The Influence of Organizational Structure on Teacher Empowerment:
A Case Study of a Title I Elementary School

A Dissertation submitted
to the Graduate School
Valdosta State University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in Educational Leadership

in the Department of Curriculum, Leadership, and Technology
of the Dewar College of Education and Human Services
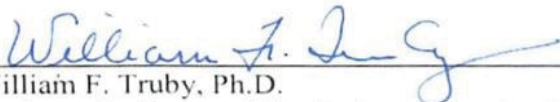

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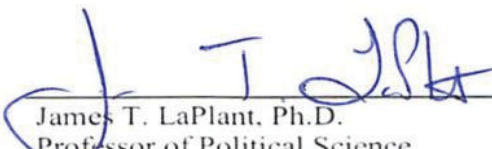Associate Professor of Curriculum & Leadership

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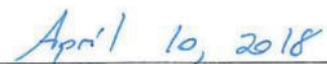Robert B. Green, Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

This instrumental case study design addressed the lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I elementary schools. The purpose was to interview grade level teams and six individual teachers in a low-performing Title I school to determine if and to what degree organizational structure influenced empowerment and the teachers' ability to work effectively together. Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, teachers in a low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school were interviewed regarding the impact of organizational structure on their abilities to work effectively together. The findings in this study may provide national policy makers, federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, and regional and local education units with research and insights on how to better structure Georgia schools. The researcher found that the hierarchal structure created by administrators influenced Title I teachers to work dependently. The structure created by the administrators did not promote interdependency. The imposed structure included mandatory protocols, definitive decision-making, and absolute expectations, and lines of authority, which seemed not to have any effect on bottom-line measures of success. Perhaps there is a disconnect between teachers' definitions and understanding of empowerment and interdependence in this particular school which may apply to other schools as well. In a final analysis, it is the researcher's opinion that in schools where structures impede interdependence there is a likelihood of continued low performance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The dissertation journey has been a tough mountain to climb. The Lord strategically placed individuals in my life for each step of the challenge. I have to thank these individuals for their time, guidance, and inspiration. I am indebted to each member of my Dissertation Committee. I could not have completed the research and analysis without the help and enthusiasm of Dr. Tsemunhu. She kindled a fire and sincere interest in learning from others and pushed me deeper into the research. Dr. Green's natural forces will always bear fruit in my servant hood. I keep his principles in my heart and use them to motivate others. I express my thanks to Dr. Lairsey for supporting me with professional guidance even in times of despair. I would especially like to thank Dr. William (Bill) Truby, the chairman of my committee. He has continually taught me valuable professional and life lessons through witty wordplay and intuitive wisdom. As a supervisor, mentor, and teacher, his professional legacy will always be honored in my commitment to organizational and individual performance. Thank you all for encouraging me to be an interdependent thinker through meaningful interactions with you.

The climb requires certain people, let us just call them saints, who push and encourage you with an enduring love and patience. My family has been this support for me. I would like to thank my parents, who always encouraged me to finish what I start and reach my goals. They taught me I could not do this through my own strength, but through His mighty hand. My family members, my prayer warriors, are the ultimate role models for walking in faith and without fear. My big sister has always shown me what it means to be courageous. She told me, "This is how I fight my battles." My little brother has always had my heart, and has shown me what it means to love unconditionally. To those family members who have since passed away, you are not forgotten and pieces of you have contributed to do this success.

Daniel is my loving husband. He has been my safe place, the one I embraced, during hardships, disappointments, and just simply "heartbreak." He has been left alone many days and nights so I could work on this project. He never complained; instead, he encouraged me more to stay strong on the path. He has helped me more than I could ever give him credit for. God gave me you.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

School reports and reform efforts such as a "Nation at Risk," No Child Left

Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTT), and the reauthorization of Elementary and

Secondary Act (ESEA) have not improved academic achievement for Title I schools

based on accountability measures (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Orange, 2014; Peck &

Reitzug, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2015). Considerable amounts of time and effort were

spent obtaining and allocating valuable resources, monitoring regulations, and evaluating

accountability measures (Georgia Department of Education [GADOE], 2015a; Nowicki,

2016). To increase academic achievement, educational leaders made decisions to

"address standards, assessments, school and district accountability, and special help for

struggling schools and students" (Cardoza, 2016, para. 4). However, these efforts have

not improved academic achievement for students in low-performing Title I schools

(Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Waddell, 2011).

