear focus on instruction and climate as well as the supportive, respectful culture developed by administrators. Administrators were seen as focused on supporting

teachers to improve instruction instead of enforcing compliance. Although the teachers had no substantive input on the development of policies and procedures, they did not feel disempowered because respect and trust enabled discussions when they disagreed with a particular decision or procedure. Cucchiara et al. (2015) explained that this level of trust is a crucial element in developing a shared vision and strong school culture.

Teachers in the challenging schools expressed frustration at constantly changing programs and schedules, disrespectful treatment by administrators, and their own sense of powerlessness. To these teachers, the instability undermined morale and efficacy in the classroom (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Not only did teachers feel disrespected by administrators, they struggled to retain their focus on students and their sense of professionalism when the school culture was seen as unsupportive and administrative mandates were irrelevant to teaching students. The teachers in all the challenging models experienced significant management of teachers' practices, including demands about classroom displays, instructional routines, classroom management, test preparation, and data usage. The researchers described this management as reflective of an unsupportive, compliance-oriented culture (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions had implications for their support of the turnaround process. Cucchiara et al. (2015) found that in schools with positive working conditions the teachers expressed more favorable views of the reform than those in schools with challenging conditions. Teachers in the positive schools not only had faith in the reform model, but also expressed teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy in regard to influencing student learning. Most of the challenging schools' teachers had been supportive of reform in the beginning, but their views of turnaround

changed. The researchers argued that terms such as "buy-in" imply that once teachers buy into the reform they are going to be supportive throughout the process, but in reality an unorganized, unsupportive school culture can cause the organization to lose teacher buy-in. Because organizational function and culture are manifestations of leadership, strong leadership is crucial to early progress in school reform (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Cucchiara et al. (2015) provide an understanding of how the reform is experienced by a variety of stakeholders. Their study serves as a learning tool as teachers shared, through interviews and focus groups, factors that helped them be more effective and those that interfered with their work. The recent focus on increasing test scores has pushed teachers' concerns to the background. The researchers shared teachers' perceptions that stability in systems, along with a supportive culture, allows them to manage intense expectations and maintain their support for a reform which required them to work in new and demanding ways.

Conclusion

Respected rearchers provide evidence that leadership is second only to teaching among the school-related factors which impact student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). Experienced researchers indicate positive relationships between teacher empowerment and teacher morale (White, 1992), teacher effectiveness (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000), school climate (Martin, Crossland, & Johnson, 2001), and student achievement (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). They also show that teacher morale (Jones & Youngs, 2012; Marston, 2010; Meyer et al., 2009), teacher self-efficacy (Caprara et al., 2006; Ross, 1992; Hoy & Davis, 2006) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Goddard,

2001; Goddard, Hoy, et al., 2004; Goddard, LoGerfo, et al., 2004) are known to have an impact on student achievement.

Researchers indicate a relationship between empowerment and efficacy, as well as positive relationships between teacher empowerment and teacher morale (White, 1992), teacher effectiveness (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000), school climate (Martin et al., 2001), and student achievement (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000). Empowering environments are fostered through organizational leadership, structures, processes, and cultures that support efforts to make schools successful (Short, 1998). An understanding of how a variety of stakeholders experienced the reform is important for school reform efforts and improved student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. According to the Turnaround Eligible Schools list compiled by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017), elementary schools comprise the majority of the historically failing schools in Georgia. When costly school reform initiatives fail to show significant gains in student achievement, principal leaders and teachers face many challenges. One critical challenge is making informed decisions at the local level that will have the greatest impact on student achievement. Balyer, Özcan, and Yildiz (2017) defined empowerment as investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies as informed by their professional judgment. Teacher empowerment has been a focus of educational reform, leadership models, and teaching effectiveness for over two decades (Short & Johnson, 1994; Balyer et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. Teachers' perceptions of their empowerment may provide local and district level leaders at low performing and failing schools with insight about how their organization's performance can be improved. The information

gained from this study may also be beneficial for new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policymakers who are seeking to develop professional leadership practices and drive overall school improvement and student achievement. Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of low performing and failing schools.

Three research questions guided this study: 1. What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school? 2. What are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions? 3. How effectively do teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive the school is organized, empowering them to do the very best job of which they are capable?

An inductive qualitative approach was used to answer the guiding questions. Justification for the use of a qualitative research design, the criteria for the sample selection and setting, and relevance to the guiding questions are provided in this chapter. The role of the researcher is established and discussed in relation to the problem, potential biases, and methods for monitoring subjectivity. A description of the instrumentation, data collection, data analysis strategies, and ethical considerations help ensure reliability.

Research Design

Combining theories of empowerment (Freire, 1996, 2005; Kanter, 1993), Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1993), and Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) may lead to an understanding of how teacher empowerment relates to teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy. It may also lead to an understanding of how examining teachers' perceptions of their degree of empowerment facilitates transformative learning for teachers, new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, developers of leader preparation programs, and state policymakers who may be seeking to promote organizational change and/or drive educational reform. It is a goal of constructivist researchers to rely on the participants' views of the situation being studied, focusing on specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach was best suited for the inductive nature of this study, as I sought to make meaning from the experiences and perceptions of empowerment of the teachers in a historically low performing elementary school. The following characteristics of qualitative research outlined by Creswell (2014) were incorporated in this chapter: natural setting, researcher as key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive and deductive analysis, participants' meanings, reflexivity, and holistic account. Engaging in this form of inquiry supports a way of looking at research that honors inductive style, focuses on exploring and understanding individual meaning, and the importance of interpreting a complex situation (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and produces data in the form of quotes from documents

and participant interviews, excerpts from video tapes, electronic communication, and/or field notes (Merriam, 2002).

I conducted a basic interpretive study to make meaning of the experiences and perceptions of empowerment of the teachers in a historically low performing elementary school. A basic interpretive study was appropriate for this study because it exemplified the following characteristics: the researcher was interested in understanding how people interpret and assign meaning to their experiences; the researcher as the instrument mediated the meaning; and the inductive strategies yielded a descriptive outcome (Merriam, 2002). Data collected through memos, interviews, and observations were relevant and dependent on the theoretical frameworks of the study. The analysis of data involved identifying recurring patterns presented as categories, factors, and themes, which subsequently supported the findings. As the researcher, my understanding of how the participants assign meaning to the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2002) was the overall interpretation.

Setting

This investigation was conducted in a historically low-performing Title I elementary school in Central Georgia. Purposeful sampling procedures were deemed appropriate to select a particular setting and people to provide information relevant to the research questions and goals of the study. Purposeful selection has five possible goals (Maxwell, 2013): to achieve a typical representation of the selected settings, individuals, or activities to be studied; to develop heterogeneity within the population so conclusions adequately represent the range of variation among participants; to select individuals who are critical for testing theories related to the study; to establish comparisons in order to

illuminate differences between settings or participants; and, to select groups or participants with whom the most productive relationships may be established to answer the research questions (pp. 98-99). This researcher's goals were to achieve typical representation of teachers in historically low-performing Title I elementary schools and to select groups or participants with whom the most productive relationships may be established to answer the research questions. A low performing school is recognized as a school identified by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement as a Priority or Focus school based on three consecutive years of CCRPI data. A Title I school is one that receives funds as a result of Title I, Part A of the ESEA which provides "financial assistance to local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure all children meet challenging state academic standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Feasibility of access and data collection (Maxwell, 2013) increases the likelihood of establishing relationships most productive for answering the research questions.

The study site was a K-4 elementary school with a 615 student enrollment. The student population was comprised of 53% males and 47% females; 96% Black and 2% White; 17% students with disabilities; and 100% free/reduced-price lunch recipients (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). There were 42 teachers at the study site. A School Performance Report released by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) provided CCRPI data that indicated the school was historically low-performing. CCRPI scores from 2012-2016 consisted of F's and D's, the latest score a D-, 65.8. Lexile reading measures revealed 31.5% of the school's third grade students and 35.3% of the fifth grade students were reading at or above the grade level target.

Georgia Milestones data in mathematics showed 22.5% of the school's students scored in the Beginning range, 50.0% scored in the Developing range, 23.1% scored in the Proficient range, and 4.4% scored in the Distinguished range.

The study site was deemed a low socioeconomic entity because 100% of the student population received free/reduced lunches. The study site is located in a city where business and industry were abundant. The city is home to industries such as Parker Aerospace, MAGE SOLAR USA, Flexsteel Industries, QBT Industrial Fabricators, YKK AP, and Steelfab, large distribution centers like Fred's, Best Buy, Farmers Home Furniture, and New Holland North American Logistics, a health care and social services industry equating to nearly 10,000 qualified health care professionals (almost 20% of the local workforce), and innumerable retail businesses (Dublin-Laurens County Industry Focus, 2017). The business and industry of the study site location was of importance because it implicated that a lack of local financial resources were not a contributing factor to low student achievement. In fact, the per pupil expenditures for the school were above the state average (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017).

Also of interest to the study, the School Performance Report indicated a three out of five school climate star rating. The School Climate Star Rating, calculated by the Georgia Department of Education, is based on a scale of one to five stars. A rating of one star indicates a low school climate score, and a rating of five stars indicates a high school climate score. The rating is based on the following components: climate survey responses from students, parents, and teachers/staff; data on student discipline; data on the school as a safe and substance-free learning environment; student, teacher, administrator, and staff attendance; and other factors.

Role of Researcher

I served as the researcher and major research instrument. In this role, I strived to understand the meaning people construct about their worlds and experiences. Thus, the human instrument is considered an ideal means for collecting and analyzing data (Merriam, 2002, p. 5) because it can be "immediately responsive and adaptive." Advantages of the researcher as the instrument include the ability to observe and interpret nonverbal communication and unspoken verbal communication, to process data immediately; to perform perception checks for clarity and accuracy of interpretation, and to explore unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam, 2002).

Just as there are advantages of the researcher-instrument role, there are also disadvantages. Selective attention and selective interpretation of data are possible biases and can result from the research process when the researcher is also the interviewer. Merriam (2002) suggested, rather than trying to eliminate the biases, they should be identified and monitored for how they may possibly shape data collection and interpretation. Maxwell (2013) recommended disclosing information about the researcher's past experiences with the research problem, participants, and/or setting so the reader can develop an understanding of the connection between the researcher and the study. This also helps the reader understand how those experiences can potentially cause this researcher to lean toward certain themes, to seek evidence to support my views, or create favorable or unfavorable conclusions. As a veteran educator with 26 years of experience, I have worked with a variety of administrators, some of whom have been leaders respected for sharing leadership and/or empowerment and others who did not.

However, there is no connection to the potential study site, setting, or any of the participants.

Participant Selection

Participants were purposefully selected in order to achieve "representativeness or typicality" of the individuals who experience some degree of empowerment within the setting (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful selection also allowed me to select participants who were best able to answer the research questions. The criteria for participant selection included teachers who had completed at least three years of experience at the school or district and who were teaching in grades three and four. The rationale behind the selection process was to ensure participants had experience beyond what GADOE considers the induction phase of three or less years of teaching experience (Georgia Department of Education, 2016); to ensure participants' perceptions were based on their experiences at the present site, or at least in the same district, rather than another organization; and, to gather the perceptions of the teachers in the grade levels where student achievement is measured by the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). Teachers in the grade levels where student achievement is measured by the CCRPI were selected because it is their students' achievement scores which contribute to the "historically low performing" status of the setting.

I made initial contact with teachers during their grade level specific Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings. The initial contact visit allowed me to become familiar with the setting, to identify potential participants who met the criteria and were better able to keep interview appointments, to establish mutual respect and trust, and to determine participant interest in the study (Seidman, 2013). During the initial contact

visit, I explained the nature of the study, how the participants fit into the study, the three-interview sequence, and details included in the informed consent form (2013).

Instrumentation and Data Collection

I used multiple methods to collect data in order to strengthen the findings. Multiple methods were used not only to triangulate the findings, but also to gain information about different aspects of the phenomenon and to broaden the range of aspects (Maxwell, 2013). I created a database to organize and document data. A database allowed other researchers to review the evidence directly without being limited to written reports, thus increasing the reliability of the study. The database included memos, interview transcripts, and any potential documents such as meeting minutes from faculty and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meetings. I maintained a chain of evidence to increase the reliability of information. This process was carried out by citing relevant pieces of evidence found in the database, indicating in the citation the circumstances under which the evidence was collected, and indicating a link between the content of the evidence and the research questions.

Interviews

The primary instrument used to gather data were interviewing. As suggested by Seidman (2013), I used a three-interview series approach to in-depth interviewing. I used an interview guide to establish the purpose and focus of each interview and to guide data collection during interviews. In-depth interviewing is designed to ask participants to reconstruct their personal experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). Thus, the interview guide contained open-ended questions pertaining

to the research questions. However, interviewing requires active listening which prompted follow-up questions not included in the guide.

Interview 1: Life and Career Experiences. This interview was aligned with the first research question. It focused on the life and career experiences of the selected participants and allowed me to build participant profiles.

1. Tell me about your background.
2. How did you get into teaching?
3. Tell me about your education. What degrees and certifications do you hold?
4. Tell me about your teaching experiences. Where have you worked? What have you taught?
5. What do you find most meaningful about being an educator?
6. What experiences have you had in positions of leadership, both formal and informal?

Interview 2: School Organization and Empowerment. The second interview pertained to the second and third research questions. It focused on participants' perceptions of how the school's organizational structure played a role in teacher empowerment and participants' perceptions of their access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

School Organization

1. Describe your school's organizational structure in relation to roles and positions.
2. Describe shared-leadership at your school.
3. Explain how the organization of your school affects your abilities as a teacher.

Meaningful Information

1. How is important information communicated to you?
2. Describe professional development at your school.
3. What do you think about Professional Learning Communities?
4. To what do you contribute the majority of your professional growth throughout the school year?

Appropriate Resources

1. Do you think your school affectively allocates resources?
2. Do you think your school system affectively allocates resources?
3. How are school resources allocated at your school?
4. How do you explain the school supply list to parents?
5. What would you consider your best teaching resources?
6. What resources do you think would help you be better able to teach your students?

Decision-Making

1. What role do you play in the implementation of new programs in your school?
2. What is your role in the school improvement process?
3. What role do you play in scheduling classes? Scheduling students?
4. Describe how curricular selections are made at your school.
5. Describe your ability to be creative and innovative in your classroom.

Interview 3: Reflections.

1. Given what you have shared with me about your life and career experiences, how do you feel those experiences helped prepare you for your current position? Please provide examples.
2. What do you think about your school's organizational structure in relation to teacher empowerment?
3. Describe yourself in relation to teacher empowerment.

With participants' permission, I used an audio recorder during each interview. Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed, and transcriptions were used for analysis. During the interviews, I wrote field notes. Field notes, or working notes as referred to by Seidman (2013), help interviewers concentrate on what the participant is saying, help prevent interruptions during responses, and help the interviewer keep track of what is said so the topic can be revisited at an appropriate time. Field notes helped me keep track of follow-up questions and clarifying questions without interrupting the interviewee.

Documentation

I collected copies of faculty meeting minutes, school leadership team meeting minutes, Professional Learning Committee minutes and the handouts dispersed during those meetings. I collected other documents such as the School Improvement Plan and the school supply list given to parents at the beginning of the school year. I also collected the district's Initial Charter and its Strategic Improvement Planning Report. Documents are a strong data source because they already exist in the situation, do not intrude upon or

alter the setting, and are not dependent on the whimsical nature of human subjects (Merriam, 2002).

Researcher Memos

The third method of data collection was writing memos. A memo refers to any writing the researcher does aside from field notes, transcripts, or coding (Maxwell, 2013). Memos are used to reflect goals, methods, theory, prior experiences, and relationships with participants and settings (Maxwell, 2013). As suggested by Maxwell (2103), I wrote memos to reflect on the process, self-critique, and facilitate analytic insight about the phenomenon. I also organized memos in a "systematic, retrievable form" for easy future access (p. 20). Writing immediately followed any experiences related to the study.

Data Analysis

Just as multiple forms of data collection are important to a study, so are multiple strategies for data analysis. There are three main analytic options for analyzing qualitative data; memoing, categorizing, and connecting (Maxwell, 2013). Coding is identified as the main categorizing strategy used in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Maxwell described these options in conjunction as a process:

> Reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships, and creating matrices and other displays are *all* important forms of data analysis. (Maxwell, 2013, p. 105)

I applied the following data analysis procedures to interview transcripts and field notes, documentation, and memos. The first phase of data analysis involved creating

codes to assign to data once it had been collected. As recommended by Saldaña, I kept a codebook to record provisional codes, emergent codes, their content descriptions, and a brief data example of each so that the codes could be reviewed periodically and reorganized into categories and subcategories (2013). The first coding cycle combined elemental, affective, and exploratory coding methods. Prior to data collection, I created provisional codes based on the research questions and literature review. The list of provisional codes included words such as leadership, self-efficacy, collective-efficacy, school climate, resources, professional growth, decisions, information, and empowerment. I used In Vivo coding to identify words and phrases the participants used to retell their stories and experiences. In Vivo coding does not follow predetermined code words, but rather allows the participants' own words to develop the code. Coding with the participants' own words enhanced and deepened my understanding of their culture and perspectives (Saldaña, 2013).

I used Code Mapping as a post-code transition activity between first and second cycle coding to reorganize the data. Code Mapping enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of observations (Saldaña, 2013). During the first phase of Code Mapping, I extracted all codes from the data set and listed them as they randomly appeared in the data. In the second phase, I categorized the initial codes into sections with similar properties as they apply to the research questions. To condense further the data categories, I conducted a third phase of Code Mapping. Code mapping was not only a part of the auditing process for the study, but also a technique for developing higher-level concepts (Saldaña, 2013).

During the second cycle of coding, I reorganized the data through pattern coding and assigned the data to categories. Maxwell identified distinctions in categories as organizational, substantive, and theoretical (2013). Organizational categories are broad areas or issues which help sort and order data. Substantive and theoretical categories are the result of coding. Substantive categories are descriptive, inclusive of participants' concepts and beliefs. Conversely, theoretical categories represent concepts derived from prior theory or from emerging theory. I reviewed the Code Mapping analysis to categorize pattern codes according to the research question topics. These organizational categories included past experiences, school organization, and empowerment. Within the organizational categories, I arranged the data into substantive and theoretical categories. The third coding phase involved connecting the data. I integrated cross-case comparisons to establish relationships between categories and to derive meaning to answer the research questions.

Issues of Validity

Internal Validity

Maxwell (2013) used the term validity to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or any other account of findings, which follow a research study. To establish credibility, I collected rich, descriptive data, triangulated the data, and validated the data analysis with participants. I spent several months gathering data in the low-performing Title I school. Repeated interviews enabled me to check and confirm observations and inferences and rule out premature assumptions (Maxwell, 2013). I collected rich, descriptive data through interviews, documents, and memos. I conducted member checks following the interviews to rule out

misinterpretation and misunderstandings. At the end of data analysis, I provided each participant with a rough draft of the findings pertaining to their own perceptions and had each one provide feedback for accuracy. This respondent validation also helped to identify potential researcher biases.

Triangulation through multiple data collection methods is a strategy that researchers use to ensure validity (Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2013). I coded, categorized, and memoed following each data collection. To triangulate the data, I created a matrix of pattern codes created from the research questions and data samples from across the three methods of data collection (interviews, documents, and memos). This process, along with reflective writing, allowed me to identify recurring themes.

Maxwell (2013) identified researcher bias and reactivity as major threats to validity. Researcher bias can occur through data selection when the researcher chooses data that fits pre-existing theory, goals, preconceptions, or data that may stand out to the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). Personal experiences and identity are potential validity threats the researcher counteracted through memoing (Maxwell, 2013). It is important to note that I am a veteran teacher who has taught in elementary school settings where teacher empowerment was fostered, and where it was not fostered. I took extra caution to ensure the data were not misinterpreted due to my own prior experiences. Conversely, as a current leader at a high school I understand that teachers' perceptions are often formed without knowing the whole picture. Thus, my ability to see both sides of the issues may prove to be a strength of the data collection and analysis.

Reactivity refers to the influence of the researcher on the setting or participants (Maxwell, 2013). Because eliminating the influence of the researcher is impossible, the

goal is to "understand it and use it productively" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). To reduce reactivity, I avoided leading questions that may have influenced the participants' responses to interview questions.

Transferability

When qualitative researchers think about what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation and how that knowledge can be transferred to another similar situation, the researcher is able to generalize the research (Merriam, 2002). I used two strategies for increasing transferability: research site selection and rich, thick description (Merriam, 2002). For this study, I selected a research site with characteristics similar to other low performing elementary schools in Georgia. The school was a Title I elementary school with demographics that included low socioeconomic status and a predominately African-American student population. I provided a database with enough rich, thick descriptive findings and information to allow readers to determine transferability to their particular situations.

Ethical Issues

This study involved collecting data from willing participants through interviews and documentation in an established school setting. Working with human subjects is a sensitive process regulated by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. At Valdosta State University, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is responsible for ensuring that research participants are treated ethically and in compliance with federal and state laws and regulations. This study was conducted according to IRB policies and procedures. It was eligible for exemption under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) part 46 regulations

(U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections, 2017). See Appendix A for the IRB Protocol Exemption Report.

Obtaining informed consent for interviews with participants was the first issue I addressed prior to beginning the investigation. See Appendix B for the Informed Consent form. Following IRB procedure, I explained the study to potential participants, allowed them to ask questions, and provided time for them to make a decision about participating in the study. The informed consent form stated explicitly that the potential participants were invited to participate in the study. A brief statement that explained the purpose of the study, how it was to be conducted, for how long, and whether there were any sponsors for the research (Seidman, 2013) followed this invitation.

The next section of the informed consent form explained potential risks for participants. Two potential risks are those which occur during in-depth interviewing and those which occur after the interviews have been completed (Seidman, 2013). Depending on the participant's sensitivity to the topic, in-depth interviews may cause emotional discomfort. I worked to minimize potential discomfort. Once interviews were completed, verbatim transcripts revealed intimate details of the participants' experiences and perspectives, providing the potential for embarrassment. Conversely, I ensured that potential participants understood there were no risks for lack of participation.

The informed consent form also contained a brief description of potential benefits to both the participant and to others. As suggested by Seidman (2013), I modestly described the benefits in a way that did not raise undue expectations, but still justified the potential risks involved with in-depth interviewing. For this study, the benefits were intangible. A better understanding of their own perceptions was beneficial to

participants. In addition, the study could potentially benefit other teachers, new and practicing principals, district-level leaders, leader preparation programs, state policymakers, and ultimately, students.

Cost and compensation were also concerns addressed in the informed consent form. There were no travel expenses for the participants because the study took place on site where they were employed. There was also no loss of wages since the interviews took place during times that did not interfere with instruction. I did not offer monetary compensation for participation in the study. However, in an effort to develop trust and build researcher-participant relationships, I did offer to assist participants with non-research related tasks that may have been hindered by participation in interviews.