Despite major spending to improve academic achievement, data from the Georgia

Milestones Assessment System End of Grade Test (Georgia Milestones EOG) revealed

students are not meeting state performance targets (Fincher, 2015). Georgia's Title I

program provided more than $450 million a year to assist schools in achieving

proficiency on accountability measures for low-income students (GADOE, 2014, 2015a).

However, GADOE (2015b) reported 73.9% of low-income students scored below the

proficiency level in reading. The results for math indicated 74.1% of students scored below the proficient level. In addition, Beaudette (2016) reported a general downtrend in achievement scores for students in Title I elementary and middle schools. Furthermore, schools with high percentages of low-income students had lower achievement scores (Beaudette, 2016).

<p style="text-align:center;">*Statement of the Problem*</p>

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable resources, lack of improvement continues to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). Jimenez-Castellanos (2010) argued in the last 30 years "educational outcomes still have not improved" (p. 352). Yet evidence suggested mandated responses such as strategic use of funding and higher accountability systems were minimally effective in improving academic achievement of Title I students (Rogers-Chapman, 2015; Waddell, 2011; Zyskowski, Curry, Patrick, & Washington, 1999). The Governor of Georgia, Nathan Deal, emphasized 70% of failing schools served elementary-aged students and claimed the status quo is unacceptable (Office of the Governor, 2017). He remarked, "If this pattern of escalation in the number of failing schools does not change, its devastating effects on our state will grow with each passing school year" (Office of the Governor, 2017, para. 41). The root cause issue is not the lack of resources but perhaps a structural problem impeding on teachers' abilities to meet their full potentials (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Purpose

Teachers, and the organizational structure in which they work, matter in the commitment to improve academic achievement (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Roach & Elliot, 2009). The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers were empowered by a school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. According to Covey (1991), the ability to effectively work together progresses through three levels of maturity, defined as the process leading to effectiveness. Covey (1991, 2003) defined the three levels as dependence, independence, and interdependence. Covey believed interdependent behaviors empower individuals to achieve optimum results towards collective goals (Covey, 1991; Marchese, Bassham, & Ryan, 2002; Perrella, 1999; Reese, 2008). A key component to supporting interdependence among team members and leaders is a helpful school structure (Covey, 1991, 1992; Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

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

RQ2: Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, at which maturity level do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive their empowerment in relation to organizational structure?

RQ3: Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, what perceptions do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school have

regarding the influence of the school's organizational structure and their ability to effectively work together?

Significance of the Study

This study addressed the lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to examine how empowerment, a component of organizational structure, impacts teachers' ability to effectively work together (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Gilbert, Laschinger, & Leiter, 2010; McDermott, Laschinger, & Shamian, 1996; Lorinkova, Pearsall, & Sims, 2013; Short, 1994; Somech, 2005). The findings in this study may inform national policy makers, federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, and regional and local education units on how to better structure schools allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to more effectively work together. The findings of this study may support educational leaders in confronting the challenge of improving academic achievement in low-performing schools.

Conceptual Framework

The premise for conducting this research began with an interest in Stephen Covey's Maturity Continuum (Covey, 1991, 2004, 2008). The Maturity Continuum is a hierarchy of three levels of maturity identified as dependent, independent, and interdependent (Covey, 1991, 2004, 2008; Green, 2000; Marchese et al., 2002). At the lowest level of maturity, dependence is observable when individuals borrow power from authority or position (Covey, 1991, 2003). Independence is recognizable when individuals acquire personal power (Covey, 2003). Dependence and independence are prerequisites to achieving interdependence, the highest level of the hierarchy (Covey,

1991, 2004, 2008). Interdependence is perceived as power dispersed to the individual and team, which is also the governing principle of empowerment (Covey, 1996, 2003).

Covey's Maturity Continuum was used to understand how teachers perceived the organizational structure of a low-performing Title I school (Covey, 1996). Organizational leaders develop empowerment by creating conditions conducive to productive, interdependent relationships (Covey, 1996). Empowered employees expend maximum potential to achieve the mission and goals of their organizations (Covey, 1996). Covey's Maturity Continuum was used to measure the degree of empowerment to determine the influence of the school's organizational structure on teachers' ability to work effectively together.