I addressed confidentiality in the informed consent form. I assured the research site "gatekeepers" that the anonymity of the site and its participants would be protected to the extent allowed by law (Maxwell, 2013). I assigned the study site and participants pseudonyms which served as their identities during data collection and analysis. I assured participants that contact information sheets, informed consent forms, and audio recordings of interviews would be kept in a secure place to protect against their identities being revealed. I used precaution to ensure that participants' interview responses not reveal their identities through personal stories and intimate details.

Researcher-participant relationship is a potential ethical dilemma with regard to data collection and dissemination of findings (Merriam, 2002). The researcher-participant relationship may determine how much the researcher reveals about the purpose of the study during the informed consent process, and how much privacy and protection participants are given (Merriam, 2002). Another ethical obligation is to try to

understand how the participants' perceive and respond to the researcher's intrusion into their lives (Maxwell, 2013). I sought to understand the participants' perceptions of me and of the research, and worked toward building ethical and productive relationships.

Chapter Summary

The lack of significant gains in student achievement in Georgia's schools, despite costly and innovative initiatives, is cause for concern. Leadership and teaching are the top two school-related factors to impact student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

I designed this basic interpretive study with the guidance of Merriam (2002), the Institutional Review Board at Valdosta State University (2007), Maxwell (2013), Seidman (2013), and Saldaña (2013). I chose the research site because it fit the criteria associated with a "historically low-performing" school based on the last three consecutive years of scores on the College and Career Readiness Index. I used purposeful sampling to select participants who have the most experience in the teaching profession and the most experience in the school setting. I collected data through multiple forms (interviews, documentation, and memos) and analyze it using multiple strategies such as coding, categorizing, and reflective writing. I took necessary precautions to assure validity of the findings, including the collection of rich, thick descriptions; triangulation of data; and, identification of researcher bias and reactivity.

I also took necessary measures to conduct an ethical study in compliance with federal and state laws and regulations. Following IRB procedure, I obtained informed consent for observations and interviews with participants. I also worked to develop productive, ethical researcher-participant relationships.

Chapter IV

DATA ANALYSIS

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. According to the Chronically Failing Schools List produced by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017), elementary schools comprise the majority of the historically failing schools in Georgia. The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information and appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. The following questions guided the study.

1. What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school?

2. What are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions?

3. How effectively do teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive the school is organized, empowering them to do the very best job of which they are capable?

Participant Profiles

The purpose of this section is to familiarize the reader with each participant. Each participant's profile is introduced through a narrative based on the data. Participants were purposefully selected in order to achieve "representativeness or typicality" of the individuals who have the opportunity to experience some degree of empowerment within the setting (Maxwell, 2013). The criteria for participation in the study required participants to have experience beyond what GADOE considers the induction phase of three or less years of teaching experience (Georgia Department of Education, 2016); to have been employed in the same school or district for at least three consecutive years and, currently teach in the grade levels where student achievement is measured by the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). Seven teachers participated in this study, three third grade teachers and four fourth grade teachers.

As suggested by Seidman (2013), I used the three-interview structure to place participants' comments in context and to check for internal consistency. The three-interview approach also allowed me to connect their experiences and check one participant's comments against those of another. In order to protect the participants' identities, I assigned a pseudonym for each one based on the names of former students or former colleagues with whom the participants share a name. In addition, I assigned pseudonyms to the school district and individual schools, as well as the county in which they are located.

Table 1 illustrates demographic identifiers and the professional profiles of each participant. All participants were female except one. Five of the seven participants were Black. Their years of experience ranged from five to twenty-eight years. All participants

had a Master's degree and five of the seven also had an Education Specialist degree. All participants taught one or more of the academic subjects of math, English/Language Arts (ELA), science, and social studies. Fourth grade teachers worked as one team and taught only one subject each. However, the third grade was divided into two pods leaving the teachers two subject areas for which they were responsible.

Table 1

Demographic Identifiers and Professional Profiles of Participants

Participant	**Race**	**Gender**	**Education**	**Years of Experience**	**Subject Area(s)**
Douglas	Black	M	B.S., Early Childhood Education M.S., Early Childhood Education Ed. S., Educational Leadership	6	Math
Kelly	White	F	B.S., Special Education, SLD M.S., Special Education Ed.S., Early Childhood Education	28	ELA/Social Studies
Meredith	Black	F	B.S., Early Childhood Education M.S., Foundations of Education Ed.S., Education Leadership	12	ELA/Social Studies
Patricia	Black	F	B.S., Early Childhood Education B.S., Special Education M.S., Early Childhood Education	5	Social Studies
Patterson	Black	F	B.S., Early Childhood Education M.S., Early Childhood Education	8	ELA
Phyllis	Black	F	B.S., Early Childhood Education M.S., Elementary Education Ed. S., Early Childhood Education	8	Science
Stuckey	White	F	B.S., Early Childhood Education M.S., Early Childhood Education Ed.S., Curriculum and Technology	10	Math/Science

Patterson

Patterson was a single female and had no children of her own. She was born and raised in Livingston, Georgia. She graduated from the same school system in which she taught. She graduated from Livingston High School in 2006 and attended Valdosta State University where she received a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She obtained a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education with a focus on Enhanced Teaching Practices from Ball State University in Indiana. She also had an endorsement in Reading and was certified in Middle Grades Social Science and ELA.

Patterson grew up in a home where education was highly valued and expectations were high for her and her younger brother. Their mother was a high school teacher, so education was ". . . of the utmost importance." She was strongly influenced by people in her family. She said, "I grew up around teachers. My grandmother had three daughters, all of whom are teachers. So education was all I knew growing up. I basically grew up in a classroom." Patterson also mentioned that her "aunt was the very first African American librarian hired by Lowndes County Schools." She reflected, "I think having that firm foundation in education and already knowing what it took to be successful in this profession prepared me for my current position."

Patterson had always taught in Livingston City Schools. At the time of the study, she was in her 8th year of teaching. She taught fifth grade ELA and Social Studies for four years. She taught second grade Science and Social Studies for two years. Patterson described her fifth year of teaching as ". . . a huge transition." She had moved from fifth grade to second grade. She requested to be moved because she ". . . wanted experience in a different grade level . . .", but found that she ". . . was just more suited to teach older

students." After two years of teaching second grade, she decided to move back to fifth grade. However, their school system opened the fifth grade academy at the middle school. During the summer, she visited several fifth-grade academies with the superintendent, but overall did not like the middle school atmosphere. Though she liked teaching older students, she loved the intimate atmosphere of an elementary school. She ". . . just did not like the middle school atmosphere." She ". . . like[ed] teaching older students . . .," but ". . . love[ed] the intimate atmosphere of an elementary school." She decided to move to fourth grade so she could remain at her school. At the time of the study, she was in her second year of teaching fourth grade ELA.

Patterson's leadership qualities were recognized by her school and district leaders. During her career, she has been awarded Teacher of the Year for her school and the Office Max "A Day Made Better" Teacher Award. She was the grade level leader for fourth grade, served on the school's leadership team, led professional development meetings for teachers at the school, and the school literacy team, a member of the district literacy team, and served on the governance council for the school.

Patterson's roles as the grade level leader and as a member of the school's leadership team were intertwined. She stated: "I attend the leadership team meetings with the administration, so whatever they tell me to deliver back, I deliver that back. Usually, that's data or anything that the administration needs for the teachers to do." Patterson conveyed that information to the teachers in Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings during the teachers' common planning time. As the grade level leader, it was her job to use data to facilitate a plan of action with her team members, keep PLC minutes, and turn in the minutes and other necessary documentation to the administration.

Teachers were required to hold PLC meetings bi-weekly. Patterson expressed mixed feelings about the benefits of the PLC meetings:

> I do see the benefits of it. However, if I'm just speaking honestly, do I think that it's helping me to become a better teacher? No, I feel like I can look at the data by myself, interpret what I need to interpret, and when I need to come together with them then we can do that.

Patterson did not always perceive PLC meetings an effective use of time. She stated, ". . . it depends on what's going on, if I'm just speaking honestly. You know when you're having a busy week it's really not that effective . . ." She explained that they just go through the motions of looking at the data and signing off on the PLC minutes when they have a busy week, but ". . . when it's a more normal week we can really sit down and analyze the data." She also bemoaned the demerits of long planning times at the elementary level: ". . . we have to take our kids everywhere and they have to be picked up. So, really, by the time everything is finished, you may have 20-25 minutes and sometimes they try to stuff PL sessions in that." She described herself on those days as, ". . . not focused on what you're talking about. I'm thinking about everything else that I have to go get done."

As the grade level leader, Patterson was also responsible for scheduling when and how Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings were carried out. "With RTI, I take the lead in when we do it and how we do it . . . we have 85 kids and 42 of them are RTI." RTI is a tiered approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and/or behavioral needs. Patterson's additional grade level leader duties included parent

coordination such as planning and scheduling parent conferences and preparing and sending out parent communications.

The knowledge she gained from experiences with both fourth and fifth grade ELA standards made Patterson a valuable asset to the school. She was the school's leader of a newly formed literacy team that involved the lead ELA teachers in grades Pre-K through fourth grade. Prior to the 2017-18 school year, the school's ELA teachers did not collaborate. They ". . . lacked consistency in structure . . . communication across the grade levels wasn't there." Patterson recognized this as a factor that contributed to low student performance. She explained:

> . . . when you have a good teacher in kindergarten who's just doing what they think they should be doing, and first grade is doing what they think they should be doing, the children weren't really building on anything. So, a lot of times what you had was by the time they got to me . . . what you had was a bunch of kids who were good at certain things but none of which was what you really needed at that grade level. There wasn't a lot of academic structure.

According to Patterson, her principal created the literacy team out of a necessity for literacy intervention. ". . . out of the 341 students that we have in those grade levels, 322 of them are reading below the Lexile target band for the state . . .. We have 250 interventions [RTI] that are going on in the school right now." During ELA collaborative meetings, Patterson guided the ELA teachers in the vertical alignment of the ELA curriculum across grade levels, particularly in the area of writing. Because she was the school's literacy leader, she also served on the district's literacy team. In that role, Patterson worked with the ELA lead teacher from the other district elementary school and

the middle school to ensure they were all ". . . on the same page." Having facilitated teachers at her school in the process of writing a literacy plan for the school, she was helping to write a literacy grant for the district. If awarded, the grant would allow the system to purchase resources and hire additional personnel to address literacy needs.

Patterson was elected by her peers to serve on the school governance council, which was a committee that helped make decisions for the charter school. The governance council also consisted of school leaders and members of the community. Patterson described the governance council as district level meetings for everyone to ". . . just kind of discuss what's going on in [their] community, what's going on with [their] students . . .." The governance council ". . . help[ed] the principal and the board make decisions at the school level that would be best for [the] school and for [the] kids."

In addition to the various leadership roles in which she served, Patterson took initiative to share new experiences with teachers not only in her grade level, but in other grade levels, as well. She stated:

> I have also lead professional learning meetings for teachers at the school when it comes to particular programs. I am also eager to utilize any new technology or digital reading programs, so my principal does ask me to teach and aid other educators in the school in using these programs. Usually, the principal will provide a substitute for my class and I train the teachers during their planning times.

Patterson felt her leadership opportunities were effective at the school level and that they afforded her a "voice" and that she could speak ". . . not just for [herself] as a teacher, but

for the entire grade level." Patterson's leadership opportunities surpassed those of her colleagues. None of the other participants were as involved in leadership roles.

Patterson was committed to her students and went beyond the call of duty to meet their needs. She stated: "I've taught students with parole officers. I have had to attend court with some of my students. I've attended funerals with some of my students who have lost older brothers, uncles, and fathers to gun violence." She conducted a number of home visits each nine-week period in an effort to keep the line of communication open with parents. "I've always tried to help my students beat the odds." Patterson found education meaningful because she was able to ". . . impact the lives of children on a daily basis." She recognized that her students were burdened with ". . . serious struggles on a daily basis." So, her goal was to ". . . always be a source of stability . . ." for her students. "When I can create a positive change in a student, that means the world to me."

I found Patterson to be confident, articulate, and knowledgeable. Not only was she driven to impact the lives of her students, but also to improve the education process at her school. She was open and accessible to her co-workers and administrators. The leadership skills she exhibited made her a logical choice for the roles she played in the school and district.

Douglas

Douglas was a single male with no children of his own. The eldest of three children, he was born and raised in Parks County where he attended Livingston City Schools. During his Junior year in school, his English teacher questioned him about his career plans and suggested he try Early Childhood Education (ECE). He tried an ECE

course his Senior year and liked it. He shared: "I liked it. I liked what it was all about. I just accepted it from there and it has been a joyous ride."

Douglas graduated from Livingston High School in 2007. He earned a Bachelor Degree in Education from Macon State College in 2012. He continued his education at Georgia College and State University where he earned a Master's Degree in Education in 2016 and an Education Specialist degree in Education Leadership in 2017. He had taught at the Livingston elementary school for six years. He was hired as a special education teacher. During his first three years, he taught third through fifth grades as a special education inclusion math teacher. Douglas's good teaching record helped him to get to his current role as a regular education 4th grade math teacher. He stated: ". . . she [the principal] had heard about some of my sped students in 4th grade helping some of the regular ed students in 4th grade math. So, she wanted me to transition into that role." At the time of the study, he had taught math in a regular education classroom for three years. Douglas, who was once a special education co-teacher, had a co-teacher who helped him with special education students. Despite having a co-teacher, he was reluctant to let go of his classroom responsibilities. He shared: ". . . was a little hesitant in relinquishing some of the control . . ." because he did not know ". . . which way they would go . . . ," meaning that he did not know if the teacher would be able to meet his expectations. ". . . my expectations for myself was high, so I was like, I don't know if everybody else will be willing to do the same thing." He continued, "I started doing a lot more and got better with it and we had more conversations about how we could tag team the issues. It has been a lot easier this year than it has the previous two years."

Douglas served as lead teacher and was voted Teacher of the Year for the 2016-2017 school year. He also served as the co-chair for fourth grade. His job required him to attend leadership meetings and perform other leadership tasks in the absence of the grade level leader. Douglas described being on the leadership team as challenging because, ". . . whatever we talked about on the leadership team, I had to make sure I came back and clearly communicated to my grade level peers without showing any . . . biases towards ideas." He explained that even though the grade level leader may not like a particular idea, it is important to ". . . present it in a neutral way . . ." because ". . . if personal feelings were eliminated from it and it was just tried as it was talked about, it could work."

Douglas empathized with many of his students and served as a role model. He captured these sentiments in the following anecdote:

> Many of the students I am currently teaching live in the neighborhoods that I grew up in. Even though those neighborhoods have significantly changed since then, I do know what they have to go through, and I also know what it takes to remove yourself from those circumstances. Because of my experience, I believe I am an example to them on what to do to remove yourself from situations that are not as good as this country offers. Therefore, many of the students do like to associate themselves with me and want to be in my class.

Douglas won the affection of his students and the community as a caring teacher who made an "impact" on the lives of students through his teaching. He stated: ". . . the impact that you can have on a child's life, whether it's inside or outside the school. 'Cause, to me, outside the school seems to be more, fulfilling more than inside." He

shared a story about a time that he ". . . had this little Secret Santa initiative in [his] classroom." One of the students had been absent on the day the other students drew names, so Douglas drew his name. He bought a gift and took it to the student's house. While approaching the house, a woman came near him and asked if he was Mr. [Douglas]. Then she asked if he had won teacher of the year. After explaining that he had won that award during the previous year, she responded: "I just want to let you know, keep doing what you are doing 'cause there's a lot of children around here who like you and talk about you all the time, so just keep doing what you're doing." He described that it was a ". . . good feeling when she told me that."

Douglas was energetic and passionate about teaching and learning. He had high expectations for himself and others. He was confident in his abilities as a math teacher and as a role model for his students.

Phyllis

Phyllis, the youngest of three children, was born and raised in Parks County. She was a quiet, soft-spoken person. She described herself as ". . . one of the quieter ones." Though she was always polite and accommodating, getting her to open up was difficult. She said, "I don't say much. If you want to know something, you have to ask it. If you wait for me to say something, that's not going to happen [laughter]." I found this to be true. She was not quick to share her opinion or feelings.

She attended Livingston City Schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Growing up she was ". . . more an A student until [she] got to high school . . . then I kinda started slacking, but none the less, [she] passed and made it on through." Her

brother and sister had been in the Beta club while she was ". . . the average child." She said, ". . . education was important back then. I just started slacking off."

She had various teaching experiences. First, she was a teacher's assistant in high school in the school's Youth Apprenticeship Program. She also taught in the youth department at her church. She shared her passion for the teaching profession: "I got into teaching because I used to be in the Youth Apprenticeship in high school and just helping out at church with the youth department." She stated, ". . . education was a field I was interested in looking into and looking forward to working with children throughout the years." She could not remember anyone who had influenced or inspired her to become a teacher, rather she ". . . just enjoyed working with the kids."

Phyllis had 12 years of formal K-12 teaching experience. She began teaching in Bibb County and taught there one year before a position became available in Livingston City Schools. She taught Pre-K for five years before moving to another elementary school in the district where she remained until the schools were rezoned. She taught first grade at that elementary school for four years until the school closed two years ago. She had been at the study site for the last two years where she taught fourth grade science. She also worked with students in the 21st Century program after school from 3:00 until 5:30 where she ". . . focus[ed] on a certain skill in ELA on two days out the week, then on math two days out the week . . ." and then provided ". . . enrichment for an hour at the end of the day." On Fridays, the students participated in STEAM activities that involved ". . . just working on the computers or building things, or making artsy things of that nature."

Phyllis was a nurturing teacher who cared deeply for her students. She shared: "Helping the students learn . . . becoming the mother figure for some of them 'cause you show that you care and concerned about them and they might not receive that at home. So, just being able to help them when I can." She also felt the teaching profession had become ". . . like a business for some people, because all the stuff they want you to do." Though she shared this opinion, she was not one to complain. Instead, she said, "If teaching is your passion, you'll do what you need to do to get it done." She described herself as "flexible." She said, "I've had to move from school to school with the changes. Then I had to move this year up to a new grade. So, I'm just able to change. It doesn't bother me."

Patricia

Patricia was a widow with four children and eight grandchildren. She grew up in Parks County and graduated from West Parks High School. While growing up, she was academically competitive with others. She said, "In my family education was very important. I can remember being very academically competitive with my siblings, cousins, and friends." She had passion for education and ". . . loved attending school . . . didn't want to miss it." She recalled ". . . enjoy[ing] school so much that in . . . elementary years [she] play[ed] the role of a teacher at home, pretending to play school."

Patricia began her teaching career as a paraprofessional from 1996 until 2012. In 2007, she graduated from Middle Georgia College with an Associate Degree in Education. She graduated from Mercer University with dual Bachelor Degrees in Special Education and Early Childhood Education in 2012. Two years later, she graduated from the same university with a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She began

her formal teaching career as a Pre-K teacher. For one year, she was an inclusion/resource teacher for kindergarten and first grade in the areas of Math and Language Arts. The next year she served as the inclusion teacher for second and third grades in Math and Language Arts. Next, she was an inclusion teacher for third and fifth grades in Math and Language Arts. Since 2016, she has been teaching fourth grade Social Studies and says it is her ". . . favorite subject area and grade level." In addition to teaching, Patricia has served as an after-school teacher for Communities in Schools since 2004. The Communities in Schools program was for fifth graders and ". . . provid[ed] homework assistance, one-on-one tutoring, and after homework rotation classes . . . Character Education, technology, fitness, and Abstinence Education."

Patricia had an expanded view of being a teacher. She succinctly described her role as a teacher:

> As a classroom-teacher I must fulfill several roles, resourcer, supporter, mentor, learner. Sometimes I have parents emailing or calling wanting to know what else they can do with their child to help them to be academically successful. As their child's teacher, I provide the parents with resources that will be beneficial to their child's learning . . . websites, activities, etc. . . .. It is my duty to provide my students and parents with the support needed to ensure that my students are getting the best education. I truly feel that it takes teamwork to give a child the best education. This is why I like to communicate with my parents on a regular basis.

Patricia found joy collaborating with colleagues. She said, "I am also thankful for my wonderful colleagues. Whenever I have tried different solutions or strategies, and

nothing has improved then I can always go to them for some help or ideas." She added that outside of the colleagues in her grade level, "PLC's, faculty meetings and staff development workshops give me the opportunity to share and receive and communicate with my colleagues any concerns."

Patricia ". . . strive[d] to give [her] students the best education possible." She wanted ". . . to see every student become successful and achieve their goals." She said even though some of her students might not ". . . soar as high . . ." as she would prefer them to, ". . . just to know that [she] made a difference at some point in their lives meant a lot." Patricia was soft spoken and had a pleasant, positive demeanor. She did not seem to be overtly confident, but rather comfortable in her role and with her ability to reach her students. I observed her interaction with three students who were in trouble and having to sit out of their rotation class. She spoke to them of the consequences for their actions and did so in a quiet and compassionate, but firm manner.

Meredith

Meredith was a single mother of two children and an ELA/ social studies teacher. She grew up in Livingston with four siblings in a home where education was highly valued and failure was not an option. Her grandmother was a teacher who ran a daycare after retirement. She recalled receiving her first C. "I was not disciplined for it, but I was told very firmly that I better not come home with this type of grade again. Therefore, I never received anything lower than a B until my collegiate years." As a very young child she wanted to be a teacher, but in middle and high school thought she wanted to become a physical therapist. Meredith graduated from Livingston High School and went on to achieve a Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education from Georgia State

University, a Master of Science in Foundations of Education from Troy University, and an Education Specialist in Education Leadership.

Meredith was inspired to become a teacher by some of her own teachers. She stated:

> I feel that some great teachers developed my love for teaching. I can remember the funniest teachers and then I also remember my worst teacher. I feel that those memories and reflections have molded me in the type of teacher I am today.

All of Meredith's teaching experiences had been at the same Livingston elementary school. Although Meredith was passionate about teaching, she did not rule out other professional interests. She stated, "Teaching is my passion. I enjoy seeing students grow at their own pace, but I'm not sure it's not time for me to do something else." This may suggest dissonance as a separation between the love of students and teaching and the desire to move away from what was seen as the business of schooling. Meredith had acquired experience teaching at different levels during her tenure at the school. She taught first grade for seven years during which time she taught all academic subject areas. She taught second grade for four years. During that time, there were years that she taught all academic subjects and some years that she only taught English/Language Arts. At the time of our meeting, she was teaching third grade for the first time. In addition to classroom instruction, Meredith had served as a teacher mentor, the chair of various school committees, and had attended the Livingston City Schools Leadership Academy. The Leadership Academy was for any teachers who were interested in pursuing a leadership position in the school system. In 2011, she received Teacher of the Year award.

Meredith was articulate and professional. She did not make derogatory comments and hesitated before answering anything she thought could be interpreted negatively. She seemed to cover her frustration with laughter.

Kelly

Kelly was a mother of three grown children and an ELA/social studies teacher. She grew up with one sibling in Glennville, Georgia and attended Pinewood Christian Academy in Bellville, Georgia. Education was revered in Kelly's home when she was growing up. Her mother only had a high school education and her father had been in the Marines and slowly got his accounting degree while trying to raise a family. She shared: "So, it was very important to them that my brother and I get a good education. You know, I don't ever remember thinking that there was any other option besides college."

Kelly attended Mercer University where she played college basketball and had originally planned to go into physical education. She was disappointed that she did not feel like she was learning anything, so she decided to go into psychology. She considered social work, but her social work advisor encouraged her to go into teaching. She eventually majored in Special Education, Students with Learning Disabilities and minored in psychology and physical education. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree from Mercer University, she attended Georgia College and State University where she obtained her Master's Degree in Special Education and a Specialist Degree in Early Childhood Education. She received Specialist of the Year award at Georgia College and State University

Kelly had always taught in Parks County, but had taught both in the county district and in the city school district. She began her career in a special education

resource setting in first through third grades. Next, she accepted a Pre-K disabilities job that served both city and county schools. She served in that position for seven years. Then, she taught for the county school district for five years at a Pre-K school that was housed at the high school. During that time, she coached the boys' and girls' cross country teams. The Pre-K was moved to another school, so Kelly followed the job and stayed there for three years. Although Kelly had a passion for teaching Pre-K, she was unable to continue to teach Pre-K because the governor froze the raises for those teachers. Afraid that she wouldn't be able to make ends meet, she began to look for other jobs. So, when a special education position became available in the city school district, Kelly went back to co-teach in third, fourth and fifth grades while also coaching track and softball that first year. She taught one year of third grade which was a very small class of about ten students who were ". . . the lowest of the low in the system." About three years ago, Kelly fell ill and lost her position. She got another teaching position at an elementary school in the city school system and ". . . did a little sped [Special Education], and some RTI intervention teacher/kinda coordinator." Then, that school was closed and she was moved to the current school where she was the reading intervention teacher that rotated with two groups. When we met, she was a third-grade ELA and Social Studies teacher. Her tenure at Livingstone was a roller coaster. She stated: "Since I have been back to [Livingston] City, I have not been in the same position for more than one year and this is my seventh year back."

During her 28-year teaching career, Kelly was Teacher of the Year for the school system and grade level chair. She also participated on the school's leadership team and on the leadership program at the system level. Kelly was the co-chair for third grade, but

did not actively participate. In her words, "Well, I'm a co-chair, but really [Meredith] is the more accepted one at the leadership meetings so she goes to the leadership meetings." Kelly expressed some resentment because despite her lengthy service at the school, she does not have a voice and does not feel welcome on the leadership team. However, this has not stopped her from contributing to the overall learning of the students at her school. Driven by a passion to help kids learn to read, she started a successful community reading program the previous year. She described the Community Read program:

> The community reading program targets the lower 25th percentile of learners at the school. We have matched 25 to 30 different members of the community with students at all grade levels. They come in once a week and meet with the child, read with the child for 30 minutes, provide reading on the child's grade level. Sometimes they read the book to the child and follow with an activity. Through this program, community members are able to serve as mentors for the students.

Also through Community Read, Kelly had placed five small libraries in strategic places in the lower socio-economic areas in the community. They restocked the books on a bi-weekly basis. Although the superintendent did not know Kelly had started the community reading program at first, she had been talking with him about options for expanding the program. "He didn't know I had done it for a long time, but once it gained some publicity he was very supportive of it." She was also working on a grant with the literacy team that the superintendent wanted to use to provide a literacy bus to go into the communities to reach children who were not yet in school.

> Our superintendent does want to do a literacy bus and try to hit that birth to five because our kids come in 18 months behind, even if they go to Pre-K, they're still

> 12 months behind. The gap is so . . . I don't know if you know all the research, but they're 30 million words behind. The catching up part is unbelievable, so . . . I'm all about getting a literacy bus and letting it go into these places, but you know, we've also got to train these parents and get these parents to buy into the importance.

Kelly was passionate about growing the Community Read program and excited about the results she saw in the ". . . lower 25th percentile of learners at the school."

I found Kelly to be quite knowledgeable about child development and abreast of literacy research. Kelly was open to talking about her experiences, both positive and negative. Though she shared frustrations about her principal, she also gave her credit for her strengths.

Stuckey

Stuckey was a mother of two small children and a math and science teacher. She was born and raised in Parks County and graduated from West Parks High School. She described herself as someone who ". . . worked hard but did not excel at everything . . . average A/B with a C here and there . . .." Her parents always expected her to get an education. Though she ". . . did not know what degree either of them had, I recall knowing from an earlier point that my parents went to college and it was expected of me to go to college to get a good job." While in high school she was influenced by a social science teacher who demonstrated a passion for her subject. She remembered the teacher fondly:

> She loved what she did and you could tell by her attitude. I remember looking at pictures of things she had done that lined up with what she was teaching. This

made me think she must know a lot about what she is teaching us if she has been to these places met some of these people.

After high school, Stuckey attended college at a Georgia Southern satellite campus in Livingston and considered teaching as a profession. However, after two years of college at the Livingston campus, she transferred to Valdosta State University and registered for the Speech Pathology program. When that did not work out, she returned to Livingston and reassessed her options. She shared, "I knew I wanted a field where I could be in control of what I did on a daily basis. I wanted to help people and I liked working with people." She sat out a semester and decided ". . . teaching would allow [her] the option to lead [her] class and work with groups of students." Stuckey earned her Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education through the Georgia Southern satellite campus in Livingston. She later earned a Master of Arts degree in early childhood education from Walden University and a Specialist in Curriculum and Technology from Georgia College and State University.

Stuckey began her teaching career in Livingston City Schools. She taught a regular education class in third grade for two years before being paired with a special education inclusion teacher. After two years of working with the inclusion teacher, she ". . . took the GACE to become certified to teach SPED." Her experience with English Second Language (ESL) students also inspired her to obtain an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement. She wanted the ESOL endorsement ". . . after having a couple of ESOL students in [her] room and wanting to know how better to serve them." Stuckey had worked at the Livingston elementary school for the last seven of her ten years of teaching experience. Her career experiences included teaching all content

areas in third grade. She was a special education inclusion teacher in math and science in kindergarten and inclusion teacher in math and reading in first grade. Stuckey was a second-grade resource math and reading teacher and a second grade inclusion teacher in all subject areas. In addition, she served as the fourth-grade Response to Intervention (RTI) and reading pullout teacher as well as the fourth grade math and social studies inclusion teacher. At one time, Stuckey was the lead special education teacher tasked to mentor other special education teachers and to evaluate Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) prior to finalization. Stuckey accepted the responsibility to evaluate IEPs and mentor teachers, but became frustrated when the students were not served based on the IEP recommendations.

At the time of the study, Stuckey was back where she started in a third-grade classroom. She quipped, "This is my tenth-year teaching and I find myself back where I started in the third grade classroom. This time I am teaching math and science which I have not done together since my first year." Stuckey was also the ESOL teacher for her school and worked with three students every morning for 45 minutes.

Stuckey was open and friendly during our interviews. She willingly allowed me to follow-up our interviews with a phone call. At times, it was difficult to get her to focus on a topic because she took advantage of the opportunity to vent her frustrations. Stuckey was passionate about teaching the students and frustrated because she believed the special education students were not being adequately served.

Chapter Summary

The participants' profiles provide the reader with an opportunity to become familiar with the participants' backgrounds, their levels of education, years of experience,

and areas of expertise. The use of the participants' own words provides a sense of their consciousness (Seidman, 2013) and an effort to construct and make meaning of their lived experiences. The profiles help to define participants' roles in their organization and establish a basis for how they view their roles.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF THEMES

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the processes used for analyzing the data collected from interviews, documents, and memos. I discuss the codes that were used to fracture data and reconnect them through the discussion of each theme. Each theme is discussed using the participants' own words in order to define their roles in the organization and establish a basis for their perceptions. The findings are connected to the literature review throughout each theme.

Data Analysis

When I first met the participants, and obtained informed consent from them, I explained that the purpose of the study was to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived themselves empowered to do the very best job of which they were capable. Teacher empowerment, as addressed in this study, was not defined for the participants. I used the first interview to establish a baseline of information and build participant profiles. During the second interview, I gathered the participants' perceptions of teacher empowerment, available resources, meaningful information, decision-making, and school organization. Participant comments led to additional questions in the protocol as well as follow up and clarifying questions during interviews. I audio taped each interview and quickly transcribed afterwards. I wrote memos following interviews and after each interaction with transcripts and documents. This process allowed me to remain immersed in the

data. Once I completed the second round of interviews, I began to analyze the data. The first step of analysis involved open coding. In this step, I fractured the data into small units and regrouped them into codes as illustrated in table 2 (Maxwell, 2013).

Table 2

Examples of Initial Codes Used

Initial Codes Used	
Code	Code Description
L	Leadership-teacher leadership, administrative leadership
EF	Efficacy-teacher self-efficacy
E	Empowerment-participants' perceptions of empowerment
SC	School Climate-participants' perceptions of their school climate
SO	School Organization-participants' perceptions of the organization of their school
R	Resources-participants' access to resources
PD	Professional Development-professional development provided by the school
DM	Decision-making-participants' ability to make meaningful decisions about students and instruction
MI	Meaningful Information-participants' access to meaningful information

In the first round of coding, I created a series of matrices and used the sections of the interview protocol as descriptive topics. I created a three-column matrix for each of the descriptive topics. The left-hand column of each matrix contained the questions that fell under that specific topic. In the center column, I copied and pasted each participant's response to the questions. I left the right-hand column open for coding. Table 3 illustrates a sample of the data collected on the topic of school organization. An interview question is located in the left-hand column of the school organizational matrix. The participants' responses are in the center column. The right-hand column contains the provisional codes assigned to the data.

Table 3

Example of School Organizational Matrix

Question	**Participant's Responses**	**Code**
Describe your school's organizational structure in relation to roles and positions.	Patterson: Okay. So, we have, of course, the administration, principal, curriculum instructor. We have an RTI coordinator and she's the academic coach, so she has a lot of has that she's putting on. Said that's pretty much our administrative team who we go to. Our counselor . . . we have a governance council, which I am a member of. We also have leadership teams. So, we also have kind of like a team leader for each grade level, which I am also that, too. So we have our meetings bi-weekly, pretty much. So, I hope that's answering your question. So, we have that. And, I would say that's pretty much the jest of our leadership and the roles are concerned. And, if I need to expand on that I will. Douglas: Well, we don't, like, um, we have a chain of command that we try to follow. If we have an issue, we try to solve it at the grade level. If we can't solve it at the grade level. Then we go to the administration and if we can't get it solved there, we go to, we go to the board office. But, we have a chain of command and we try to follow it as we should. When it comes to roles, when it comes to teachers, we know pretty much what our role is and we try to help each other when possible. We don't want to, like, for instance for me, like . . . I'm the math teacher in the 4th grade and I do try to help them with reading comprehension and all, cause that's my job. But, I can't just go against everything Ms. Crawford has taught them, and everything. Or, try to show them something different cause it would confuse them.	L (administrative) L (teacher) L (administrative) L (teacher)

In a second round of coding, I recoded the responses in each matrix using In Vivo coding to note participant language that referenced the initial codes. For example, sometimes participants referred to resources in terms of tools, funds, money, budget,

technology, and textbooks. When those terms occurred in the responses, they were written in the right-hand column of the matrix, and coded as R for resources. Likewise, when references to resources or other interchangeable terms used by the participants were found in a matrix other than the resource matrix, the reference code was noted in the right-hand column of the matrix. To avoid confusion, the responses were read and analyzed for only one code at a time. This process required multiple readings of the responses. The third coding phase involved connecting the data. I integrated cross-case comparisons to establish relationships between categories and to derive meaning to answer the research questions.

I collected documentation from third and fourth grade PLC meetings, Leadership Team meetings, faculty meetings, and school improvement plans. These documents were coded for instances of school organization (SO), decision-making (DM), resources (R), leadership (L), professional development (PD), and access to meaningful information (MI). Once the documents were coded, I cross-referenced the codes with the codes in the interview matrices.

Themes

There are a number of different orientations that can be used to frame one's understanding of teacher empowerment. One orientation of empowerment refers to the feeling of empowerment and relates to increased feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Another orientation of empowerment describes the act of empowerment performed by an authority figure (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Kanter, 1993) including behaviors such as sharing authority, resources, information, and rewards with employees (Conger &

Kanungo, 1988). Table 4 illustrates the themes derived from the data. There were three conceptual themes: *empowering teachers with resources*, fostering an empowering school climate, and *empowering teachers through professional development*. The *fostering an empowering school climate* theme was divided into two sub themes, *empowering morale* and *structures that empower*. See Appendix C for a table of themes with supporting annotations.

Table 4

Empowerment Themes

Themes and Sub themes
Empowering teachers with resources
Fostering an empowering school climate
Sub theme: Empowering morale
Sub theme: Structures that empower
Empowering teachers through professional development

Empowering teachers with resources

In the *empowering teachers with resources* theme, I focus on the provision of resources as understood from the perspective of the teachers themselves because their concepts of resources may be different from the way resources are understood philosophically by educationists. By focusing on education resources, I am able to highlight ongoing problems and challenges teachers face. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) ascertained that when analyzing their own efficacy in relation to the teaching task and its context, teachers consider the importance of factors that make teaching difficult or act as constraints and weigh them against an assessment of the available resources necessary to

facilitate learning. The participants in this study had various concepts of the resources necessary to facilitate learning.

Common threads in relation to resources included consumable supplies, instructional materials, personnel and technology. Participants in the study alluded to the fact that the school system had not allocated supply money for at least eight years with the exception of once when it was sent from the governor. Teachers had to purchase consumable supplies from their personal funds, from salaries that had been frozen in an effort to pay off a large district debt. The school district adopted the EngagedNY math curriculum during the 2016-17 school term. Textbooks and the accompanying teaching resources had not been purchased for language arts, science, and social studies for at least ten years. Additional personnel were also needed to provide resource classes for special education students, for working with the large number of students on an RTI plan, and to reduce class sizes so that low-performing students could receive more one-on-one attention. The participants also viewed resources in terms of technology. They perceived technology as integral to education and wanted to use it to enhance classroom lessons and to prepare students for the GA Milestones assessments. Regardless of whether they identified resources as consumable supplies, instructional materials, personnel, or technology, all participants in this study alluded to the notion of resources as an impediment to their sense of empowerment.

Patterson believed that ". . . resources are a big thing . . ." and had a broad understanding of various resources and the important roles they perform in education, ". . . whether it is technology, whether it's certain programs, whatever it is, just making sure that we have what we need . . .." She did not feel that teachers were provided the

appropriate resources and that ". . . the majority of the times the tools that [they] get, teachers themselves are the ones that are doing that."

Patterson understood that her school district had funds, but did not understand how they were allocated. She stated: "I hear that there's money. I don't understand who gets it. All I know is that I'm not getting it. And, I'm not talking about with my check. I'm just talking about for resources I need in my room." Patterson did not complain about the fact that her salary was frozen while the district attempted to pay a large debt, but lamented that her school district had the funds to purchase ". . . AIMSweb, Frontrow Education . . . all these different programs that progress monitor . . . but for the classroom teacher, definitely not." Patterson did not feel that her school district empowered her through access to resources, but believed that her principal would ". . . go in her principal's account and she would get it if I could show her how it was going to be beneficial."

Patterson also believed the school was short on human resources for the amount of work they were required to do to remediate students. In fourth grade, they had ". . . 85 kids and 42 of them are RTI . . ." and they ". . . [had] no help with that." Patterson was frustrated knowing that ". . . whatever [they] can get done during the day, that's what [they] can get done to help those students and to remediate." She expressed this as a collective frustration, a perception that her team lacked collective efficacy in relation to RTI remediation.

Patterson was disappointed that the school had inadequate technology to prepare her fourth-grade students for the GA Milestone test. She stated: ". . . these babies didn't have any type of technology whatsoever that they were using until test day came."

Although, the teachers had access to a small lab with twelve computers, according to Patterson, they did not use it because ". . . [they] can't take [their] entire class in there." The school also had a computer lab in the library, but it was on rotation and the students went to that ". . . one week out of the month . . ." to do ". . . reading activities . . ." or ". . . projects . . ." that the teachers sent for them to complete. Patterson, a single woman with no children of her own, was in a financial position to purchase a set of laptops for her classroom. She believed those laptops to be her best teaching resources. Patterson seemed to be self-empowered by her ability to purchase consumables and technology, but dis-empowered by other resources, such as personnel, that she could not purchase.

Douglas believed resources were needed to empower teachers, but was somewhat conflicted in his beliefs about who was responsible for allocating those resources. He believed the local school system was doing the best it could, ". . . based off the deficit that we have in the budget . . . I think they're doing the best that they can . . .." Yet, he also believed the Georgia Department of Education was partly responsible for him being shorthanded with resources. He stated: "That would have to come from the state level, because it doesn't seem like we get the resources that we need . . . every year education has to make budget cuts . . . it seems like education always gets shorthanded." In contrast to his earlier statement about not getting the necessary resources, Douglas also noted that he did not need many supplies because he had ". . . spent the bulk of [his] early years trying to purchase things [himself] . . ." so he would have what he needed if he ever ". . . [had] to leave or change districts." Although Douglas was able to purchase basic supplies, he found funding to be an obstacle in regard to technology, ". . . we want to move towards more technology-based [instruction] and I know, I try to buy as much as I

possibly can, but I know that I can't purchase like laptops and things." At the time of the study, Douglas was using technology ". . . at least twice a week . . ." with his students ". . . to do something fun with the skills . . .," but had to ". . . check out the computers from 21st Century or from the library." He did not ". . . have enough for everybody to have one-to-one . . ." and was not able to keep the laptops all day so he ". . . [could not] use them in all classes." Douglas positioned himself as a positive, resourceful individual, but also wanted to be truthful. Conflicting statements about the need for resources could have been the result of those conflicted desires.

Phyllis was quiet and did not like to complain, but readily admitted that ". . . useful resources . . ." were needed to empower teachers. She moved to fourth grade from first the previous school year and struggled with trying to build grade-level appropriate classroom resources. She stated: "Useful resources. That's my struggle . . . not having the funds to purchase them unless I use my own money and sometimes I'm not able to do that." Phyllis felt that her ability to provide her students with a variety of activities was limited. "Students enjoy a lot of hands-on . . . some struggle with taking notes on a regular basis. So, being able to provide them with the extra hands-on activities alongside the worksheets and notes they have to take would be nice." Since she did not have the additional supplies for the hands-on activities, she ". . . just require[ed] [her] children to write notes for the most part." She also printed ". . . worksheets and stuff from Teachers Pay Teachers . . .," but did not use the textbooks often because they were ". . . old and outdated." Phyllis believed she could reach more students if she could provide them with the hands-on activities they enjoy, but felt disempowered by limited available resources.

Patricia reiterated the need for ". . . more resources . . ." to be empowered. She found herself ". . . spending out of pocket to get what [she] need[ed]." She believed ". . . funds . . ." kept her from doing her very best with her students. As a social studies teacher, Patricia enjoyed having her students do projects to demonstrate an understanding of historical concepts, but her ability to have them do projects was limited because of ". . . not having funds to get the resources that we need." However, she did ". . . use a lot of resources from the internet . . ." to supplement her instruction. "I don't like paper, paper, paper. So, I try to give them multiple ways of completing assignments." Like other participants, she used ". . . Teachers Pay Teachers a lot, but again, [she had] to come out of pocket . . ." for those resources. Patricia considered technology to be her best teaching resource, but defined that resource in terms of the Internet and her promethium board. She preferred using the promethium board over the 11 Chromebooks she had in her class because she had to use the Chromebooks ". . . in groups . . ." or had to ". . . partner them [the students] up . . ." and wished she had more. She recognized that technology was effective at engaging the students, "I find that technology keeps their attention." Patricia considered herself an innovative person, ". . . sometimes you just have to be creative and create to keep from spending so much." She believed ". . . funds . . ." not only affected her abilities as a teacher (self-efficacy), but also that they ". . . factor[ed] in . . ." to the reasons the school was recognized as a low performing school for four consecutive years (collective efficacy).

Meredith also recognized that ". . . resources are big . . ." when it comes to ". . . trying to get the kids ready for the tests . . .," but was constrained by ". . . not having the resources . . ." she needed. She also used Teachers Pay Teachers, an online marketplace

where teachers buy and sell original educational materials, but would ". . . look at it to see if there's something free out there that's good that could hit the standard or an activity that I don't have to create." She shared with me that prior to our interview, the School Improvement Specialist asked in a meeting about which curriculum the language arts teachers were using and that ". . . it was just so funny." She sarcastically used the word "funny." I could tell she meant it was incredulous that the School Improvement Specialist asked the question when she should know the teachers ". . . don't have anything . . ." and that ". . . online resources are everything that [they] use."

Meredith would like to have a ". . . baseline . . ." curriculum because ". . . everybody has their interpretation of a lot of different things, but if you just have that baseline then everybody can pull things that they need." She would like to have textbooks aligned to common core standards. She felt that if all language arts teachers had the same curriculum, collectively they could make a difference in student achievement (collective efficacy). She blamed the school district for inefficient allocation of funds and the reason they did not have a baseline curriculum. She believed it was because ". . . they have purchased so many programs . . . so many programs that [she] can't even keep up with them." To add to the disempowerment caused by not having a baseline curriculum, the district leaders expected teachers to report their usage of all the programs. This was also frustrating because Meredith felt that she could not use all the programs and that requiring the students to remember five or six different passwords was less effective than if she were allowed to ". . . just find something that's good and use it." She also found it frustrating that she had to ". . . come out of [her] pocket to purchase a whole lot of things that people don't even realize . . .," things such

as ". . . pencils, construction paper, copy paper . . . even copy paper because it's been so bad." The school district's financial burden negatively impacted Meredith, who is a single mother with two school age children of her own. Although Meredith pointed out a ". . . big jump . . ." of having gone from ". . . only three Chromebooks [to] eight . . .." I believe the tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement to be an attempt at a positive spin on her access to technology. Like others, she lamented on having to pair students on laptops when she was ". . . in a testing grade." Meredith was frustrated that she was working with limited resources.

Kelly also felt disempowered in terms of a wide range of resource shortages. She acknowledged that the school did not provide her with ". . . materials . . .," but felt that she could ". . . get materials." She complained that she ". . . probably spent $200 in pencils at the first half of the year . . ." and that there was ". . . not one thing in [her] room that was purchased on a school level except coach books . . . from paper to anything."