In addition to perceptions of maturity level, this study also used Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural perspective to frame the conditions of the selected organization. Bolman and Deal (2013) described two basic structural decisions necessary to design an effective organization. These included appropriate division of labor and suitable forms of coordination and control. Making sense of issues related to the organization's structure required describing the conditions, procedures, and responsibilities within the organizational design. According to Bolman and Deal's structural frame (2013), examining an organization requires looking "beyond individuals to examine the social architecture of work" (p. 66). Examining the strengths and limitations of the structural design rather than individual skills and attitudes was meant to identify flaws impeding effective organizational performance (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Summary of Methodology

Qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze data on the degree to which teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested qualitative research design represents people in their lived experiences. Other organization theory and design researchers asserted studying the structural components of an organization requires meaningful interpretation of the context (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Daft, 2013). Case study research methods were employed to understand teachers' perceptions and experiences of their organizational structure within a low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school. The school was selected based on criteria determined by CCRPI scores, school enrollment, and free and reduced lunch rates. A low-performing Title I school was selected because it serves predominantly at-risk students in a continuously struggling organization. This case study utilized multiple data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and documents. Teachers at the selected site were recruited to participate in the study. Data analysis utilized various coding methods to identify patterns and themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Limitations

One of the strengths of qualitative methods is the researcher's ability to maximize understanding by investigating the complexity of a special case (Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2007). However, ethical dilemmas emerge regarding data collection and analysis in qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009). One limitation in this study was that convenience sampling appeared to influence sampling procedures. Data collection took place in the fall of 2017, although achievement data used in site selection were collected from 2012 to

2015. This was due to GADOE's designation of intensive support to schools either labeled Priority School or Focus School in the summer of 2015. The guidelines for purposeful selection included criteria to identify low-performing schools based on three consecutive years of state assessment data. The school selected for this site was currently in year three of the cohort. The school was accessible to the researcher, but this was an unintended factor of the research. Secondly, personal paradigms were a possible source of bias. Patton (2002) indicated distorted responses, incomplete or inaccurate documents, and researcher bias can be limitations that may occur in qualitative. A personal mindset and appreciation for leaders decentralizing power had the potential to inflate structural circumstances of the research site. The researcher spent enough time at the school site to be immersed into the environment, but not so much to influence ongoing social relationships (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, reflective writing of personal reactions allowed for quick recognition of bias and kept the author from wandering from the lived experiences of the participants. Finally, only one Georgia Title I elementary school was investigated in this study, so the findings may not be transferable to other Georgia Title I schools. Additional schools were not included due to the qualitative inquiry of case study research.

Chapter Summary

This study addressed the lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I Elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to determine if and to what degree teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to work effectively together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school. Covey's Maturity Continuum was used as the metric to identify the level of empowerment perceived by

teachers. Bolman and Deal's structural frame was used to understand and describe structural factors associated with teachers' ability to work effectively together. Case study methods were used to guide understanding of the organizational structure and degree of empowerment the selected site. The findings in this study may inform National policy makers, Federal and State Departments of Education, University and College teacher preparation programs, Regional and Local education units on how to better structure Georgia schools, using Covey's Maturity Continuum, allowing teachers in low performing Title I schools to more effectively work together.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms to provide further clarification in this study. In some cases, there are multiple meanings for several terms and scholars in literature define some terms differently. The definitions listed here provide clearer understanding of how the terms are being used in the current study**.**

Achievement Gap. This CCRPI indicator compared scale score achievement data between the school's lowest achieving students and the state's mean score for each subject. This indicator also measured the difference in gap size between the current and previous year for the school's lowest achieving students. The higher Achievement Gap score was used for CCRPI points. For this study, the Achievement Gap indicator was used to define the criterion for site selection (GADOE, 2015b).

Authority. For the purpose of this study, I used this term to mean the degree of power leaders use to coordinate and control organizational groups. It was related to the frequency of and access to meaningful information, resources, and decisions.

Bureaucratic Control. Bureaucratic control was the leadership practice of using standardized rules, standards, and internal procedures to govern behaviors. Leaders have "complete authority over daily operations" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 76).

Centralization. Centralized organizational structures rely on one or two top administrators to decide and enforce organizational decisions, which is how it is applied in this study (Daft, 2013).

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). GADOE used CCRPI to measure school improvement, accountability, and communication programs to promote college and career readiness for all students. For this study, CCRPI reporting was used to select a research site.

Collegial Learning. One may see collegial learning when educators engage in active learning (coaching, modeling, collecting data, examining student work) with other members of the team for the purpose of achieving a shared commitment to student success.