In addition to material resource shortages, Kelly also had to work short handedly. She was mainly concerned that there was ". . . not enough personnel in [their] situation." She felt that if there was not ". . . enough personnel to be able to implement what [she] need[ed] . . ." then she did not have the ". . . power to do what . . ." she knew was ". . . need[ed] for children to grow." Kelly did not believe the needs of the school's Special Education students were being met, "They're far from being met." Although she was ". . . teaching a regular grade . . .," she had a ". . . large amount sped population, and the co-teacher component, or whatever, [had] almost been non-existent." Kelly was discouraged that she ". . . really [had] kids who need[ed] to be resourced . . .," but didn't have ". . . a resource option." She was also frustrated that she had ". . . thirty kids [in third grade] on

a first-grade level . . .” and that it was “. . . too many to get something done.” Kelly believed she could help students more if her school had “. . . the correct sped interventions going on . . .” and personnel, “. . . and the biggest thing is personnel.” Kelly’s special education certification and many years of experience as a resources teacher made her passionate about serving special education students and disheartened that they were not being served in the ways she thought they should be served because the school could not hire enough personnel. Kelly’s concerns about her class size and the varied ability levels of her students support the research of Gibbs and Jenkins (2013). The researchers reported a significant relationship between class size and teacher and pupil attitudes, and that smaller classes are associated with greater attempts to individualize instruction and a better classroom climate. They also considered that as class sizes increase, the range of abilities and backgrounds in a class become more varied; thus, the effects of increased class size and student numbers are complex and contextual.

Kelly was also frustrated about limited instructional technology. She had three laptops that she had purchased and four that she had gotten from the library. She complained to “. . . two different people . . . from . . . central office . . .” about not having enough technology to prepare her students for GA Milestones and was told “. . . ya’ll have one to one technology over there.” She believed there to be a “. . . huge disconnect . . .” between what people at the district level thought was available for teachers at the school and what they actually had available.

Stuckey felt powerless and disenchanted by the pervasive lack of resources necessary to teach math and science in a regular education third grade class at the time of

the study. Her prior experiences with special education students gave her knowledge of the students' disabilities before having them in her third-grade class. Like Patterson and Kelly, Stuckey was frustrated that the students' needs were not being met because the school was understaffed due to financial issues. She had ". . . six [special education] kids and three of them need[ed] to be resourced." Stuckey had written Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for the students to indicate that they needed to be resourced, but those IEPs had to be amended because ". . . there wasn't enough teachers, or the way they segmented the days didn't work for the times." Not only was Stuckey frustrated by the fact that there were not enough teachers to adequately serve the students, she was also disconcerted that the school had lost many of the paraprofessionals who had worked with the teachers. She felt the teachers ". . . need[ed] that extra support . . ." that a paraprofessional would bring to instruction and believed there was ". . . money that could be cut somewhere so that [the school] could probably supplement ten paras." Though she acknowledged new math manipulatives were purchased with a new math series during the previous year, Stuckey's disheartened outlook was compounded by not having ". . . up to date resources . . ." to use with her science classes or funds to purchase ". . . even a paper clip." She lamented: ". . . other districts . . . smaller than us . . . still somehow manage to get resources, up to date resources, for their teachers and we have nothing." She found it confusing that the teachers ". . . used to have stuff and now [they] don't."

Stuckey's resource woes were further compounded by a lack of instructional technology. She felt constrained without ". . . technology for what they want[ed] [them] to do . . ." and could not ". . . implement it the way they want[ed] . . .." She had twenty-six students and ". . . six computers so [she] brought a lap top from home and had the

ipads trying to make the centers work." When she reported to the principal that her technology was not working, the principal referred her to a teacher down the hall who ". . . always [found] a way to make it work." Stuckey did not feel that she was ". . . in that situation . . ." and could not ". . . go buy . . . seven more for [her] room." Not only did Stuckey feel disempowered through inadequate technology, she felt abandoned by her principal who did not address her concerns.

Kanter's theory of structural empowerment (1993) stressed the importance of providing employees with the resources and training necessary to achieve the organizational goals. Being an empowered teacher means having access to textbooks, the freedom to choose the most appropriate methods and approaches that enable more effective education. According to a recent survey conducted by GfK on behalf of Samsung Business, 90 percent say that modern technology is an important tool in achieving success in educational programs (Empowering teachers to implement technology-driven educational programs, 2015). While many schools struggle with teachers who cannot use technology, participants in this study yearned for technology sufficient for them to teach effectively. To empower teachers through technology, Vatanartiran and Karadeniz (2015) suggested that the technology integration plan should involve creating opportunities for collaboration among teachers through the development of joint units, networks for learning and sharing of good practices, peer coaching and mentoring systems. Based on my findings, I can speculate that the participants in this study did not perceive themselves empowered through access to resources, though the degree to which they believed to be disempowered varied.

Fostering an Empowering School Climate

School climate is a complex concept comprised of organizational elements and psychological perspectives. School climate is contingent on the quality of a school's characteristics such as norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (NSCC, 2017); and on the quality of school life based on the shared perceptions and attitudes of students', parents', and school personnel's experiences reflective of those characteristics (Greunert, 2008; NSCC, 2017). It is one of the many challenging factors principals face in their drive for school improvement. The school principal is largely responsible for establishing a positive school climate, for fostering positive attitudes, and building relationships among the faculty and staff who support effectively working and learning together (Cohen et al., 2009). It is imperative that the school principal foster positive attitudes among the faculty and staff since teachers' attitudes about their careers influence the environment of the school and its students (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Because the school principal is responsible for establishing a positive school climate, which includes the shared perceptions and attitudes of teachers as well as organizational structures, I divided this theme into two sub themes: *empowering morale* and *structures that empower*.

Empowering Morale. Teachers' attitudes have been defined throughout educational literature in terms of morale—the way individuals feel about work and the organization through which they are employed (Bruce, 2003), and teacher efficacy—the belief in one's own ability to accomplish goals (Bandura, 1997). In addition to morale and efficacy, teachers' attitudes have been described in terms of burnout and demoralization (Tsang & Liu, 2016). Tsang and Liu (2016) defined burnout as the

negative emotions people may experience in relation to their jobs. Demoralization, akin to burnout, is the experience of being unable to cope with feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, subject incompetence, and diminished self-esteem (Tsang & Liu, 2016). The distinction between burnout and demoralization lies in the causes for each concept. Burnout is due to psychological factors such as individual personality, mental health and coping strategies; whereas, demoralization is caused by social factors such as the occupational and organizational hierarchy (Santoro, 2013). Santoro (2013) suggested demoralization as an effect of morale. Teacher morale are the feelings or emotions teachers have about their jobs based on the extent to which the school context is viewed as meeting teachers' goals in teaching. Thus, teachers may experience demoralization when they interpret the school context as not favoring them to fulfill their goals in teaching (Santoro, 2013). In this theme, I will reference self-efficacy, collective efficacy, burnout, and demoralization in relation to morale.

Patterson experienced low morale in the past because she had fourth graders who were ". . . supposed to be reading on a Lexile of 740 to 940 . . .," but were ". . . beginning readers, who [were] literally in the negative numbers." She recalled that ". . . 82% . . . [were] reading below level." She ". . . lack[ed] the resources to get them where they [were] supposed to be . . ." and it made things ". . . very, very difficult . . .," causing not only her to ". . . lose morale . . .," but also others ". . . within the school system . . ." who were experiencing the same difficulties. Across the school, in ". . . grades one through four . . . out of the 341 students in those grade levels, 322 of them [were] reading below the Lexile target band for the state." Another contributing factor to low morale in the school was that ". . . within four years . . . [they] had a different principal every single

year." Patterson felt that each year was ". . . just like starting over . . . like being a first-year teacher every year." Each new leader brought ". . . all these different programs [that] were thrown at [them] . . .," but during that time, ". . . no one was giving the teachers truly the support they needed." The instability of constantly changing programs and schedules undermine morale and efficacy (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Patterson believed her current principal ". . . tried to boost the morale . . .," but perceived an increase in morale ". . . because [they] got off the [Focus School] list." Patterson also felt that the district's financial situation was an obstacle to her ability to perform at her best, because it resulted in limited resources. Her concern was not about her personal benefits. She stated: "I could care less about my check. I'm just talking about resources I need in my room." However, with a smile and a chuckle she explained that she tried to ". . . find ways to get around those by whatever means necessary." Patterson purchased laptops for her classroom with her ". . . personal money . . . out of pocket." Patterson also described herself as ". . . not balanced . . ." because she ". . . put more time into school than into family life." Patterson's perceptions of unequal balance may be the result of demoralization because she was not empowered to fulfill her teaching goals during school hours (Santoro, 2013).

Like Patterson, Douglas experienced low morale, but his experiences were from a different perspective. Douglas viewed morale collectively, as a factor of the overall school climate. He believed ". . . the morale was low . . ." because some teachers had been put in teaching positions as ". . . more or less punishments . . ." by previous administrators. He was hesitant, but referred to those teachers' attitudes as ". . . cancerous . . ." and believed they had ". . . affected others at that time." He believed

teachers had reached the point where they ". . . just did the very minimum just to say they did their job and [went] home . . ." and that ". . . nobody wanted to put extra effort into it." His comments support Bruce's (2003) notion that an employee with low morale will participate less and do only what is required. Douglas acknowledged that the school had ". . . always had low performing children . . .," but the ". . . fifth grade at the time was a pretty high group of kids . . ." he argued the staff ". . . could have done a lot more if [they had] been in the right spots." He did not believe low morale was the result of low student performance, but rather that low morale had negatively affected student performance. Teachers' attitudes about their careers either positively or negatively influence the environment of the school and its students (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Individually, Douglas was confident about his teaching ability. He conceded the current administrator had ". . . heard that some of [his] inclusion kids were helping the regular kids . . ." and asked him to move to a regular fourth grade math class. Douglas viewed himself as a creative teacher. Someone who is ". . . creative because there's some games that I do that teachers haven't thought of or seen." He was also admittedly ". . . real competitive." He wanted ". . . to get the kids to where when they leave a better person they were before they came to [him]." He wanted to send ". . . a somewhat decent . . . product over to the middle school . . . so no one [could] say that [he] didn't do [his] job." When Douglas was voted Teacher of the Year, he went to the principal and asked for the number of people who had voted for him. He was proud to say that even though she would not give him a specific number, ". . . it was a lot more of them, 'bout like a landslide." He also believed ". . . the impact that [he could] have on a child's life . . . outside the school seemed to be more fulfilling, more than inside." He explained that a

random woman had stopped him on the street to say, ". . . there's a lot of children around here who like you and talk about you all the time, so just keep doing what you're doing . . ." and that it ". . . was a good feeling when she told [him] that." The logic behind his statement about the fulfilling impact he could have on a child's life, in combination with what I learned about his competitive nature, made me wonder if maybe it was not the impact on the child's life, but rather the recognition he received for his efforts that he found more fulfilling. Whatever his motivation, Douglas was passionate about teaching and was committed to student achievement.

Patricia recognized low morale as a problem throughout the system because she heard ". . . teachers complain district wide." She believed low morale was ". . . because of funds . . .," or a lack of funds. Because of a budget deficit, the district recently closed one of its elementary schools. Many displaced teachers were unhappy about the changes. However, Patricia did not allow it to affect her own morale. She humbly reflected her commitment to help children learn, "It doesn't affect me because no matter where I am, I'm there for the same reason, to make a difference. So, no matter where I'm at, I'm going to do what I'm supposed to do." Patricia was the oldest of the participants, a widow with four children and eight grandchildren. She was a paraprofessional for sixteen years and worked in the school district while earning her degree in Early Childhood Education. It is likely that her personal experiences and the extended path to her own education may have influenced her outlook. Patricia's ". . . motivation . . ." was a ". . . purpose . . . to make sure that every child [was] successful in some way." She reflected that in order for students to succeed it ". . . takes teamwork . . ." and a willingness ". . . to go beyond what is really expected." She advised: "You're going to

have to be willing to put in a little more than what is expected, especially with the students that you serve. Some need more help than others . . . like I said, working as a team is so important." Her reference to ". . . students that you serve . . ." was reflective of the spirit of servitude that she exhibited.

Phyllis did not use the term morale, but remarked that, "It seems like the teaching profession has become like a business for some people, because all the stuff they want you to do." The comment was not made as a complaint, but rather as an observation. However, she missed ". . . just being able to teach the kids and enjoy being with them and them with you and working with you." She sympathized with fellow teachers who were expected to work on ". . . different committees . . . at least two throughout the school year." Although she recognized the extra burden on teachers, she did not outwardly complain about the additional responsibilities of the committees. Rather, she gave this situation a positive spin in which ". . . handing everybody different hats or jobs to do help[ed] the school to run smoothly . . .," because ". . . it's not all on one person, or one team." Phyllis admitted that she ". . . struggle[d] . . ." with not having resources and ". . . not having the funds to purchase them . . ." unless she used her own money which, she regretted not always ". . . able to do that." Phyllis was not someone I would consider a complainer. She described herself as ". . . flexible." She ". . . had to move from school to school with the changes . . ." and felt that she was ". . . just able to change." She was ". . . not bother[ed] . . ." by change. Phyllis's own words best described her commitment. "If teaching is your passion, you'll do what you need to do to get it done."

Meredith's perception of morale was personal and fueled by a deep sense of uncertainty and lack of trust. She lamented, "My salary is frozen and you want me to do

ten more things. So, that doesn't make the morale that great." She attempted to regain a positive outlook by adding, ". . . you know we're here to teach kids, and all of us love teaching kids and that's why we're here . . .," but her thoughts turned back to ". . . still that doesn't make you feel good at all." Meredith did not think her job was stable because she said, ". . . every other month we don't know if we're going to get paid!" She spoke on behalf of other teachers, indicating her perception of overall school morale. "People are worried about that [getting paid]. I think we're just trying to figure out what's next. What's going to happen next?" She also believed that the school had ". . . just had so many changes . . ." that people were not even comfortable in their current positions. She shared that she had been moved around enough that she did not ". . . even worry about it now." Meredith shared: "I don't even let it bother me now. That's why didn't put up a whole lot of stuff on the walls." However, her wistful tone and melancholy facial expression reflected that she was bothered by the thought of moving. At times Meredith seemed conflicted between wanting to project a positive image and wanting to disclose her true feelings. She still had ". . . a love for teaching," but felt that school leaders should do more to encourage and support teachers. "Teachers need more encouragement and support from all levels, but especially at the school level. Building good morale is vital in having happy employees, and I feel that this is an area that can be improved."

Kelly experienced low morale at two levels: personal and professional. At a professional level, she lamented about low student achievement since ". . . almost 60% . . ." of the students in the school were ". . . in the lower 25th percentile . . ." and ". . . about half . . ." were in the ". . . lower 10th percentile." She was concerned about the

unbalanced teacher-student ratio. She had: ". . . 30 kids in [her class] on a first grade level in third grade" and felt that it was ". . . too many to get something done." She had ". . . kids who need[ed] to be resourced . . .," but they did not ". . . have a resource option." She felt that she ". . . wasn't helping them at all . . . none . . ." and that was ". . . the most frustrating thing [she] ever experienced."

On a personal level, Kelly expressed factors affecting her self-efficacy and her perception of collective efficacy. She explained: "I just don't think we do what's best for the kids." Kelly also attributed low morale to a ". . . huge debt that's looming." She perceived that ". . . nobody want[ed] to work [there] for several reasons in the city school system . . ." which made it ". . . hard for them to get good caliber teachers." She believed it was because ". . . they're not getting their step raises and they're not getting local supplements." She blamed the district's poor financial situation for lowering the morale between the schools and local businesses. She believed businesses were ". . . not all about supporting [them] . . ." because they felt the schools were ". . . getting enough of [their] money." The financial situation had ". . . hiked up their taxes beyond belief."

Kelly also blamed the principal the pervasive low morale at the school. She lamented, ". . . last year we lost about ten teachers. She ran off like six of them the first year. This year fifteen are looking for new jobs." She also complained about her administrator's communication style as a contributory factor to the school's increasing teacher attrition. Specifically, she did not think it was tactful for her administrator to send an email five days before school started to let her know she was being moved to third grade. Kelly perceived the use of email rather than a phone call as lack of respect. Kelly did not hold back when sharing her feelings. It was clear that she was an unhappy

teacher, one who felt unappreciated and disrespected by her principal. I will discuss Kelly's relationship with the principal in more detail in the next theme. However, Kelly's feelings of low morale did not affect her passion for teaching and learning, or her commitment to the students. Rather, it bolstered her determination to expand the Community Read program she founded the previous year. Kelly was working with the superintendent to ". . . add a literacy bus . . ." that would operate much like a mobile library moving from one station to another to provide easy access to books.

Stuckey echoed similar sentiments of low teacher morale at her school. She shared that although the overall morale had slightly improved ". . . from where it was . . ." it was ". . . still not good." She also recognized that there were ". . . teachers who want[ed] to leave." Stuckey and other teachers were seriously considering leaving the school for other reasons, specifically low teacher salaries. She complained teachers' salaries had been frozen and ". . . financially, [her] family need[ed] that thousand, two thousand dollars . . ." and she could not ". . . afford to take that much of a cut."

Stuckey expressed dissatisfaction over the disrespectful treatment she received from her administrator. She felt that her expertise in Special Education was lowly regarded. She shared one humiliating incident, prior to the 2017-18 school year, she had been ". . . one of the lead SPED teachers . . ." and had to ". . . look over IEP's prior to being finalized and let the case teacher know the corrections that needed to be made to the IEP." She explained that for two years she had told the administration how some of the special education students should be served and that she ". . . even wrote it down . . ." and provided them with the ". . . paperwork . . ." after the students had even been ". . . retested . . .," but that no one would listen to her. She stated:

> I know these kids. I know what they need and you will not listen to me. I can see what's working and what's not working, what I told you to do and what I told you not to do and you won't listen to me.

Although she had based her recommendations on data, the students were not served as needed. She stated: ". . . everything's based on data. I've looked at the data. I've got two years' worth." Stuckey became animated sharing about one case when she had a ". . . psychology report saying . . . how the student need[ed] to be taught . . .," but had to ". . . meet a parent who want[ed] to know why . . ." the student was ". . . not going on . . ." and why the student was ". . . not learning." She was irritated that leaders ". . . from the top . . ." would tell her she had ". . . the power . . ." and the ". . . control . . ." to serve the students as necessary, but in reality she ". . . told [them] what to do and [they] didn't do it." These events made her feel powerless and incapacitated to make decisions and changes for the special education students. She was not satisfied with the limited authority to make suggestions about how these students were served. She lamented: "There's obviously no power in my words even when you tell me there is." Then, ". . . that's where I feel like I have no power." She described this feeling as taking ". . . all the oxygen out of [her] balloon" and that it ". . . just kinda breaks everything down." She felt the system failed to serve the students well by misplacing them. She described how it made her feel in the following words: "It just rips me up inside."

To add insult to injury, at the time of the study, Stuckey had been moved from being the lead special education teacher to being a third grade inclusion math and social studies teacher, teaching those same students she had recommended for special education resource services during the previous two years. Bogler and Nir (2012) determined

earned status and respect as the most powerful dimension of empowerment that predicts extrinsic job satisfaction. Stuckey's status as the lead special education teacher was taken from her and she felt disrespected because she had limited authority to make suggestions. The majority of Stuckey's frustration was not about her perceptions of lost empowerment, rescinded status, and disrespect. Rather, it stemmed from her passion for the students. Having worked with some of the students two and three years, she felt she had ". . . more invested than just about any other teacher . . ." and was powerless to help them.

Bandura (1997) determined that an individual's self-efficacy, the belief in one's own ability to accomplish goals, affects how much effort the individual is willing to expend, how long they will persist through difficulties, their ability to recover from failures, and the stress they experience while coping with demanding situations. The ability to recover from failure and the stress a person experiences while coping with demanding situations can affect that person's morale, which, in turn can affect how much effort the person is willing to expend and how long he will persist through difficulties. Bruce's (2003) notion that an employee with low morale will participate less and do only what is required is only consistent with Douglas's perception of how teachers reacted when morale was low. As indicated by the teachers in this study, it is possible to experience feelings of low morale, or to feel less than efficacious, but continue to be passionate about teaching children. It is possible to become dis-enchanted with a situation or a leader while remaining committed to and passionate about the overall cause of the organization; which, in this case, is educating children. Though morale was low and the teachers felt less than efficacious, they continued to "expend" effort and "persist

through difficulties." This supports the argument that teachers do not feel equally efficacious for all teaching situations (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Structures that empower. In 2010, the Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia Superintendents Association identified collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, and unity of purpose among the characteristics necessary for building a positive school climate. The school principal is required to provide the faculty and staff with access to the support, resources, and professional development needed to fulfill the school's vision (Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). Further, the school principal must foster positive attitudes and build relationships among the faculty and staff (Cohen et al., 2009; NSCC, 2017). The principal in this study organized structures and processes within the school, which empowered teachers with opportunities for collaborative or shared leadership, teacher collaboration, and professional development.

One of the structures organized by the school principal was the school's governance council. The governance council consisted of three teachers, two administrators, and two community members and served as a forum to empower stakeholders to help the school board make decisions at the school level. The teachers who served on the governance council already held leadership positions in the school, which limited opportunities for other teachers to participate. The leadership team was another structure in the school which provided an opportunity for teacher empowerment. However, with the exception of one member, the leadership team was also limited to teachers already empowered as grade level leaders. On the leadership team, grade level leaders worked with the administrators to develop and implement the School

Improvement Plan as well as any other process deemed necessary. In turn, the grade leaders shared information with their grade level team, led their peers in the completion of tasks, and facilitated various processes. Committees were another way teachers could potentially take advantage of empowering structures. The teachers were required to sign-up for at least two committees at the beginning of the school year, but were given the freedom to choose which committees. Some participants in this study took advantage of structures of the school climate to empower themselves.

Patterson had a rapport with the principal that may have resulted in multiple opportunities for shared leadership. Patterson's duties as a grade level leader and member of the school's leadership team included ". . . RTI . . . scheduling what . . . and when . . ." interventions were carried out, scheduling ". . . field trips . . . any type of parent coordination, communication, conferences . . .," attending the ". . . leadership team meetings with the administration . . .," and passing on to the teachers in her grade level ". . . data or anything that the administration needs for the teachers to do." She was also responsible for ". . . turning in the PLC minutes and things like that . . . getting together and showing data for the fourth grade and sharing it with the teachers . . . kind of setting up action plans for the grade level." Patterson also served on the school governance council, an advisory committee for the charter school district. She was also chosen by the principal to serve on the school's literacy team. "I think our principal picked and chose who she wanted to be on the literacy team . . . maybe just a teacher that she saw fit . . .." Patterson used the plural pronoun "us" when saying her principal "gave us a voice," but not everyone believed they had a voice. She believed her leadership

opportunities empowered her to speak, not only for herself, but also on behalf of her co-workers. She stated:

> . . . I feel like I have a voice and that I can speak, not just for myself as a teacher, but for the entire grade level for what we need, for problems that we may be having, or for things like that. So, I do feel like that is effective.

She also believed her opportunity for leadership on the governance council was effective. "I think that is a very open forum where we have people in the community who are there, too, so everybody gets to voice their opinion and say what their concerns are." In contrast, ". . . when it comes to district decisions and things . . ." she did not feel that their ". . . voices [were] heard all the time," and that their ". . . leadership [was] a bit of a formality more so than reality . . .." Patterson did not feel her leadership was as effective at the district level. Because of the relationship the principal had developed with Patterson, she felt emotionally and socially safe. She felt engaged and respected.

Patterson credited her principal as being "effective" and "tough" and setting ". . . very specific . . . high expectations . . . and procedures at the school." She perceived the principal as a role model who systematically showed the teachers what they had to do ". . . specifically in this area and in this grade level and all the way down the line in order to progress and in order to get off this [Focus School] list." By attributing that to the principal's ". . . very specific . . . high expectations . . . and procedures . . .," Patterson attributed her school's increased student achievement to the principal's leadership skills. The following anecdote captures her view of the principal's supportive nature. ". . . throughout the years that she's been here we just kind of established a rapport to where we know we can get what we need and we just feel more comfortable." However, the

data indicates that not every participant experienced the same level of comfort or had the same rapport with the principal. Patterson believed her current principal fulfilled her need for leadership that she could "depend on" to be "consistent" with specific "procedures" she could "effectively" implement in her classroom.

Patterson was privy to more opportunities for empowerment than any other participant in the study. The principal had selected Patterson for all but one of her formal leadership positions. Principal selection is a construct of formal leadership which reflects the teachers' perceptions that a principal controls the avenues to teacher leadership by appointment (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Thus, principal leadership is a path to teacher leadership only for those given the opportunity (Angelle & Teague, 2014). However, Patterson believed her empowerment was ". . . by [her] own doing." She stated, "If I need something in order to better fulfill my role as an educator and teach my students, I automatically make it happen for myself." She believed her display of ". . . determination . . ." was why the administration gave her ". . . more leadership roles within the school." Certainly, the structures within the school were advantageous for Patterson, providing her with opportunities for empowering leadership roles.

Douglas's competitiveness and confidence may have secured him a place on the school's leadership team, the structure of the school climate he used to empower himself. As a grade-level co-chair, his initial position on the leadership team was to attend meetings in the absence of the grade chair. However, the principal further empowered Douglas by giving him the position of "Data Entry" and role of "Note Keeper." He was the only co-chair for whom a position and role was created. Douglas reciprocated the principal's confidence in him. He credited her with recognizing that they had ". . . some

people with talent . . .” who were “. . . in areas where they [were] not able to use them and that there needed to be some changes.” He said, “. . . one of the first things she did was move people into the position that they needed to be and that has showed results for us.” He believed the principal had empowered the teachers by matching “. . . student weaknesses to teacher strengths . . .” and that she was able to do that “. . . because she knows us.” Douglas used the plural pronoun “us,” suggesting he believed the principal had taken the time to get to know all the teachers and their strengths and weaknesses. Douglas also used the plural “we” to express belief the school’s principal was: “. . . willing to support anything that we come up with as long as we can communicate with them.” However, not all teachers shared this feeling of familiarity or support from the principal. There were also individuals who did not believe they were empowered to teach in their area of strength. His use of plural pronouns could mean that he believed morale had improved and/or that he was unaware of the experiences of his colleagues.

The school principal engaged Douglas as a part of her leadership team. Though he used this structure and his relationship with the principal to empower himself, Douglas had an empowered disposition that came from self-confidence not dependent on the acceptance and encouragement of the administrator. He felt empowered by his own abilities.

Patricia did not care to take advantage of leadership opportunities outside of her classroom. She saw her participation on school committees as “. . . doing [her] part to help the school.” Though she served on the Relay for Life and Christmas Angel committees, she was “. . . not the leader of the committees.” The teachers “. . . have the opportunity to volunteer for those committees that [they] would like to serve on.” She

also saw her work with RTI students as shared leadership. ". . . we don't just focus on the students in our homerooms because some teachers may have way more students than the other, so we pull together . . . and not just focus on our homeroom." Although Patricia's perspective on shared leadership was limited to committee assignments and teamwork, she believed her opportunities for leadership were effective. "I feel like it makes a difference." This supports the notion by Angelle and Teague (2014) that teachers do not always perceive formal leadership roles such as department heads and grade level chairs as extensive indicators of teacher leadership. They also perceived informal teacher roles in collaboration or extra role behaviors—in this case, committee assignments—indicative of teacher leadership. Empowering teachers in informal ways such as teacher-led collaborative teams or shared responsibility within their teams may be more effective in increasing collective efficacy (Angelle & Teague, 2014).

Although Patricia recognized the grade level leader as ". . . more like [their] voice for the fourth grade . . .," she felt that her principal was ". . . open . . ." and if she ". . . [had] any concerns . . ." she could ". . . always email her . . .." Patricia did not ". . . have a problem going to her [the principal] about anything . . ." and appreciated ". . . being given feedback . . ." rather than being told, ". . . this is just how it's going to be done." Patricia shared that she had gone to her principal and requested to pull some of her students from their rotation classes and her planning to ". . . give them extra help during that time . . . more study, remediation, more practice . . ." and the principal had allowed her to do so.

Patricia recognized empowerment as ". . . teamwork within the staff, leaders, and district level . . ." leaders. Though the school structure was organized to empower

teachers as leaders, she was contently empowered as a team member, committee member, and as a classroom teacher. Patricia's priority was to be empowered to make decisions to benefit her students. She believed she had the ability to approach her principal with requests and ideas that would impact her students.

Phyllis had been part of the leadership team the previous year as the grade level leader for first grade. She felt she had been empowered with ". . . the chance to participate . . ." in leadership and had been ". . . provided opportunities to share opinions and ideas." At the time of the study, she was content to ". . . just come to work and do [her] job." Phyllis did not need formal leadership roles to feel empowered. Rather, she felt more empowered by ". . . motivation . . ." and ". . . useful resources . . .." She also found it empowering when she was able to ". . . engage students learning."

Phyllis had a ". . . comfortable . . ." working relationship with her principal because she ". . . knew her before she became [her] administrator." She did not elaborate on her relationship with the administrator except to say that she could ". . . communicate with her." Phyllis's tone and facial expressions were as innocuous as her words. It was difficult to determine if she was a positive thinker, or if she was so reserved as to not reveal much about her feelings. Whatever the case, she appeared content without being a formal teacher leader and comfortable in her relationship with the principal.

A conversation with Meredith about leadership revealed discord. As a grade level leader and a member of the leadership team, Meredith had opportunities for empowerment. During leadership meetings, Meredith was able to voice her opinion ". . . about things going on in the classroom and the curriculum, but not about [PLC] meetings. . ." because the principal would get ". . . a negative notion." This perceived "negative

notion" made her ". . . more reserved and not want to speak up." Meredith, although confident that her voice was heard, was reluctant to exercise her voice in certain situations. She also revealed an element of distrust. Meredith said she needed, ". . . someone that you feel like you can go to and be honest with, and it's not going to come back to bite you," but she did not have that confidence in her principal. In turn, she felt that the principal did not trust the teachers enough to collaborate without documenting their meetings. "I guess they don't trust us enough to just talk about and discuss . . .." Trust is essential for an effective distribution of leadership. Effective distributed leadership depends upon, among other factors, repeated acts of trust such as enabling the increasing distribution of leadership roles, responsibilities and accountabilities (Day & Sammons, 2016).

Although she was complimentary of some of her principal's leadership practices, Meredith saw a need for improvement in the way the principal interacted with the staff and in the way she gave direction. Meredith expressed that she thought her principal supported the staff, but that ". . . there could be some more motivation . . . more encouragement . . . and not so much . . . negative comments." In another statement, she revealed that she did not feel teachers had enough ". . . encouragement and support . . . especially at the school level . . ." and ". . . this [was] an area that [could] be improved." Meredith was empowered as a teacher leader, but did not feel emotionally or socially safe, or even respected enough, to have an open conversation with her principal in front of her peers. Because of the principal's ". . . negative comments . . ." and a fear of her getting ". . . negative notions . . .," Meredith was less engaged with the principal. Meredith's story illustrated that an individual could potentially be in an empowered

position without perceiving one's self completely empowered. Teachers may still feel un-empowered, even demoralized, if they interpret the school context as unfavorable even though school structures have not disempowered them (Santoro, 2013).

Kelly was the third grade level co-chair. If the grade level chair were unable to attend a leadership meeting, she would be responsible for attending the meeting. Kelly did not take advantage of this empowerment opportunity and attend the meetings because the chair was the ". . . more accepted one at the leadership meetings." She also expressed that she believed her voice best left unheard: "If my voice is ever heard, it's going to be no." Teachers will be more likely to voice their perspectives when they feel listened to, supported, and taken seriously by authority figures (Gozali et al., 2017).

Kelly did not withhold her opinion of her principal. "Our administration is not supportive." She felt that the things she did ". . . only made her [the principal] look good." She talked about ". . . working with the bottom 25% . . ." of students through her Community Read program, which she believed resulted in the school ". . . coming off the focus list . . .," but added that it did not seem to matter what she did, it was not the right thing to do. She even pondered whether the principal was ". . . intimidated . . ." by her for some unknown reason. Kelly's comments were not born of arrogance, but rather of exasperation. She indicated that she had never had a ". . . situation where [she] didn't get along with the administration." She did not limit her feeling of frustration to the principal. She stated:

> . . . even like our school improvement person . . . she is the one kind of like the assistant principal . . . spoke to me once the whole last year and this year. She had a five-minute conversation with me last week . . . only time she ever spoke to me.

As an older veteran, Kelly saw herself as someone who could help the principal become ". . . a better administrator . . ." if only she could ". . . have a five-minute talk . . ." with her. She wanted to tell the principal that she had ". . . all these good qualities . . . highly organized . . ." but, that she needed to work on her ". . . people skills." She described the principal as someone who ". . . may jump on you." She shared a situation in which the principal called her out in a faculty meeting for asking a question that was misread as ". . . being disrespectful." Kelly described the incident as ". . . the most unprofessional thing [she had] ever seen." For Kelly, the principal was unapproachable. She warned: ". . . don't you dare ask her a question, I mean, she's liable to snap at you in a minute." She admitted that the principal did ". . . some good things . . ." but saw her as ". . . just a horrible people person." She recognized that it was ". . . not just [Kelly] she's been ugly to . . ." and described her as someone who would ". . . rah, rah, ree . . ." and pretend to encourage people, ". . . but down deep . . ." was ". . . not nice." Kelly perceived a disconnect between her principal's words and actions. Leader hypocrisy and insincerity produce negative emotions toward the leader; leader humility empowers individuals to aspire to reach their fullest potential and enables them to make the incremental improvements toward their goals (Owens & Hekman, 2012, 2013). Kelly's assessment of the principal was: "She doesn't empower you. She knocks you down." Kelly's experiences with the principal affected her morale and her willingness to engage with her. She did not feel empowered by her principal, but she empowered herself to move forward with the Community Read program.

Stuckey had a similar perception about speaking out. She expressed a desire to ". . . feel like there's openness to go in and talk to somebody and voice your opinion

without them fearing that because you don't agree with them . . . that you're not necessarily arguing." Instead, she had learned to ". . . hold [her] tongue . . ." for fear of being ". . . reprimanded." Stuckey understood that there was ". . . that line . . ." between administrators and teachers, but that she should be able to ". . . talk and express a concern and even be passionate . . ." without it being perceived as ". . . aggression." She also revealed that her principal used the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) to intimidate the faculty and staff. "When it's told, TKEY, you snap to attention . . . we're all going to be like Pavlov's dogs." Stuckey said, "If you're not clocked in on time, your TKEYS will be docked . . . you're not in the hallway on time, your TKEYS will be docked." She felt that as an administrator, she would not want that for her staff. "I would want to trust my teachers. I should know the ones that I cannot trust. Yes, I would monitor, guide, do stuff with them, but give them the power to do the right thing on their own." She believed that it ". . . stem[med] back to empowerment . . .," meaning that it was un-empowering to teachers to ". . . constantly come back to the teacher . . ." and tell them ". . . this is on TKEYS, and this is on TKEYS, and this is on TKEYS." In her words, ". . . it kinda wears you down." Worn down is how I would describe Stuckey, though burned out and demoralized may be more suitable references. Stuckey's worn down feelings could be the result of both burnout (Tsang & Liu, 2016) and demoralization (Santoro, 2013).

The school was organized with structures and processes to create a climate of empowerment where teachers had opportunities to share in decision-making and leadership. However, not all teachers experienced empowerment the same, nor did they have the same personal perception of their empowerment. Teachers in the study

exemplified the two theoretical perspectives of empowerment: the act of empowerment by an authority figure; and the feeling of empowerment that relates to increased feelings of self-efficacy and intrinsic task motivation. Some teachers in the study took advantage of every opportunity for teacher leadership and considered themselves empowered, not only as an act performed by the principal, but also intrinsically. Other teachers showed no interest to be empowered beyond the ability to make decisions for their students. Then, there were teachers who perceived their empowerment to have been rescinded. This study data indicates that individuals can be given opportunities for empowerment, but empowerment only occurs if the individuals take advantage of opportunities provided them. In the early research on teacher empowerment, Short (1998) ascertained that one cannot empower individuals, that they can only create environments and opportunities that lead to support empowerment.

Empowering Teachers through Professional Development

The Georgia School Boards Association and Georgia Superintendents Association (2010) identified collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, and unity of purpose among the characteristics necessary for building a positive school climate. The school principal is largely responsible for establishing a school culture in which a clear vision is established and communicated; and, for providing the faculty and staff with access to the support, resources, and professional development needed to fulfill the vision (Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). Jhanke (2010) also identified professional development as effective in developing collective efficacy. Professional development and Professional Learning Communities are two ways to provide teachers with access to

meaningful information such as, changes in subject content, new instructional methods, advances in technology, changed laws and procedures, and student learning needs. A successful leader can organize and unify the school staff; articulate, reinforce, and inspire a shared vision; organize professional committees; facilitate professional learning; and stimulate increased academic achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). The *empowering teachers through professional development* theme focuses on the participants' perceptions of the professional development opportunities provided them and the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) organized by their school's principal. Elements of this theme overlap with the *structures that empower* theme.

Patterson felt comfortable going to her principal and sharing her thoughts and opinions. However, it did not alleviate what she saw as a mandated ineffective use of time. She felt the mandated bi-weekly PLC meetings were ". . . not that effective . . ." when she was ". . . having a busy week." Whereas, she could ". . . see the benefits . . ." of meeting with her team, she did not think meeting bi-weekly to analyze data were helping her to become a better teacher. She stated:

> Do I think that it's helping me to become a better teacher? No. I feel like I can look at the data by myself, interpret what I need to interpret, and when I need to come together with them then we can do that.

She believed they ". . . need[ed] more time as far as teachers, to get together and to plan . . ." but did not need to analyze data at every meeting. Patterson believed that ". . . with already so much stuff going on within [their] planning time [they] barely [got] any time anyway . . ." and that the principal should ". . . just kinda let teachers do that [meet]

themselves instead of forcing their hands." In addition to the PLC meetings, she complained that sometimes the principal would ". . . try to stuff PL sessions in . . ." during the planning time. She continued: "We don't really have a long planning time . . . because we have to take our kids everywhere and they have to be picked up. So, really by the time everything is finished, you may have 20-25 minutes." Patterson said professional development topics were chosen according to teacher responses to a survey, and in her words, ". . . what we say we need." She disagreed when the principal felt they ". . . needed more development when it came to formative assessments and differentiation in the classrooms." Again, she felt the professional development was a waste of her time. "I don't need professional development on differentiation because I'm pretty confident and I do that. I don't need differentiation format. What I need is time." However, she did feel the current principal was doing a better job than previous principals with providing the teachers with training on programs or strategies they were being asked to use, such as ". . . Secret Stories, phonics instruction, and mentoring text." Although she was provided multiple opportunities for collaborative leadership, had a good ". . . rapport . . ." with her principal and was ". . . comfortable . . ." going to her with concerns and issues, she did not feel empowered to make decisions about the use of her planning time, or about what she considered an effective choice of professional development. Though Patterson respected the principal, she did not necessarily agree with all the ". . . procedures . . ." she chose to implement. When teachers and leaders disagree on a particular decision or procedure, respect and trust enable discussions (Cucchiara et al., 2015). It is unclear whether Patterson felt the need to discuss her opinions about the PLC meetings with her principal.

Douglas had a similar view of PLC meetings. He trivialized the mandated bi-weekly meetings as helpful, but merely as ". . . just a little extra duty." He understood ". . . the idea of it . . ." and saw the importance of ". . . teachers talking, about the data, how the students are performing . . . collaborat[ing] with each other . . .," but he felt the documentation was ". . . just one more thing [to do]." He felt he could speak for all teachers, ". . . you know teachers already have a handful of things to do and then you add that on and they just perceive it as one more thing to do." Douglas made multiple statements to describe PLC meetings and documentation as additional unnecessary work. In contrast, he positively reflected on collaboration with other math teachers during school-wide professional development sessions. He appreciated the development of what they referred to as Math Collaboratives in which, ". . . all the math teachers . . . come together and . . . just talk about strategies [they] want to see in each grade level . . . using a common language." He believed those meetings were important so that when students progressed from kindergarten on through the grade levels, they would ". . . hear the same messages . . ." and by the time they got to third grade, begin to ". . . just breeze into . . ." some of the things they had ". . . been hearing for all the years."

Overall, Douglas believed his most useful professional development came from ". . . talking to other teachers . . ." and the ". . . stuff [he] read online." He did not speak about the actual professional development he had received during the previous year when the school implemented Engaged New York Math. Instead, he talked about having to follow the scripted lessons and that it had been ". . . kind of hard . . ." for him. He could see how the script would be ". . . useful . . ." for a ". . . brand-new teacher fresh out of college." However, he had been teaching ". . . fourth-grade math since [his] second year

[there] . . .” and felt he “. . . pretty much [knew] the curriculum . . .” and did not need a script. It was “hard” for Douglas to “adapt” to using the script in part because he felt demoralized. Teachers achieve moral rewards when they develop lessons that connect subject matter with their students (Santoro, 2013). Moral rewards may include attending to students’ academic, psychological and social needs or using their knowledge of a subject to make it appeal to students. When that source of moral reward is supplanted with a scripted curriculum, teachers lose access to an avenue to moral rewards and demoralization occurs (Santoro, 2013). Powell et al. (2017) ascertained that some teachers view scripted programs as antidotes for teacher incompetence. They described this view as a psychological impact that can be the final determinant for some teachers as to whether they want to remain in a field that devalues their knowledge and expertise.

Patricia’s perception of professional development was different from any of the other teachers. She corroborated the other reports that teachers were given “. . . the opportunity to fill out surveys . . .” if they “. . . [felt] that [they] need[ed] more knowledge or learning in certain areas.” She differed in that she considered the TKEYS a part of her professional development. She shared her appreciation of TKES:

> I like TKES because it also helps me monitor myself on growth throughout the year, things I want to change, do differently. Also, toward the end of the year I have the opportunity to look back and say I want to try something else next year, or that didn’t work so good this year.

She sometimes felt the “. . . need to express [her] weaknesses on things [she] would like to change in the upcoming year.” She also appreciated “. . . being given feedback . . .” in “. . . formatives and walk-thrus . . .” because it helped her see where she needed to

improve. Patricia did not feel threatened by the evaluations, but rather saw them as a method for achieving self-awareness and personal professional growth. She used the TKES evaluations to facilitate critical reflection. Tripp and Rich (2012) considered reflection a self-critical, investigative process in which teachers consider the effect of their pedagogical decisions on their situated practice with the aim of improving those practices. Critical reflection itself is considered as a basis for professional learning because it facilitates the learning processes of the everyday classroom experiences (Šaric & Šteh, 2017).

Patricia also "liked" having PLC meetings because they allowed ". . . grade level teams to come together and communicate, collaborate on the student performance, things [they] need[ed] to change . . . one teacher may see things another teacher might not." Patricia ". . . like[d] doing a lot of research for [herself] through Google." She ". . . like[ed] when they [had] people come in from the outside to do maybe some professional learning during [their] planning . . .," and ". . . love[d] to have professional learning if it [was] something new." However, she felt this was taking away time from teaching. She lamented:

> I just hate to . . . I wish it could be done other than during the school day. I hate being out of the classroom to attend professional learning. However, it could be beneficial. I just hate to miss instructional time. 'Cause even though you have a sub, that sub is not going to do the same thing you would do.

This comment was the closet Patricia came to making a complaint during our conversations and even it had a positive connotation. In this situation, Patricia interpreted the school context as not favoring her to fulfill her goals in teaching (Santoro,

2013). Her perception of professional development was positive and introspective, different from that of other teachers. She self-analyzed and used professional development for growth and as an opportunity to determine what she needed to do to offer more of herself to her students, co-workers, and school. Teachers who routinely develop their own knowledge and skills model for students that learning is important and useful. Their ongoing development creates a culture of learning throughout the school and supports efforts to engage students in learning (Mizell, 2010).

Phyllis shared a similar positive perspective of professional development, but was much less introspective. She believed the PLC meetings were "helpful" because the teachers met to ". . . go over the students' Lexile scores and scores like that" to determine their achievement levels. The meetings had them ". . . rolling with RTI . . ." which was ". . . a big deal." Phyllis was ". . . able to pull material for the students based off their scores." She said other than RTI, their professional development topics were in ". . . no certain order . . .," but they were ". . . supposed to use [their] school improvement plan to help guide . . ." them. Phyllis shared an anecdote in which ". . . a lady . . . talked to [them] about classroom management . . ." and that she ". . . enjoyed getting different ideas and things to try." She did not commit to an opinion about professional development other than to say she found them "helpful" or that she "enjoyed" some of the presentations. Phyllis seemed to view professional development as a natural aspect of her career, indicating that she believed in continuous learning. Some educators take the initiative to engage in professional development because they believe it necessary for them to meet goals, including the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to better serve their students (Mizell, 2010).