Covey's Maturity Continuum. This theoretical model described three levels of dependency to demonstrate the degree of effective relationships among team members (Covey, 2004). These principles of effectiveness were used in this study to measure the participants' abilities to effectively work together.

Decentralization. Decentralization was a structural option for authority in which the leader gives individuals and teams at lower organizational levels authority in decision-making, roles, and responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Dependence. An individual exhibiting the behavior of dependence has little personal power and relies on the supervisor for resources.

Empowerment. Empowerment was defined as the level of responsibility (job roles) and authority (access to information, resources, and decision-making).

Focus School. A Focus school is a Georgia Title I school ranked in the lowest 10% based on failure to meet state performance targets using Achievement Gap scores (GADOE, 2015c).

Georgia Milestones Assessment System. The End of Grade (EOG) Georgia Milestones was an assessment program measuring performance outlined in the Georgia Standards of Excellence including the areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Students in grades three through eight took the EOG exams and scores were used for an accountability component in teacher and leader evaluations and CCRPI (GADOE, 2015d).

Human Resource Frame. Bolman and Deal (2013) used this perspective to describe the relationships between people and organizations. The major assumptions linked human motivation and work to organizational success.

Independence. An individual exhibiting independent behaviors secured personal power and resources and elected not to work with others (Covey, 2004).

Interdependence. The organization's structure was designed to distribute personal power and resources; in turn, an empowered individual elected to work with other individuals and teams, sharing power and resources (Covey, 2004).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This national assessment measured student achievement in the areas of mathematics, reading, science, writing, the arts, civics, economics, geography, United States history, and technology and engineering. The most common assessments were given in mathematics and reading. A

sample of students across America in grades four, eight, and twelve participated in this assessment. The data were used to compare student achievement across the nation for different demographic groups (Gorman, 2010).

No Child Left Behind Act. This 2001 law required states to adhere to education accountability measures, implement annual standardized assessments, and follow sanctions pertaining to schools failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Organization. Daft (2013) defined organizations as "social entities that are goal-directed, are designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems, and are linked to the external environment" (p. 12). This study used an educational organization for research methods.

Organizational Behavior. Organizational behavior was a framework used to understand an organization by examining the behaviors of individuals and groups in a particular context (Daft 2013; Ott, Parkes, & Simpson, 2008).

Organizational Structure. Bolman and Deal (2013), as applied to this study, defined organizational structure as "the blueprint of roles and relationships set in motion to attain common goals or missions" (p. 98).

Organization Theory. This is the study of the structural and contextual variables of an organization used to develop and manage resources in order to accomplish desired goals (Buenger, Daft, Conlon, & Austin, 1996; Daft, 2013; Greenwood & Miller, 2010).

Professional Development. This consisted of individual or team learning activities increasing teachers' knowledge and skills related to schoolwide initiatives, instructional strategies, management, technology, student services, and other evidence-based curricula to meet the needs of all students.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These are made up of teachers who are organized into a group for the purpose of working interdependently towards the same goal and continuously engaged in collegial learning.

Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). Georgia officials established 16 RESA agencies to serve local districts in their school improvement programs. They were divided into regions across the state. The agency used for this study was in the western area of the state.

Relationships. This study explored relationships among teachers, administration, and the organizational structure in a school setting. The term relationship involved the connections between the participants and the organizational structure of the environment. Individual and team relationships were examined within the organization.

Resources. Resources were financial, human, and physical assets used to accomplish work in school organizations. How leaders managed and provided access to information pertaining to all three categories revealed level of authority.

Responsibility. In this study, responsibility referred to the allocation and execution of job roles and responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Social Capital. This theory referred to the "actual and potential resources embedded in relationships among actors" (Leana & Pil, 2006). There are internal and external levels of social capital. This study explored internal social capital, which refers to the structure and relationships among members within an organization.

Structural Frame. Bolman and Deal (2013) created this term to describe structural aspects influencing organizational performance. The structural frame

perspective included six major assumptions dealing with changing people through appropriate roles and relationships.

Synergy. Synergy is a principle used to describe the product of collective effort among two or more individuals to achieve results greater than individual contributions (Covey, 2011).

Team. A team was a group of teachers working collectively together in a Georgia Title I school. The team was based on grade level, specialization, and/or leadership requirements.

Title I School. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) defined Tile I schools as "schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families" based on census poverty estimates (para. 1).