Meredith reflected that at some point in the past they had ". . . a grant from the State Department . . ." for a program they ". . . were using . . . for reading and ELA." So, during that time, representatives from the company were ". . . coming in and monitoring, making sure that [they] were implementing those strategies." She admitted that they were currently ". . . getting the programs . . ." for RTI, but ". . . were not getting any training." They received emails encouraging them to sign in and create classes, but Meredith ". . . was just lost . . ." because she was ". . . not that kind of person," meaning that she could not figure out how to use the programs without training. More than 90 percent of teachers agree that up-to-date training on using technology in the classroom is important; but, nearly a third are not satisfied with the support received from their schools in integrating technology (Empowering teachers to implement technology-driven educational programs, 2015). Teachers need to be empowered with technical support from their principals. Whereas a school administrator indifferent to problems of teachers regarding technology use is very demotivating for the teachers, an administrator who supports teachers, students and parents on technology use will encourage an empowering climate for successful integration of technology (Vatanartiran & Karadeniz, 2015).

Although Meredith thought her professional development opportunities were ". . . okay," she believed her most useful professional development throughout the school year occurred ". . . when others teach others . . . when peers teach each other." Meredith did not consider the PLC meetings a part of her professional development, but rather as ". . . one more thing to do." She thought the meetings would be effective if they could ". . . actually work on [their] lesson plans instead of someone saying bring this and saying look at this." Although the ". . . template . . ." they were given for documenting PLCs

contained a check box for ". . . lesson plans . . .," Meredith did not feel they ever had the opportunity to work on their plans. The teachers have to provide documentation of their PLC meetings. "I have to type it up. I have to submit it by a certain time. I have to make sure I have documentation of the data." Though Meredith could understand that ". . . everything [was] going to documentation . . .," she saw the documentation as ". . . one more little thing for [them] to have to do instead of working on something that [they] would actually like to work on." It frustrated her that the mandatory meetings kept her from being able to ". . . actually plan activities with [her] colleagues . . ." so she had to stay after school to plan. She stated:

> . . . most times we have to stay after school and plan and then that just becomes later in the day. You're going home later. You can't fix supper for your kids. So, it just becomes a tiring day. And, then you come back to the same thing over and over again.

Meredith did not feel that she was able to use her planning time effectively. Even though they took the time to ". . . look at the data to figure out where [they] need[ed] to go . . ." with their students, she felt they ". . . never [had] the opportunity to get kids where they need[ed] to be." She believed they never had the opportunity to get the students where they needed to be because they were always looking at the data and not planning strategies to get them to advance. She thought ". . . it [could] be overbearing, the things that they want[ed] them to do." Disempowered teachers tend to also feel demoralized because they are unable to refuse the mandated duties they deem irrelevant to teaching students (Ingersoll, 2006). In such cases, the school climate is seen as unsupportive (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Kelly did not feel she had opportunities for professional development that extended beyond the PLC meetings. She felt she had to ". . . dig for it." "I mean, there's nothing . . .." She recalled that once they had ". . . someone come in for the Secret Stories . . .," but ". . . as far as staff development, we're doing our PLCs. But, they're not real big on letting you go anywhere." There had been ". . . several things [she] wanted to do . . . grouping people, mentoring text . . . things like that that were out there." She was frustrated that she did not get to participate because ". . . they don't want you to be gone." Kelly perceived that she did not get to participate in professional development opportunities because "they" did not want teachers away from school, but this may have also been the result of funding issues. The federal government requires that 10% of Title I funds for underperforming schools be allocated to related professional development (Mizell, 2010). Title I funds may be allocated for improvement of instructional services and for instructional staff training; including paying for a consultant, materials, substitute teachers, salaries for coaches and mentors, stipends for teachers' work outside the workday, or supplies and resources for professional learning (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

Kelly did ". . . like . . ." having the PLC meetings because she thought she could ". . . gather a lot of good personal data that [was] applicable to [her], or applicable to [her] grade level." During the previous year, Kelly had been the reading intervention teacher and had reading rotation with two groups. When she met with the rotation teachers, they ". . . pulled in a lot of things that were very interesting." She believed, "That's what's going to push, move your kids forward, if you're talking about data. I think that's good." She believed the PLCs for this year were not as effective, that it was

more ". . . whatever [was] talked about in leadership . . .," or ". . . often redelivery." Kelly did not believe her school did anything to help her with teaching strategies and reaching students who were below level. Like many others, she thought her most useful professional development throughout the school year came from ". . . podcasts, online resources . . . things I dig for myself." Online professional development can be useful for learning content, observing video demonstrations of eff ective practices, and for interacting in real-time discussions with other participants and an expert. However, online professional development generally occurs in isolation rather than as a member of a team where participants benefit from collaborating with peers; which has a greater impact on student learning across the school than does individual learning (Mizell, 2010).

Stuckey was frustrated about the not receiving what she thought of as the ". . . support and training . . ." she needed to be effective. When the school was transitioning, or ". . . becoming STEAM . . .," the teachers were told they would get ". . . STEAM certification . . .," but that training was limited to ". . . a one or two day ½ day training about how [to make] activities." She believed the school was ". . . on the right track . . .," in the beginning but they ". . . do nothing like that now." She described her STEAM lessons as ". . . when you're doing something and you know you're not even doing it right, but you're trying just based off what you know." To add to her frustration, "It's now been three years since we've been STEAM. I have no certification. None." Stuckey had thought ". . . to have STEAM certified somewhere on [her] certificate . . ." would ". . . look good . . ." and make her more marketable if she chose to look for employment in another system. In addition to inadequate STEAM lessons, Stuckey felt unprepared to teach ". . . the new science standards . . .." She received ". . . an email . . ."

on the ". . . Tuesday afternoon before school started . . ." stating that she would not be teaching Reading, which she had ". . . taught for years and years." Not only was Reading what she had been teaching, but she had also ". . . had a couple of days of PLs . . ." on the new Reading program, ". . . Secret Stories." It was ". . . the end of October, or November . . ." before the science teachers were ". . . called in to do a phenomena lesson plan for science to go with the new science standards." Stuckey believed the meeting should have taken place ". . . in August when [she had] been racking [her] brain to figure out why the standards [were] a little different, but not a lot different . . .," and while she was trying to figure out ". . . what [she] need[ed] to pull, what [was] going to be good, and what [was] going to be engaging." She was frustrated because there was ". . . nothing out there . . ." to help her. She felt that ". . . stuff like that doesn't make sense." Stuckey surmised, "If you want to support the teachers, do it in a timely manner. Give us the instruction we need at the beginning of a school year, not half way through it, and then give us the resources we need." Stuckey felt disempowered and demoralized because she interpreted the school context did not favor her to fulfill her goals in teaching the new content (Santoro, 2013). It is the responsibility of the principal to provide the faculty and staff with access to the support, resources, and professional development needed to fulfill the school's vision (Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003).

Stuckey also shared that the teachers ". . . had some PLs on the Harry Wong book because Harry Wong came to [their school system]." She was not happy that they ". . . had like three different PLs during [their] planning period . . ." to ". . . go through the book that he wrote." She felt, ". . . spending three or four planning periods going over a

book [was] probably not the best use of time." She also thought it a waste of time to spend ". . . one or two of those [PLs] looking through the school documents [School Improvement Plan] at the beginning of the year." "I mean, we're not getting anything valuable out of it." Stuckey said the PL topics were supposed to come from a survey conducted at the beginning of the year, but could not ". . . say that exactly lines up 100%." She said she had requested ". . . help on classroom management . . .," but that she had not received professional development on that topic. Stuckey did not feel empowered by the professional development offered at the school. She found her ". . . most useful . . ." professional development to be ". . . the things that [she] may find, or maybe even a colleague may reference to [her] . . ." and would not ". . . always say it [was] from training." Educators often complain that they are required to participate in professional development that does not address the real challenges they face in their schools and classrooms. Much like Stuckey's reaction to the Harry Wong training, educators resent what they perceive as cookie cutter professional development that targets a large numbers of educators and fails to address the learning issues of students in their specific demographics (Mizell, 2010).

Stuckey believed the weekly PLC meetings were ". . . counterproductive . . .." She felt that it was just about going through the motions of creating documentation. "You have to fill out this piece of paper cause it's a document that has to be filled out and it has to be turned in." She felt that it was ". . . not an effective use of teacher time." She believed she made better use of time when she ". . . and the other third grade reading teacher would plan during [their] planning time." During that time, she did not think they needed ". . . to fill out a sheet of paper . . ." to prove they were planning and they ". . .

actually got something done." Stuckey did not believe she should have to fill out a document to prove she was planning. She saw it as ". . . taking something away from the teachers." She felt un-empowered by the documentation, ". . . there again, you've taken the power away from us 'cause you don't trust us, obviously. Because we have to prove everything we do."

The teachers in this study had varying perceptions of the professional development opportunities provided them and of the Professional Learning Communities organized by their school's principal. Although many of the teachers did not perceive their PLCs as effective use of time, they all spoke well of their working relationships with their team members and even referred to peer collaboration as empowering each other to learn new strategies and gather information. All teachers, including those who did not perceive their PLCs as an ineffective use of time, complained that they did not have enough opportunities to collaborate because they lacked the autonomy to make decisions about their planning time. Not only did the teachers believe themselves to be un-empowered without school-led opportunities for professional development and continuous learning, they also believed themselves disempowered to use their planning time to serve their individual professional development and continuous learning interests. All teachers in the study believed their most useful professional development was what they researched and found on their own, not what had been provided for them by their school.

The development of effective professional communities is essential because it has a significant impact on teachers' working relationships, which have a significant effect on student achievement (Louis et al., 2010). As president and CEO of American Board, a

non-profit organization established by the U.S. Department of Education dedicated to building strong communities through preparing, certifying, and supporting teachers, McCollough (2014) outlined a plan for building effective PLCs and school-wide professional development. He recommended that norms established for the operation of effective PLCs focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment through deliberate common planning, identification of best instructional practices, deliberate common assessment, analysis of student work, and planning for remediation as needed. According to the teachers in the study, their PLCs followed those same norms.

Effective school-wide professional development requires school leaders to assess the learning needs of staff and to provide the assistance for growth where needed. McCollough (2014) suggested using student achievement data, instructional observation data, teacher perspectives, and trends from research and literature to determine professional development needs. The principal in this study used data from student achievement scores and benchmarks, instructional observation data from TKES evaluations, teacher perspectives gathered through surveys, and trends from research on RTI approaches, School Improvement Plans, and literacy. A thorough analysis of professional development needs may reveal that needs differ throughout the building, by department, and on an individual level (McCollough, 2014). Thus, differentiated learning can be provided in terms of job embedded learning for individuals and department or school-wide learning to address prevalent instructional issues. Individual teachers in the study received job embedded learning through Math and ELA Collaboratives and coaching for new curricula. School-wide learning addressed classroom management.

McCollough (2014) recommended monitoring both job embedded learning and school-wide learning formats through a "plan, do, check" cycle. The principal conducted bi-monthly leadership team meetings with grade level leaders to "plan" what and how instructional issues were to be addressed during the upcoming PLCs. The grade level leaders led their teams to "do" the PLCs as planned. Finally, the principal used a documentation format that she designed to "check" that the assignments had been carried out as requested. Despite the teachers' perspectives of effectiveness, their PLCs and school-wide professional development follow the outline proposed by McCollough (2014).

Chapter Summary

An overview of the processes used for analyzing the data collected from interviews, documents, and memos should help the reader understand how the data were fractured and reorganized to make meaning of the participants' experiences. The data revealed three conceptual themes: *empowering teachers with resources*, *fostering an empowering school climate*, and *empowering teachers through professional development*. The fostering an empowering school climate theme was divided into two sub themes, *empowering morale* and *structures that empower*. Each theme was discussed using the participants' own words in order to define their roles in the organization and establish a basis for their perceptions. The findings were connected to the literature review throughout each theme.

Chapter VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement published the Turnaround Eligible Schools list comprised of all schools with a three-year CCRPI average below 54.0. The list includes 104 schools from 27 districts, which consist of 66 elementary schools, 28 middle schools, and 7 high schools (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived the school effectively organized to empower them to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. A focus on teachers' perceptions of the leader's empowerment of teachers may provide local and district level leaders at low performing and failing schools with insight about how their organization's performance can be improved. The information gained from this study may also be beneficial for new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers who are seeking to develop professional leadership practices as well as drive overall school improvement and student achievement. Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of low performing and failing schools. Burns (1978) noted, without knowledge and standards, "we cannot make vital distinctions between

types of leaders from rulers, from power wielders, and from despots" (p. 11-12). Louis, Dretzke et al. (2010) argued the need for additional research to examine the specific leadership behaviors most effective on student learning. In addition, they recommended school leader preparation and professional development programs continue to emphasize both emotional and behavioral aspects of leadership. Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of schools (Precey & Entrena, 2011). "Transforming schools is a key objective of governments across the world and so careful thought needs to be given to the ways in which current and future leaders can be prepared and supported to be successful in a constantly changing, increasingly complex world" (Precey & Entrena, 2011, p. 74).

This study was conducted in a historically low-performing Title I elementary school identified by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement as a Priority or Focus school based on three consecutive years of CCRPI data. Third and fourth grade teachers who had at least three completed years of experience at the school or district were recruited for the study. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school?

RQ2: What are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions?

RQ3: How effectively do teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive the school is organized, empowering them to do the very best job of which they are capable?

Data were collected using multiple methods in order to triangulate the findings, to gain information about different aspects of the phenomenon, and to broaden the range of aspects (Maxwell, 2013). A database created to organize and document data included memos, interview transcripts, and documents such as meeting minutes from faculty and PLC meetings. Using Seidman's (2013) three-interview series approach to in-depth interviewing enabled the reconstruction of participants' personal experiences and the meaning they made of those experiences. An interview guide was used to establish the purpose and focus of each interview and to direct data collection during interviews. Participants were asked to read the interview transcripts for member checking (Maxwell, 2013).

The first step of analysis involved open coding. In this step, data were fractured into small units and regrouped into codes (Maxwell, 2013). A three-column matrix aided in the organization of the descriptive topics. During the second round of coding, In Vivo coding was applied to note participant language that referenced the initial codes. The third coding phase involved connecting the data. The integration of cross-case comparisons established relationships between categories and allowed for connections to be made between the research questions and the data collected. These connections resulted in three major conceptual themes and two sub-themes which were discussed in detail in the previous chapter. The following sections include a discussion of the research questions, the study's limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Research Questions: Final Discussions Summary

In this section, the research questions are aligned with a summary of the findings in the themes, sub themes, and conceptual framework. RQ1: What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school? Although the participants had unique background experiences, there were similarities in their backgrounds. They all shared strong influences who were proponents of higher education, either at home or in school. Kelly shared that her mother only had a high school education and her father had been in the Marines and slowly got his accounting degree while trying to raise a family. She shared: "So, it was very important to them that my brother and I get a good education. You know, I don't ever remember thinking that there was any other option besides college." Patterson, whose mother was a high school teacher, described education as being ". . . of the utmost importance" in her home. She said, "I grew up around teachers. My grandmother had three daughters, all of which are teachers. So education was all I knew growing up. I basically grew up in a classroom." Patterson proudly shared that her ". . . aunt was the very first African American librarian hired by Lowndes County Schools." Stuckey recalled that although she did not know what degree either of her parents had, she knew early on that ". . . it was expected of [her] to go to college to get a good job." Meredith was influenced by her grandmother who was a teacher and who ran a daycare after retirement. Patricia recalled that growing up she was academically competitive with others. She said, "In my family education was very important. I can remember being very academically competitive with my siblings, cousins, and friends." Douglas and Phyllis shared strong influences by high school teachers. Douglas had been encouraged

by a teacher to participate in an Early Childhood Education program and ". . . liked what it was all about." Phyllis had been in the Youth Apprenticeship Program in high school through which she began working with younger students. All the participants had achieved advanced degrees. Patricia and Patterson had Masters Degrees. The remaining five participants had Specialist degrees.

Another interesting commonality was, with the exception of one participant, they all grew up in the same county. Five of the seven participants had attended and graduated from the city school district in which they worked. Stuckey graduated from the county district and Kelly from a nearby district. Phyllis spent her first year teaching in a different county, but had since worked in the same district. Kelly had moved back and forth between the county district and city district. Patterson, Douglas, Patricia, Meredith, and Stuckey have only taught in the city district. It is not uncommon for small districts to be staffed by people who are indigenous to the area.

Each of the participants were intrinsically motivated by their impact on the lives of students. Patterson found it rewarding to ". . . impact the lives of children on a daily basis." She stated: ". . . the students I teach deal with serious struggles on a daily basis. So, my goal is to always be a source of stability . . .. When I can create a positive change in a student, that means the world to me." Douglas thought ". . . the impact that you can have on a child's life, whether it's inside or outside the school" was meaningful. Kelly was motivated by ". . . helping people." She shared, "I get my happiness from helping others, whether it's in the classroom or on the field. It fuels me when others reach their goals." For Meredith, "teaching" was her "passion." She ". . . enjoy[ed] seeing students grow at their own pace." Patricia shared the following anecdote:

> Each and every day I strive to give my students the best education possible. I want to see every student become successful and achieve their goals. However, I know that some might not soar as high as I would prefer them to, but just to know that I made a difference at some point in their lives means a lot.

Phyllis, who had no children of her own, saw the importance of being ". . . the mother figure for some of them . . ." and showing that she ". . . care[ed] . . ." and was ". . . concerned. . ." because ". . . they might not receive that at home." Stuckey was rewarded when ". . . students [were] finally able to master a skill, especially when [she could] see it in their face[s] . . ." when they were ". . . able to do it on their own for the first time." She was also rewarded when ". . . a parent thank[ed] [her] for working with their child because they noticed a difference." Bogler and Nir (2012) determined self-efficacy the most influential dimension of empowerment as a predictor of teacher intrinsic job satisfaction. Okeke and Mtyuda (2017) determined that the main sources of teacher job satisfaction were the daily satisfaction that came from working with children, aiding their development, and seeing them actively involved in the society while making a contribution to the welfare of others (p. 61). Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) argued that teachers do not feel equally efficacious for all teaching situations and warned against making efficacy judgements without considering the context. The participants in the study were efficacious in their ability to impact the lives of their students, and in that context, experienced job satisfaction. However, there were other areas of their jobs in which they felt less efficacious, and in some cases, un-empowered to make an impact.

Teacher efficacy—the belief in one's own ability to accomplish goals (Bandura, 1997) can affect morale—the way individuals feel about work and the organization

through which they are employed (Bruce, 2003). All participants in the study experienced low morale, either personally or vicariously through peers. Patterson had experienced low morale in the past because ". . . 82% . . ." of her students were ". . . reading below level . . ." and she ". . . lack[ed] the resources to get them where they [were] supposed to be . . .," causing not only her to ". . . lose morale . . .," but also others ". . . within the school system . . ." who were experiencing the same difficulties. Another contributing factor to low morale in the school was that ". . . within four years . . . [they] had a different principal every single year." Each new leader brought different programs that the teachers were expected to implement, but they were not provided the support they needed. The instability of constantly changing programs and schedules undermine morale and efficacy (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Douglas viewed morale as a factor of the overall school climate. He attributed low morale to teacher placements when some teachers had been put in teaching positions as ". . . more or less punishments . . ." by previous administrators. He referred to those teachers' attitudes as ". . . cancerous . . ." and believed they had ". . . affected others at that time." Unlike Patterson, Douglas did not believe low morale was the result of low student performance, but rather that low morale had negatively affected student performance. Teachers' attitudes about their careers either positively or negatively influence the environment of the school and its students (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Patricia recognized low morale as a problem throughout the system because she heard ". . . teachers complain district wide" and believed low morale was ". . . because of funds . . .," or a lack of funds. Meredith's perception of morale was personal and was fueled by a deep sense of uncertainty and lack of trust. She lamented: "My salary is frozen and you

want me to do ten more things. So, that doesn't make the morale that great." Kelly experienced low morale at two levels: professional and personal. At a professional level, she lamented about low student achievement, the unbalanced teacher-student ratio, and because she had ". . . kids who need[ed] to be resourced . . .," but they didn't ". . . have a resource option." At a personal level, Kelly expressed factors affecting her self-efficacy and her perception of collective efficacy. She explained: "I just don't think we do what's best for the kids." Kelly also attributed low morale to the district's poor financial situation for lowering the morale between the schools and local businesses. Stuckey shared similar sentiments of low teacher morale. She believed that although the overall morale had slightly improved ". . . from where it was . . .," it was ". . . still not good." She also recognized that there were ". . . teachers who want[ed] to leave" the school and seek employment elsewhere. Stuckey also expressed dissatisfaction over the disrespectful treatment she received from her administrator. She felt that her expertise in Special Education was lowly regarded.

The participants in the study were efficacious in their ability to impact the lives of their students, and in that context, experienced job satisfaction. However, their perceptions of morale indicate they did not consider themselves equally efficacious to increase student achievement. Bogler and Nir (2012) determined self-efficacy the most influential dimension of empowerment as a predictor of teacher intrinsic job satisfaction.

RQ2: What are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful

decisions? There are different lenses through which teacher empowerment can be framed. One perspective describes the act of empowerment performed by an authority figure (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; 1995; Kanter, 1993), including behaviors such as sharing authority, resources, information, and rewards with employees. Another perspective refers to the feeling of empowerment and relates to increased feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Teachers' perceptions in regard to the degree they are empowered varies across a spectrum of experiences. This study focused on teachers' perceptions of their empowerment through three dimensions: access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. In the following sections, I discuss the findings in relation to each dimension. Findings from multiple themes aids in discussing this research question: *empowering teachers with resources*, *fostering an empowering climate*, and *empowering teachers through professional development*.

Access to Meaningful Information

The participants in the study were veteran teachers whose teaching experiences ranged from five to twenty-eight years. Experienced teachers face many challenges each year, including changes in subject content, new instructional methods, advances in technology, changed laws and procedures, and student learning needs (Mizell. 2010). Teachers are provided meaningful information to help them face those challenges through professional development and Professional Learning Communities. The access to meaningful information dimension of empowerment aligns with the *empowering teachers through professional development* theme, which focused on the participants'

perceptions of the professional development opportunities provided them and the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) organized by their school's principal. Elements of this theme overlapped with the *structures that empower* theme.

All participants in the study indicated that Professional Development topics were chosen as the result of teacher surveys. Meredith described it as ". . . what teachers wanted." Patterson said professional development topics were chosen by, ". . . what we say we need." The participants listed classroom management and studies based on a book by Harry Wong among the topics of professional development that had been provided in recent years. Douglas, Phyllis and Patricia felt their opportunities for professional development were sufficient. However, not all participants shared that perception.