Trust. As applied to this study, strengthening ties among teachers exhibits trust and is a key factor in improved academic achievement (Bryk, 2010).

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable

resources, lack of improvement continues to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary

schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability

measures. The response to lack of improvement has been focused on independent,

isolated practices related to improving individual teacher quality (Short, 1994).   Reform

initiatives under bureaucratic control of political leaders hinder empowerment of

individuals to take responsibility of improving academic achievement (Bolman & Deal,

2013; Harris, 2013). Thus, lack of improvement persists for Title I elementary schools

(Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Orange, 2014; Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Rogers-Chapman,

2015).

Purpose

Instead of changes pertaining to improving teacher quality, other researchers

suggested structural conditions influence academic achievement (Bolman & Deal, 2013;

Buenger et al., 1996). Results of empirical studies revealed a relationship between

structural conditions facilitating teacher empowerment and improved academic

achievement (Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015; Randeree, 2006). The purpose of this study

was to determine the degree to which teachers are empowered by the school's

organizational structure to effectively work together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I Elementary School using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric.

Research Questions

The purpose of this literature review was to explore topics identified in the following research questions.

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

RQ2: Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, at which maturity level do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive their empowerment in relation to organizational structure?

RQ3: Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, what perceptions do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school have regarding the influence of the school's organizational structure and their ability to effectively work together?

Significance of the Study

This study addressed lack of improvement in Title I schools despite additional funding to provide remedial programs and ensure teacher quality (Hayes, 2013). Insights from the following literature review provided evidence to suggest structural conditions facilitating teacher empowerment may result in improved academic achievement. The findings in this study may inform national policy makers, federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, regional and local education units on how to better structure schools allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to more effectively work together.

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Conceptual Framework

An understanding of the purpose and significance of this study required researching the history of the problem, the structural perspective of organizational theory, teacher empowerment, and Covey's Maturity Continuum. Research inquiries on these topics through Galileo, Google Scholar, and educational listservs identified articles for the review. The topics were grouped according to the outline of the argument, beginning with the problem and followed by major theories contributing to understanding the purpose for research. The review of the literature consists of four sections. The first section used the literature to describe the problem. The second section used teachings of organizational theory to understand the structural perspective. The third section described conditions of empowerment and the influence on organizational effectiveness. The fourth section summarized the use of Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric to identify levels of empowerment.

Summary of Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used for this research study. Understanding structural conditions influencing empowerment and teachers' ability to work effectively together requires a qualitative design. Specifically, case study research methods were used to understand perceptions and lived experiences of teachers in a low-performing Title I elementary school. Participants included teachers from one low-performing Title I school in Georgia defined by College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI), school enrollment, and free and reduced lunch rates. Data collection involved interviewing and observing participants. Data were analyzed using coding cycles to

discover and report themes found among the data. Triangulation supported transferability and reliability of findings.

<p align="center">*Description of the Problem*</p>

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable resources, lack of improvement continued to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). States and local educational agencies received funding through the Title I program to support academic achievement for low-performing schools with minority and economically disadvantaged students (Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). Since 1965, educational leaders used Title I financial support to implement schoolwide programs under government regulations and guidance (USDOE, 2015). Rogers-Chapman (2015) stated the Title I program "has provided resources serving low-income and low-performing students in an effort to improve school performance" (p. 476).

In 2013, data collected from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed only 39% of fourth grade students and 29% of eighth grade students scored at or above proficient levels in mathematics (NAEP, 2014). English Language Arts (ELA) scores revealed 34% of fourth grade students and 32% of eighth grade students scored at or above proficient levels (NAEP, 2014). Furthermore, a recent review of the Title I program based on NAEP accountability measures offered little evidence the Title I program "has improved the academic achievement of disadvantaged students nationwide" (Sousa & Armor, 2016). Sousa and Armor (2016) used longitudinal NAEP data from 1990 to 2013 to assess Title I effectiveness. The authors found some increases

in student achievement occurred during the NCLB time period but found a constant achievement gap in reading and math between poverty and non-poverty students (Sousa & Armor, 2016). Additional studies further illustrated lack of improved academic achievement despite implementation of policies and practices with additional resources and support (Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2015).