When the principal decided the teachers ". . . needed more development when it came to formative assessments and differentiation in the classrooms," Patterson felt the professional development was a waste of her time. She stated: "I don't need professional development on differentiation because I'm pretty confident and I do that." Kelly shared that there had been ". . . several things [she] wanted to do . . .," but she missed the opportunities to participate because, in her words, ". . . they're not real big on letting you go anywhere." Stuckey was frustrated that she had not received what she regarded as the ". . . support and training" she needed to effectively integrate STEAM lessons. Stuckey had taught reading ". . . for years" and had been trained on the new reading program, "Secret Stories." Then, she was moved to a third grade science and math classroom. She felt unprepared to teach the new science standards. It was ". . . the end of October, or November" before the science teachers were trained to do a ". . . lesson plan . . . to go

with the new science standards." Although EngagedNY math training that had been offered the previous year, Stuckey did not receive that training because at the time she was teaching a different content area. Stuckey construed, "If you want to support the teachers, do it in a timely manner. Give us the instruction we need at the beginning of a school year, not half way through it, and then give us the resources we need." Meredith complained that the teachers were currently ". . . getting the programs" for RTI, but ". . . were not getting any training." Like many others, she was not satisfied with the support received from the school in integrating technology (Empowering teachers to implement technology-driven educational programs, 2015).

The perceptions on Professional Learning Communities were as varied as those on professional development. Patterson felt the mandated bi-weekly PLC meetings were "not that effective" when she was "having a busy week." Patricia and Kelly "liked" sharing data during PLC meetings and Phyllis found it "helpful." Douglas, Meredith, and Stuckey understood the importance of meeting, but found the meeting documentation to be unnecessary extra duty. Meredith expressed a lack of balance in the goals of their PLC meetings. She talked about taking time to ". . . look at the data to figure out where [they] need[ed] to go . . ." with their students, but complained they ". . . never [had] the opportunity to get kids where they need[ed] to be." She believed they spent all their time looking at the data and talking about it and did not have enough time to plan strategies for student improvement. All the participants appreciated peer collaboration, but preferred being able to choose how and when it occurred. Five of the seven participants were members of either Math or ELA Collaboratives. They seemed to perceive the subject specific collaborative meetings to effectively align teachers' goals.

Educators often complain that they are required to participate in professional development that does not address the actual challenges they face in their schools and classrooms (Mizell, 2010). Professional development topics such as classroom management and studies based on a specific author's book could be perceived as cookie cutter professional development that targets a large number of educators and fails to address the learning issues of students in their specific demographics (Mizell, 2010). In such cases, the participants do not feel empowered through elective professional development that enables them to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges (Mizell, 2010). The participants recalled training on new curricular selections such as EngagedNY Math and Secret Stories. When teachers are empowered with specific training then, as with Kelly and Stuckey, moved to an area where the training is not used, they become disempowered. All of the participants alluded that the most useful professional development they received throughout the year came from things they found on their own from "Google," "Teachers Pay Teachers," and other online sources. On these occasions, the teachers empowered themselves with the information they perceived necessary to reach their teaching goals. Online professional development can provide beneficial resources, but online learning generally occurs in isolation rather than as a member of a team where participants benefit from collaborating with peers; which, in turn, has a greater impact on student learning across the school than does individual learning (Mizell, 2010).

Access to Appropriate Resources

Limited resources were a common challenge faced by the participants. The discussion of this dimension of teachers' perceptions is drawn from the *empowering*

teachers with resources theme. The various concepts of the resources the participants perceived necessary to facilitate learning included consumable supplies, instructional materials, personnel and technology. Participants in the study alluded that the school system had not allocated funds for teachers to purchase supplies for at least eight years with the exception of once when it was sent from the governor. Teachers purchased consumable supplies from their personal funds, from salaries that had been frozen in an effort to pay off a large district debt. Meredith found it frustrating that she had to ". . . come out of [her] pocket to purchase a whole lot of things that people don't even realize . . .," things such as ". . . pencils, construction paper, copy paper . . . even copy paper because it's been so bad." Kelly complained there was ". . . not one thing in [her] room that was purchased on a school level except coach books . . . from paper to anything." Stuckey also lamented about lack of funds to purchase ". . . even a paper clip." She lamented that smaller districts ". . . somehow manage to get resources, up to date resources, for their teachers and [they] have nothing." She found it confusing that the teachers ". . . used to have stuff and now [they] don't."

The problem of shortages was further compounded by the unequal and inequitable distribution of resources in the district. Textbooks and the accompanying teaching resources had not been purchased for language arts, science, and social studies for at least ten years. Patterson did not feel that teachers were provided the appropriate resources and that ". . . the majority of the times the tools that [they] get, teachers themselves are the ones that are doing that." She understood that her school district had funds, but did not understand how they were allocated. She stated: "I hear that there's money. I don't understand who gets it. All I know is that I'm not getting it." Douglas complained: ". . .

it doesn't seem like we get the resources that we need . . . every year education has to make budget cuts. It seems like education always gets shorthanded." He partially blamed the shortage on the Georgia Department of Education. Phyllis had moved to fourth grade from first grade the previous school year and struggled to build grade-level appropriate classroom resources. She admitted, "Useful resources. That's my struggle . . . not having the funds to purchase them unless I use my own money and sometimes I'm not able to do that." Patricia also needed ". . . more resources . . ." and found herself ". . . spending out of pocket to get what [she] need[ed]." She believed ". . . funds . . ." kept her from doing her very best with her students. When asked what curriculum the language arts teachers were using, Meredith explained that they ". . . [did not] have anything . . ." and that ". . . online resources are everything that [they] use." She felt that if all language arts teachers had the same curriculum, collectively they could make a difference in student achievement (collective efficacy).

Participants were handicapped from doing their best by a lack of adequate support personnel needed to provide resource classes for special education students, for working with the large number of students on an RTI plan, and to reduce class sizes so that low-performing students could receive more one-on-one attention. Specifically, Patterson believed the school was short on human resources for the work they were required to do to remediate students. In fourth grade, they had ". . . 85 kids and 42 of them are RTI . . ." and they ". . . [had] no help with that." Kelly was concerned that there was ". . . not enough personnel in [their] situation." She felt that if there was not ". . . enough personnel to be able to implement what [she] need[ed] . . ." then she did not have the ". . . power to do what . . ." she knew was ". . . need[ed] for children to grow." She

was also frustrated that she had ". . . thirty kids [in third grade] on a first-grade level . . ." and that it was ". . . too many to get something done." Stuckey was frustrated by the fact that there were not enough teachers to adequately serve the special education students. She was also disconcerted that the school had lost many of the paraprofessionals who had worked with the teachers. She felt the teachers ". . . need[ed] that extra support . . ." that a paraprofessional would bring to instruction and believed there was ". . . money that could be cut somewhere so that [the school] could probably supplement ten paras." The concerns about class sizes and the varied ability levels of students support the research of Gibbs and Jenkins (2013). The researchers reported a significant relationship between class size and teacher and pupil attitudes, and that smaller classes are associated with greater attempts to individualize instruction and a better classroom climate. They also considered that as class sizes increase, the range of abilities and background in a class become more varied; thus, the effects of increased class size and student numbers are complex and contextual.

Participants in this study viewed technology as integral to education and wanted to use it. They firmly believed that modern technology is vital in achieving success in teaching and learning. However, they were all disillusioned and disempowered by common technology shortages as they tried to do their jobs. Patterson was disappointed that the school had inadequate technology to prepare her fourth-grade students for the GA Milestone test. She complained that her students ". . . didn't have any type of technology whatsoever that they were using until test day came." She was in a unique position to be able to purchase laptops for her class. She believed those laptops to be her best teaching resources. Though Patterson seemed to be self-empowered by her ability to purchase

consumables and technology, she felt dis-empowered by other resources she was unable to purchase for herself. Douglas found funding to be an obstacle in regard to technology. Douglas was using technology ". . . at least twice a week . . ." with computers he checked out from ". . . 21st Century or from the library." He did not ". . . have enough for everybody to have one-to-one . . ." and was not able to keep the laptops all day so he ". . . [could not] use them in all classes." Patricia had eleven Chromebooks in her class, but found it problematic to use them ". . . in groups . . ." or had to ". . . partner them [the students] up . . .." Meredith also lamented on having to pair students on laptops when she was ". . . in a testing grade." Kelly had three laptops that she had purchased and four that she had gotten from the library. When she complained to people at the district office about not having enough technology to prepare her students for GA Milestones, she was told ". . . ya'll have one to one technology over there." She believed there to be a ". . . huge disconnect . . ." between what people at the district level thought was available for teachers at the school and what they actually had available. Stuckey had twenty-six students for whom she tried to make centers work using ". . . six computers . . . a lap top from home . . . and . . . ipads . . .." When she reported to the principal that her technology was not working, the principal referred her to another teacher who ". . . always [found] a way to make it work." Not only did Stuckey feel disempowered through inadequate technology, she felt un-empowered by her principal who did not address her concerns. Teachers need to be empowered with technical support from their principals. A school administrator indifferent to problems of teachers regarding technology use is demotivating for the teachers (Vatanartiran & Karadeniz, 2015).

The participants in this study did not perceive themselves empowered through access to appropriate resources. Kanter's theory of structural empowerment (1993) stressed the importance of providing employees with the resources and training necessary to achieve the organizational goals. The school principal is usually held responsible for providing the faculty and staff with access to the support, resources, and professional development needed to fulfill the school's vision (Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). However, in the case of this school, the district was responsible for the funding issues that affected the teachers' abilities to do the very best job of which they were capable.

Ability to Make Meaningful Decisions

In the early studies on teacher empowerment, Short (1992) identified decision-making as a dimension of teacher empowerment. She related decision-making to the participation of teachers in critical decisions that directly affect their work, increasing their control over the work environment. Short et al. (1994) reiterated that when participants have many opportunities to voice their opinions and believe that their decisions make a difference, and when the problems identified are important to the participants and they have opportunities to solve those problems, then the quality of problem solving increases. Louis et al. (2010) strengthened the concept that, although indirectly related, shared leadership and instructional leadership are important to student achievement because of their strong relationships to the organization of professional communities that provide unity of values and norms, reflective discussions of instruction, and collective responsibility for student learning. Their analysis confirms an indirect impact of shared leadership on student achievement, thus supporting teacher

empowerment through the ability to make meaningful decisions. Angelle and Teague (2014) contended that shared leadership referred to teachers' ability to make meaningful decisions even when they do not hold leadership positions. This dimension of empowerment aligns with the *structures that empower* theme.

Four of the seven participants held shared leadership positions. Patterson and Meredith were grade level leaders. Douglas and Kelly were grade level co-chairs. Patterson and Douglas held additional formal teacher leader positions. Douglas served in the roles of "Data Entry" and "Note Keeper" on the school's leadership team. Patterson was also the leader of the district literacy team and the ELA Collaboratives and served on the leadership team and the school council. Patricia and Phyllis perceived their community work as opportunities for shared leadership. Angelle and Teague (2014) confirmed that teachers do not always perceive formal leadership roles such as department heads and grade level chairs as extensive indicators of teacher leadership. They also perceived informal teacher roles in collaboration or extra role behaviors such as committee assignments indicative of teacher leadership.

It seems reasonable to assume that teachers are not empowered to make decisions if they believe their voices are not heard by their leaders. Teachers will be more likely to voice their perspectives when they feel listened to, supported, and taken seriously by authority figures (Gozali et al., 2017). Four of the seven participants believed they were partially empowered to approach the principal with concerns and suggestions. Patterson used the plural pronoun "us" when saying her principal "gave us a voice," but not everyone believed they had a voice. She believed her leadership opportunities empowered her to speak, not only for herself, but also on behalf of her co-workers. She

stated: ". . . I feel like I have a voice and that I can speak, not just for myself as a teacher, but for the entire grade level . . .." Douglas also used the plural "we" to express belief the school's principal was: ". . . willing to support anything that we come up with as long as we can communicate with them." Patricia did not ". . . have a problem going to her [the principal] about anything . . ." and appreciated ". . . being given feedback . . ." rather than being told, ". . . this is just how it's going to be done." Phyllis felt she could ". . . communicate with her" principal.

Meredith, Kelly, and Stuckey had different perceptions of their roles in decision-making processes. Meredith was able to voice her opinion ". . . about things going on in the classroom and the curriculum, but not about [PLC] meetings . . ." because the principal would get ". . . a negative notion." Kelly did not attend leadership meetings because she perceived the chair was the ". . . more accepted one at the leadership meetings." She believed her voice best left unheard. She stated: "If my voice is ever heard, it's going to be no." Stuckey had learned to ". . . hold [her] tongue . . ." for fear of being ". . . reprimanded." She did not feel that she could ". . . voice [her] opinion without them fearing that because you don't agree with them . . . that you're necessarily arguing." The stories of Meredith and Kelly were in teacher leadership positions, but felt disempowered. Their stories support the research of Santoro (2011) who surmised that teachers may still feel un-empowered, even demoralized, if they interpret the school context as unfavorable even though school structures have not disempowered them (Santoro, 2011).

It is not unusual for some teachers to have open communication with their administrator while others do not. It is interesting that all four fourth grade teachers

reported no problems communicating with their principal and felt comfortable requesting permission to make decisions about teaching and learning, while the three third grade teachers were to different degrees uncomfortable going to the principal and even believed their voices were better left unheard. I also ponder the degree of empowerment individuals truly feel if they must request permission to make decisions about teaching and learning. As indicated, some of the participants were not inclined to make decisions or voice their opinions even when given the opportunity to do so. If the inclination to ask questions, voice opinions, and make decisions is innate, is leadership something that can be taught/developed or is it an inherent trait?

RQ3: How effectively do teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive the school organized, empowering them to do the very best job of which they are capable? This question aligns with the theme, *structures that empower*.

Teachers in the study exemplified the two theoretical perspectives of empowerment: the act of empowerment by an authority figure (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; 1995; Kanter, 1993); and the feeling of empowerment that relates to increased feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In the early research on teacher empowerment, Short (1998) ascertained that one cannot empower individuals, that they can only create environments and opportunities that lead to support empowerment. The research site was organized with structures and processes to create a climate of empowerment where teachers had opportunities to share in decision-making and leadership. However, not all teachers in

the study experienced empowerment the same, nor did they have the same personal perception of their empowerment.

Patterson and Douglas took advantage of every opportunity for teacher leadership. Patterson was the grade level leader, leader of the district literacy team, and the ELA Collaboratives. She also served on the leadership team and the school council. Though the principal had selected Patterson for all but one of her formal leadership positions (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Kanter, 1993), Patterson believed her empowerment was ". . . by [her] own doing" (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) because if she needed anything to ". . . better fulfill [her] role as an educator . . ." (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) she could ". . . automatically make it happen . . .." Principal selection is a construct of formal leadership making principal leadership a path to teacher leadership only for those given the opportunity (Angelle & Teague, 2014). Douglas was also empowered by principal selection. Although his initial position on the leadership team was to attend meetings in the absence of the grade chair, the principal further empowered Douglas by giving him the position of "Data Entry" and role of "Note Keeper." He was the only co-chair for whom a position and role was created. He was also self-empowered. He was motivated to ". . . get the kids to where when they leave a better person they were before they came to [him] . . ." because he wanted to send ". . . a somewhat decent . . . product over to the middle school . . . so no one [could] say that [he] didn't do [his] job."

Patricia and Phyllis showed no interest to be empowered beyond the ability to make decisions for their students. However, they identified their informal teacher roles on school committees as indicative of teacher leadership. Angelle and Teague (2014) suggested empowering teachers in informal ways such as teacher-led collaborative teams

or shared responsibility within their teams may be more effective in increasing collective efficacy.

Meredith, Kelly, and Stuckey shared similar anecdotes of mistrust and disempowerment. Effective distributed leadership depends upon, among other factors, repeated acts of trust such as enabling the increasing distribution of leadership roles, responsibilities and accountabilities (Day & Sammons, 2016). Meredith was in a formal teacher leader position where she felt limited empowerment. She was comfortable voicing her opinion ". . . about things going on in the classroom and the curriculum, but not about [PLC] meetings . . ." because the principal would get ". . . a negative notion." This perceived "negative notion" made her ". . . more reserved and not want to speak up." Meredith did not exercise her voice on occasion because she did not trust that her principal would perceive the message as she intended it. Without the trust of followers, one cannot inspire others to work toward achieving visionary goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2013).

Kelly also experienced feelings of distrust based on interactions with the principal. As the third grade level co-chair, she was responsible for attending the meeting in absence of the grade leader. However, she did not take advantage of this empowerment opportunity and attend the meetings because the chair was the ". . . more accepted one at the leadership meetings." She also expressed that she believed her voice best left unheard. "If my voice is ever heard, it's going to be no." Stuckey had a similar perception about speaking out. She expressed a desire to ". . . feel like there's openness to go in and talk to somebody and voice your opinion without them fearing that because you don't agree with them . . . that you're not necessarily arguing." Instead, she had

learned to ". . . hold [her] tongue . . ." for fear of being ". . . reprimanded." In prior years, Stuckey had been the lead special education teacher responsible for looking over IEPs prior to finalization and advising the case teacher of possible corrections. She recalled advising the administration for two years in a row about how particular students should be served. Her recommendations were "based on data" and a "psychology report," but they were not taken into consideration. Stuckey lamented: "There's obviously no power in my words even when you tell me there is." Eventually, Stuckey was removed from her position as lead special education teacher, leaving her feeling disempowered. The practices and behaviors of the school's leader influences the school's climate and culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004), and teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Jhanke, 2010; Jones & Youngss, 2012; Marston, 2010; Meyer et al., 2009).

Findings from this study indicate that individuals can be given opportunities for empowerment, but empowerment only occurs if the individuals take advantage of opportunities provided them. Based on the results from this study, I can speculate that teachers do not have to serve in formal leadership roles to feel they have opportunities for shared leadership (Angelle & Teague, 2010). In the cases of Kelly and Meredith, they were in teacher leader positions, but did not feel empowered in their roles. This supports Santoro's (2011) theory that teachers may still feel un-empowered, even demoralized, if they interpret the school context as unfavorable even though school structures have not disempowered them.

Implications and Discussion of the Study

This study focused on how seven teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived their ability to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information and appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. Focusing on teachers' perceptions of the leader's empowerment of teachers may provide local and district level leaders at low performing and failing schools with insight about how their organization's performance can be improved. The information gained from this study may also be beneficial for new and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers who are seeking to develop professional leadership practices as well as drive overall school improvement and student achievement.

Leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of low performing and failing schools. Researchers argued the need for additional research to examine the specific leadership behaviors most effective on student learning (Louis et al., 2010). In addition, they recommended school leader preparation and professional development programs continue to emphasize both emotional and behavioral aspects of leadership. Precey and Entrena (2011) contended that leader preparation and professional development are important to the transformation of schools. "Transforming schools is a key objective of governments across the world and so careful thought needs to be given to the ways in which current and future leaders can be prepared and supported to be successful in a constantly changing, increasingly complex world" (Precey & Entrena, 2011, p. 74).

Three major themes were derived from the data in this study: *empowering teachers with resources*, *fostering an empowering climate*, and *empowering teachers through professional development*. Two sub themes were derived from the *fostering an empowering climate* theme: *empowering morale* and *structures that empower*. The narratives of participant profiles and the *empowering morale* sub theme answer the first research question: What are the life and career experiences of selected teachers at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school? The participant profiles and the *empowering morale* theme explored the life and career experiences of teachers in a historically low performing school. The second research question asked what are the teachers' perceptions at an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school in regard to the degree they are empowered to do the very best job of which they are capable through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions? This question was answered by the themes, *empowering teachers with resources* and *empowering teachers through professional development* and the sub theme, *structures that empower*. The *empowering teachers with resources* theme provided insight about the challenges teachers face on a daily basis in regard to resources. The *structures that empower* theme reflected the degree to which teachers perceived themselves empowered to make meaningful decisions through shared leadership opportunities. *Empowering teachers through professional development* describes the teachers' perceptions of their empowerment through access to meaningful information.

Concepts and themes revealed in this study indicate commonalities among teachers in a historically low performing Title I elementary school. New and practicing

principals, district-level leadership, and anyone else seeking to develop professional leadership practices as well as drive overall school improvement and student achievement may look at this study to determine what leadership behaviors yield effective teaching practices. Transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference, such as: associations, concepts, values, feelings, and conditioned responses (Mezirow, 1997; Knowles, Elwood & Swanson, 2015). Individuals' frames of reference encompass cognitive, conative, and emotional components and comprise of habits of mind and points of view. To facilitate transformative learning, learners must become critically aware of the assumptions of themselves and others (Mezirow, 1997; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2015).

The voices of participants in this study confirmed previous studies cited in the literature review (Bogler & Nir, 2012; Day & Sammons, 2016; Gozali et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2006; Powell et al., 2017; Santoro, 2013; Tsang & Liu, 2016; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The overarching implications of this study suggest that a basic interpretive study on the lived and career experiences of teachers in a historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school revealed insights into the emotional, social, and psychological motivators of educators who perceive themselves empowered and of those who perceive themselves disempowered. These findings are beneficial for anyone seeking to determine how to motivate and encourage teachers through effective leadership practices as well as for policy makers seeking to turn around low performing and failing schools. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement continues to revise and develop "turn around" approaches. As outlined in the First Priority Act, the Georgia Department of Education hired a Chief Turnaround Officer who will work with

"turnaround coaches" and with teachers, parents and administrators to improve schools identified as turnaround schools (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions have implications for their support of the turnaround process (Cucchiara et al., 2015).

Limitations of the Study

Participants were purposefully selected in order to achieve "representativeness or typicality" of the individuals who experience some degree of empowerment within the setting (Maxwell, 2013). Purposeful selection also allowed me to select participants who were best able to answer the research questions. The criteria for participant selection included teachers who had at least three completed years of experience at the school or district and who were teaching in grades three and four. The participants included six women and one man whose teaching experiences ranged from five to twenty-eight years. Transferability is a possible limitation of this study. Transferability is the ability to generalize a conclusion within a case, setting, or a group to people, events, times, and settings not directly observed, interviewed, or represented in the data collected through other means (Maxwell, 2013). The limited selection of teachers including only veterans of three or more years who taught in grades three and four increased the risk of limiting the internal transferability of conclusions to other teachers within the setting. External transferability refers to the ability of a study to generalize the conclusions beyond the case, setting, or group to other people, settings, and times (Maxwell, 2013). Because the sample size was limited to one school in one school district, it may not adequately represent broader populations and settings. However, the thick, rich descriptions

provided in the study may allow the findings to be applied to similar cases with comparable demographics and circumstances.

Data were collected over a two-month period. The primary goal of this basic interpretive study was to determine how teachers in a historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived themselves empowered to do the best job of which they were capable. Seidman's three-interview process was used to help participants to reconstruct their personal experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). The first two interviews were conducted face to face in the participants' classrooms. The third interview was conducted over the phone. Another possible limitation of the study is the reluctance of participants to speak freely during interviews. In addition, personal perspectives of observations limit data collection. Potential limitations in qualitative research include distorted responses, incomplete or inaccurate documents, and researcher bias (Patton, 2002). Presuming the participants' responses accurately convey their perceptions, the researcher cannot be responsible for inaccuracies conveyed by participants (Maxwell, 2013). This study is a snap shot of events and people at specific time and place. People change and organizations evolve. There is no guarantee that a replication of this study five years from now would render the same results.

Other possible limitations of the study include researcher bias and reactivity. Maxwell (2013) identified researcher bias and reactivity as major threats to validity. Researcher bias can occur through data selection when the researcher chooses data that fits pre-existing theory, goals, preconceptions, or data that may stand out to the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). Although the interview protocol was designed to answer the research

questions, the participants were welcome to share additional information. Field notes, or working notes as referred to by Seidman (2013), helped track follow-up questions and clarifying questions. Personal experiences and identity are also potential biases. Member checking ensured the data were not misinterpreted due to researcher bias. Subjectivity was addressed through writing memos to reflect thoughts and goals following each interaction with the data (Maxwell, 2013).

Reactivity refers to the influence of the researcher on the setting or participants (Maxwell, 2013). Because eliminating the influence of the researcher is impossible, the goal is to "understand it and use it productively" (p. 125). Reactivity was reduced by avoiding leading questions that may have influenced the participants' responses to interview questions. Refraining from interjecting opinions and sharing personal experiences during conversations with the participants also reduced reactivity.

Recommendations for Future Research

Possible future research opportunities emerged during the progression of data analysis. First, a study with a larger sample would provide a wider range of perceptions to strengthen the findings and conclusions. Next, since the school in the study is a charter school, a comparison of teachers' perceptions of empowerment in a historically low performing charter school to those of teachers in a historically low performing traditional public school could potentially provide insight into how organizational structure affects teacher performance and student achievement. Third, a comparison of teachers' perceptions of empowerment in a historically low performing elementary school to those of teachers in a historically high performing elementary school could potentially provide insight into how organizational structure affects teacher performance and student

achievement. A study using principals as the participants would provide district level leaders and policy makers with information about the effectiveness of district level leaders and the policies they carry out. Dialogues about school policies and professional development suggest a need for future research in order to reach a better understanding of what teachers believe most beneficial to teaching and learning and the effects on student achievement. Additional research is necessary to determine effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) practices and to compare the PLC practices of low performing schools to those of high performing schools.

Final Conclusions

Despite costly and innovative initiatives, Georgia's schools have failed to show significant gains in student achievement. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement published the Turnaround Eligible Schools list comprised of all schools with a three-year CCRPI average below 54.0. The list included 104 schools from 27 districts, which consisted of 66 elementary schools, 28 middle schools, and 7 high schools (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). In order to understand why Georgia's schools are low performing, it is important to engage in critical reflection with teachers and leaders. Leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an impact on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004).

This study examined the experiences seven teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived the school was effectively organized to empower them to do the very best job of which they were capable in regard to the degree they were empowered through access to meaningful information, access to appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions. There are two

perspectives through which individuals view empowerment. One perspective describes the act of empowerment performed by an authority figure (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; 1995; Kanter, 1993) and includes behaviors such as sharing authority, resources, information, and rewards with employees (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The second perspective refers to the feeling of empowerment and relates to increased feelings of self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988) and intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Participants in this study reported emotions of being disempowered when required to participate in professional development that does not address the actual challenges they face in their schools and classrooms (Mizell, 2010). They resented cookie cutter professional development that targets large numbers of educators and fails to address the learning issues of students in their specific demographics and does not consider educators' varying levels of motivation, interest, knowledge, and skill (Mizell, 2010). Participants also revealed that when teachers perceive their schools have not empowered them with the knowledge and skills to reach their teaching goals they will empower themselves the best way they can, usually through online resources. Although online resources are beneficial, they occur in isolation and inhibit teacher collaboration.

Participants believed that limited resources constrained their abilities to do their jobs causing them to feel helpless and disempowered. They identified resources as consumable supplies, instructional materials, personnel and technology. Kanter's (1993) theory of structural empowerment stressed the importance of providing employees with the resources and training necessary to achieve the organizational goals. The school principal is usually held responsible for providing the faculty and staff with access to the support, resources, and professional development needed to fulfill the school's vision

(Louis et al., 2010; Mosley et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2008; Waters et al., 2003). However, in this study, the district was responsible for the funding issues that affected the teachers' abilities to do the very best job of which they were capable.

Angelle and Teague (2014) contended that shared leadership referred to teachers' ability to make meaningful decisions even when they do not hold leadership positions. The researchers suggested that teachers do not always perceive formal leadership roles such as department heads and grade level chairs as extensive indicators of teacher leadership. They perceived informal teacher roles in collaboration or extra role behaviors such as committee assignments indicative of teacher leadership. Shared leadership may take many forms, including grade leaders, members of leadership teams, and committee assignments. Teachers in this study supported the theory of Gozali et al. (2017) that teachers will be more likely to voice their perspectives when they feel listened to, supported, and taken seriously by authority figures.

Although individuals may be given opportunities for empowerment, empowerment only occurs if the individuals take advantage of opportunities provided them. Teachers do not have to serve in formal leadership roles to feel they have opportunities for shared leadership (Angelle & Teague, 2010). I can also speculate that teachers in leader positions may not feel empowered in their roles; which supports Santoro's (2011) theory that teachers may still feel un-empowered, even demoralized, if they interpret the school context as unfavorable even though school structures have not disempowered them.

This study contributes to the body of literature by providing insight on teachers' perceptions to the degree they believe themselves empowered in relation to the provision

of resources, the ability to make meaningful decisions, and access to meaningful information. New and practicing principals, district-level leadership, leader preparation programs, and state policy-makers may use this study to take a holistic look at leadership when seeking to develop professional leadership practices and school improvement plans for student achievement. This study also provides insight that may be used by local and district leaders and teachers to prompt a dialogue about the effectiveness of policies relating to professional development and Professional Learning Communities. For teachers seeking empowerment, this study demonstrates that empowerment begins from within. As with Patterson, teachers can empower themselves to make things happen within their locust of control. Innovative thinkers are recognized and provided opportunities for further empowerment. This researcher recommends that young teachers in this school district find their voices and create ways to self-empower. Teachers cannot be heard if they do not speak, nor can they be empowered by others unless they first take the initiative to empower themselves.

"You cannot empower teachers and students; you can only create environments and opportunities that lead to and support empowerment." Paula Short (1998)

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Appendix A:

IRB Protocol Exemption Report

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants
PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	**03569-2017**	**INVESTIGATOR:**	**Ms. Sherry Beasley**
		SUPERVISING FACULTY:	**Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu**
PROJECT TITLE:	***A Basic Interpretive Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Empowerment.***		

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- Compiled data (emails, email/telephone lists, & transcripts, etc.) must be securely maintained for a minimum of three years and then destroyed.
- As part of the informed consent process – the Research Statement must be read aloud to each participant at the start of the interview. The researcher's voice must be part of the audio tape reading the statement. The transcript must document the reading of the research statement.
- Audio tapes must be deleted/destroyed immediately upon creation of each interview transcript.

☒ ***If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.***

Elizabeth W. Olphie 12/08/2017

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Appendix B:

Informed Consent Form

VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled "A Basic Interpretive Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Empowerment." This research project is being conducted by Sherry Beasley, a student in Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology at Valdosta State University. The researcher has explained to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask the researcher any questions you have to help you understand this project and your possible participation in it. A basic explanation of the research is given below. Please read this carefully and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have. The University asks that you give your signed agreement if you wish to participate in this research project.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this study is to determine how teachers in an identified historically low performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive their ability to do the very best job of which they are capable in regard to the degree they are empowered through access to meaningful information and appropriate resources, and the ability to make meaningful decisions.

Procedures: Data will be collected through memoing, document analysis, and audiotaped and transcribed teacher interviews using Seidman's three-interview model. Documents may include but not be limited to PLC minutes, faculty meeting minutes, and school improvement plans.

Possible Risks or Discomfort: Although there are no known risks associated with these research procedures, it is not always possible to identify all potential risks of participating in a research study. However, the University has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize potential but unknown risks. By agreeing to participate in this research project, you are not waiving any rights that you may have against Valdosta State University for injury resulting from negligence of the University or its researchers.

Potential Benefits: One possible benefit of this study may include a better understanding of teacher perceptions about empowerment and the organizational structure of their school. Another benefit may be that information gained from the study could potentially provide insight about the development of teacher leadership.

Costs and Compensation: "There are no costs to you and there is no compensation (no money, gifts, or services) for your participation in this research project."

Assurance of Confidentiality: Valdosta State University and the researcher will keep your information confidential to the extent allowed by law. Members of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a university committee charged with reviewing research to ensure the rights and welfare of research participants, may be given access to your confidential information.

Participants' identifying information will be protected via a coding system. This system will be kept under locked computer system files accessible only by the researcher. No private information on participants will be requested or recorded. Audio logs will be kept in a secure location by the researcher for a period of three years, at which time they will be destroyed. All information as it relates to participants will be kept confidential and protected from unauthorized access.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you agree now to participate and change your mind later, you are free to leave the study. Your decision not to participate at all or to stop participating at any time in the future will not have any effect on any rights you have or any services you are otherwise entitled to from Valdosta State University.

Information Contacts:
Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Sherry Beasley at 229-315-1458 or slbeasle@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-333-7837 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Agreement to Participate: The research project and my role in it have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, I am indicating that I am 18 years of age or older. I have received a copy of this consent form.

I would like to receive a copy of the results of this study: _____ Yes _____ No

Mailing Address: _____

e-mail Address: _____

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

This research project has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants through the date noted below:

Appendix C:

Themes with Supporting Annotations

Appendix C

Themes with Supporting Annotations

Theme One: ***Empower with Resources***	
Participant	**Supporting Annotations**
Douglas	". . . it doesn't seem like we get the resources that we need." "I know I can't purchase like laptops and things." "Based off the deficit that we have in the budget that we have a think that they're doing the best that they can to make sure that the resources get allocated."
Phyllis	"Useful resources. That's my struggle. Not having the funds to purchase them unless I use my own money and sometimes I'm not able to do that."
Patricia	"More resources. Um, a lot of times I find myself spending out of pocket to get what I need. I do a lot of that. And, not having funds to get the resources that we need." "I haven't received anything in the last three years, so what you get in your classroom is what you buy out of pocket." "More technology. Um, even the funds, just having the funds to get the resources you need. I use Teachers Pay Teachers a lot, but again, you have to come out of pocket. Um, sometimes you just have to be creative and create to keep from spending so much."
Patterson	"I need resources. Resources are a big thing . . . . whether it is technology, whether it's certain programs, whatever it is just making sure that we have what we need. Like all of the laptops in my classroom, I bought them . . . with my personal money. It was out of pocket."
Meredith	"Um, resources are big. You know, trying to get the kids ready for the tests that we have to prepare them for and not having the resources that we need." ". . . we don't even have a baseline. Um, and I mean that's pretty much like a textbook I guess you could say. Our textbooks are old and outdated and we haven't adopted a new one."
Kelly	"I think you also have to have materials that's needed." ". . . we don't have any money. So, every single cent, and probably more, is spent trying to pay off this huge debt that's looming." ". . . large classrooms. Not enough personnel in our situation. Materials. . . I can get materials, but if you don't have enough personnel to be able to implement what you need . . . "
Stuckey	"We don't have, even really, up to date resources." ". . . financially my family needs that thousand, two thousand dollars and I can't afford to take that much of a cut."

Theme Two: ***Fostering an empowering climate*** **Sub theme:** ***Empowering Morale***	
Participant	**Supporting Annotations**
Douglas	". . . we went through like a rough patch where people were put into, I want to say, different positions based off, they were more or less punishments . . " ". . . the morale was low." "I don't want to say that their attitude was cancerous but they did seem to affect others at that time so as not to push the kids as far as they wanted to."
Phyllis	"I'm flexible. It doesn't bother me. I've had to move from school to school with the changes. Then I had to move this year up to a new grade. So, I'm just able to change. It doesn't bother me. If teaching is your passion, you'll do what you need to do to get it done." "Useful resources. That's my struggle. Not having the funds to purchase them unless I use my own money and sometimes I'm not able to do that."
Patricia	". . . hear teachers complain district wide. Not just the school, but district wise, because of funds." "It didn't affect me because no matter where I am, I'm there for the same reason, to make a difference. So, no matter where I'm at, I'm going to do what I'm supposed to do." ". . . motivation, a purpose maybe. To me, it's to make sure that every child is successful in some way." "Teamwork. It takes teamwork. It really does. You've got to be willing to go beyond what is really expected, than your normal duties. You're going to have to be willing to put in a little more than what is expected. Especially with the students that you serve."
Patterson	". . . you lack the resources to get them where they're supposed to be it makes things very, very difficult and what you see is this kind of . . . I'm kind of . . . you lose morale and you start to see that within the school system. We have a great principal, and you know, she came in and she was, you know, high expectations and she's tried to boost the morale and I think we've done better because we got off the list." "You have kids who were coming in, you know, fourth-grade level and they're supposed to be rating on a lexile of 740 to 940, and I have babies who are beginning readers, who are literally in the negative numbers. 82% of the students I have right now are reading below level." "I think during that time that's a lot of what we saw. We went, you know, within, four years, I believe it was, we had a different principle every single year. So, you come in and it's just like starting over. You felt like being a first year teacher every year."
Meredith	". . . it can be overbearing the things that they want you to do. It's good to talk about it, but then that's one more extra thing we have to do."

	". . . someone that you feel like you can go to and be honest with, and it's not going to come back to bite you. . . " "I think there could be some more motivation and not so much, I don't know. What's another word? I don't know how to say it, but more motivation and more encouragement instead of like negative, um negative comments, or whatever." ". . . every other month we don't know for going to get paid!" "I don't think it's stable." "That's why didn't put up a whole lot of stuff on the walls. I mean it looks like a whole lot of stuff now but I said I'm not putting up a lot to have to pack up to leave."
Kelly	"I need to feel like I have power to do, and the resources to do what I know is needed for children to grow." ". . . nobody wants to work here for several reasons in the city school system. It's hard for them to get teachers because you know they're not getting their step raises and they're not getting local supplements and so when you're looking for schools, and now that there are openings then you know it's hard for us to get good caliber teachers." "I just don't think we do what's best for the kids. I don't think our special ed students, their needs are not being met." ". . . we had 30 kids in here on a first grade level . . . "
Stuckey	". . . to constantly come back to the teacher and say, "This is on TKEYS. And, this is on TKEYS. And, this is on TKEYS." I mean, to me, that it kinda wears you down." ". . . the power to kinda teach a lesson and choose and do is kinda taken away by you've got to use this book and this curriculum, that kinda takes some of it out of you." ". . . to feel like there's openness to go in and talk to somebody and voice your opinion without them fearing that because you don't agree with them that you're not necessarily arguing." ". . . if you voiced your opinion, you were reprimanded. And, now with TKEYS it's like that's almost a way to say, to not have to deal with it in a sense."
Sub theme: ***Structures that empower***	
Participant	**Supporting Annotations**
Douglas	". . . she called me and said that she would like for me to, uh, move, uh, into the regular ed position for 4th grade math because she had heard about some of my sped students in 4th grade helping some of the regular ed students in 4th grade math. So she wanted me to transition into that role . . . " ". . . the impact that you can have on a child's life, whether it's inside or outside the school. Cause, uh, to me, outside the school seems to be more, uh, fulfilling more than inside."

	"I went to her and asked for the number of people who voted for me. She wouldn't specifically tell me, but she did say it was a lot more of them, 'bout like a landslide." ". . . one of the first things she said was she wanted was to match student, teacher . . . Wait let me see how she said it . . . student weaknesses to teacher strengths."
Phyllis	" Um, I was part of our, um, leadership team last year so, I've had the chance to participate. They provided opportunities for you to share opinions and ideas." "It seems like the teaching profession has become like a business for some people, because all the stuff they want you to do." "We have different committees that each teacher is required to do at least two throughout the school year. And, so handing everybody different hats or jobs to do helps the school to run smoothly."
Patricia	"I am on committees, but I'm not the leader of the committee. We do have different committees. I'm currently working on the Relay for Life committee. Um, also, the Christmas Angel committee. And, on those committees we have the opportunity to volunteer." " . . . another thing is with RTI. I know with 4th grade, we have a lot of kids receiving RTI . . . So, we try to pitch in and help each other out so it doesn't over work or over whelm the other teacher. So, we work together as a team to get it done."
Patterson	"The governance council, basically, you serve on it for two years. The teachers all vote on who they think would be good representatives for the school." "I feel like I have a voice and that I can speak not just for myself as a teacher but for the entire grade level for what we need, for problems that we may be having, or for things like that so I do feel like that is effective." "I will be honest. Many times I feel like even though we say what we need sometimes it will go in one ear and out the other. So you know sometimes I feel like our leadership is a bit of a formality more so than reality. . . But, I will say on a school level, I feel that our school leadership team is great." ". . . with RTI, I take the lead in that in scheduling what we do and when we do it . . . . field trips, schedule those and follow up with all that kind of stuff, any type of parent coordination, communication, conferences, I schedule those and get that together. I attend the leadership team meetings with the administration, so whatever they tell me to deliver back, I deliver that back, usually that's data or anything that the administration needs for the teachers to do, um, they just tell us on the leadership team and then we, you know, um, pass it down to them, and then, also turning in the PLC minutes and things like that."

Meredith	"The grade level chairs have to participate in the leadership team, which is the group that does the school improvement plan . . . I think mine are. I mean, I go to the leadership meetings so I'm kind of in."
Kelly	"I get an email 5 days before school starts that I'm now a 3rd grade teacher. . . . our administration is not supportive, and I've tried to figure it out, right. Because, the things I do only make her look good. I mean this community reading . . . I'm working with the bottom 25%, we ended up coming off the focus list, that only makes her look good. But, yet, it doesn't matter what I do . . . intimidated by me . . . like, I don't know . . . I have never a situation where I didn't get along with the administration." "Just let me come and have a 5 minute talk with you. I can help you be a better administrator. You've got all these good qualities. . . highly organized . . . " But, you know, she doesn't have people skills. I mean she may jump on you. . . " "It was the most unprofessional thing I've ever seen." ". . . we've lost like. . . last year we lost about 10 teachers. She ran off like 6 of them the first year. This year 15 are looking for new jobs.:" ". . . sometimes she can be, "rah, rah, ree,I've got an open door policy . . . " But, don't you dare ask her a question, I mean, she's liable to snap at you in a minute . . . " ". . . she does some good things. She's just a horrible people person. I don't know how else to put it. I mean it's not just me she's been ugly to. I mean, she'll rah, rah, ree, but down deep, she's not nice." "Noooooo, my voice is not heard.. No, no, no. If my voice is every heard, it's going to be no. That's just the way it is."
Stuckey	"I don't look at the power that should be as power. There's obviously no power in my words even when you tell me there is." "I've for two years told them, I even wrote it down, these kids have got to be divided like this. They were retested and I have the paperwork." ". . . after 2 years of telling you this . . . guess what, I'm now the homeroom teacher in 3rd grade and they're in my homeroom." "I've looked at the data. I've got two years' worth, and I got a psychology report saying this is how this student needs to be taught and when they're not and you meet a parent who wants to know why they're not going on, and why they're not learning . . . "
Theme Three: ***Empowering Teachers through Professional Development***	
Participant	**Supporting Annotations**
Douglas	". . . one of the professional learnings that we had was like, uh, an in-house math collaborative and reading collaborative with, uh, which is all the math teachers we come together and we just talk about strategies that we want to see in each grade level so we using a common language so like when they go from kindergarten to first and first to second so they're

	hearing the same messages. So, by the time they get to third, some of the same things they've been hearing for all the years will be like something." ". . . it seems like it's just a little extra duty. We, as a group, we pretty much, we already, we do meet 'cause we do talk. But, it's like you got to have that documentation piece. So, then it's like, uh, it's just perceived as one more thing to do." ". . . you know teachers already have a handful of things to do and then you add that on and they just perceive it as one more thing to do. " "A lot of stuff I see online and talking to other teachers. That's where I see the most useful things . . . "
Phyllis	"Um, we go over the students lexile scores and scores like that to see where they are and since we're working on RTI at the moment, that's a big deal." "Yes, 'cause it's got us rolling with this RTI and then I'm able to pull material for the students based off their scores and our ELA teacher does a great job getting those scores to us." ". . . some presentations that I've enjoyed. Such as the lady who came and talked to us about classroom management, getting different ideas and things to try."
Patricia	". . . with TKES, at the beginning of the year, if you feel there's a need to express your weaknesses on things you would like to change in the upcoming year. Um, I like TKES because, um, it also helps me monitor myself on growth throughout the year, things I want to change, do differently, um, also toward the end of the year, I have the opportunity to look back and say I want to try something else next year or that didn't work so good this year. So, I sorta like that and with being given feedback in our formatives and dour walk-thrus, it helps me to see where I can improve at." ". . . I like having the PLCs because that allows grade level teams to come together and communicate, collaborate on the student performance, things we need to change, cause whereas one teacher may see things another teacher might not."
Patterson	"Last year our principle felt like we needed more development when it came to formative assessments and differentiation in the classrooms said that's what we focused on in all of our PLCs. She had people who came in from the state and other people who came in with Secret Stories, phonics instruction, mentoring text, you know, all this different stuff that, you know, that's what it's focused on . . . what we say we need and they go out and try to have it for us." ". . . if I'm just speaking honestly, do I think that it's helping me to become a better teacher? No. I feel like I can look at the data by myself interpret what I need to interpret and when I need to come together with them then we can do that." "I feel like with already so much stuff going on within our planning time we barely get any time anyway just kinda let teachers do that themselves instead of forcing their hands."

Meredith	". . . because of RTI that we are getting the programs. But, no we're not getting any training. We get these emails that say please sign in and create your classes and just lost cause I'm not that kind of person." ". . . . one more thing to do. I think it would be, if we could actually come and, like, on our template it says lesson plans. If we could actually work our lesson plans instead of someone saying bring this and saying look at this. I don't know, it's just one more thing to do. I guess they don't trust us enough to just talk about and discuss"
Kelly	". . . once we've had someone come in for the Secret Stories. That's really, I mean as far as staff development, we're doing our PLCs. But, um, they're not real big on letting you go anywhere. I mean, last year there was several things I wanted to do, grouping people, mentoring text, things like that that were out there. You know, they don't want you to be gone." ". . . Podcasts, online resources . . . things I dig for myself."
Stuckey	". . . here's the thing we were told when we were becoming STEAM, we had a one or two day, ½ day training about how you made activities and I . . . you know when you're doing something and you know you're not even doing it right but you're trying just based off what you know?" "Just like the new science standards. I was told the week before school started, not even a week, on a Tuesday what I would be teaching. All summer, I thought Reading. When a [inaudible] helps, somewhat help align stuff. The Tuesday afternoon before school started, I got an email . . . an email . . ." You're not doing math and science." "If you want to support the teachers, do it in a timely manner. Give us the instruction we need, like at the beginning of a school year, not half way through it. And, then give us the resources we need."