In 2009, the United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2012) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) and offered chronically low-performing schools an additional $3.5 billion dollars in funding through Flexibility Waivers and School Improvement Grants (SIGs). However, researchers were skeptical of the usefulness of SIGs due to lack of empirical evidence to support improvement of academic achievement (Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Waddell, 2011). ESEA was reauthorized in 2015 and dubbed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which now provides greater flexibility to local school districts and eliminates the SIG program. However, researchers agreed little improvement of Title I schools has occurred despite years of reform policies with increased funding to support academic achievement (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015).

Since the inception of school report and reform efforts through A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTT), and the reauthorization of ESEA, academic achievement in the state of Georgia had not improved. Recent NAEP scores showed 33% of fourth grade students scored below the basic proficiency level. Since 1992, the achievement gap for minority students and student scores in advanced levels remains the same (Blank, 2011; NAEP, 2013). In low-performing Title I schools, the gap

size and gap change showed little growth (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

CCRPI scores decreased as the percentage of students eligible to receive free and reduced

lunch rate increases (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2013). Recently,

the governor of Georgia generated a list of 127 chronically failing schools based on a

CCRPI scores below 60 for three consecutive years. All 106 schools serving elementary

students on the list were Title I schools (The Governor's Office of Achievement, 2017).

Upset with the situation, Governor Nathan Deal warned the status quo is unacceptable

and proposed legislation to eliminate the issue of failing schools, especially for

elementary schools (Office of the Governor, 2017).

Focus on Teacher Quality

Policy makers gave high priority to standards-based practices and teacher quality

as variables shown to influence academic achievement (Plagens, 2010; Stichter et al.,

2009). Factors contributing to highly qualified teachers included certification status and

content knowledge (Schuster, 2012). Competition for funding favored professional

development promoting highly qualified teachers with sustained academic achievement

gains (Hourigan, 2011). However, leadership focused on teaching practices had not

established a pathway to better organizational performance. Collaborative culture was a

significant theme of school improvement (Isernhagen, 2012). Yet, this concept ranked

low in perception of need and resource allocation for Title I schools. Investigating the

influence of organizational structure on the teachers' abilities to work together may help

practitioners apply better strategies for structuring organizations to address the difficult

challenge of academic achievement for Title I schools.

Educational policy outlined specific criteria used to evaluate teachers. The foundation for these principles was derived from research studies connecting variables to student achievement (Goe & Stickler, 2008). General patterns in the research offered clear standards to define teacher quality variables. Looney (2011) concluded high quality teachers possess content knowledge, teaching experience, professional certification, and intellectual ability. Federal and state mandates required evidence of teacher quality ratings for funding of programs (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). Variables of teacher quality maintain student achievement and intensify the organizational context of school culture.

Within these quality indicators were specific teacher characteristics and instructional practices shown to produce positive effects on student learning. Stichter, Stormont, Lewis, and Schultz (2009) assessed various teaching practices of highly qualified teachers. They discovered a relationship between effective instructional strategies and higher academic achievement. Policy makers for Georgia's Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) used similar research to establish performance targets for teacher quality (Georgia Department of Education, 2015b). For example, the work of Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) helped to develop performance indicators for the TKES standard defining Professional Knowledge. Researchers have addressed individual teaching practices that improve student achievement for decades.

In Georgia, TKES was an accountability tool used to measure teacher effectiveness to ensure all students benefit from a highly qualified teacher. There was a distinction between teacher quality and effectiveness. In addition to the quality indicators, the evaluation process also determined teacher effectiveness through value-

added assessments. The concept of value-added assessments judged teachers using student growth data on achievement tests (David, 2010; Goe & Stickler, 2008; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). Due to emerging emphasis on the student growth model, pro-merit pay enthusiasts implied teachers receive compensation based on student achievement data. Despite these prescriptive expectations, schools continued to fail in making achievement gains for all students (Granger, 2008; Penuel et al., 2012).

High poverty, low achieving students required the most attention to state mandates for highly qualified teachers (Dwyer, 2007). The requirements of NCLB moved education towards higher accountability for student achievement (Hardman & Dawson, 2008; Smith & Gorard, 2007). Smith and Gorard (2007) discovered although policy makers of NCLB mandated teacher quality it did not increase the likelihood of equitable educational opportunities with an effective teacher. Georgia officials adopted federal ESEA Flexibility Waivers that established equal terms for effective teachers and increased funding to low-achieving schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). These initiatives aimed to reduce continuing academic disparity for minority and disadvantaged students based on a common definition of teacher effectiveness. However, Ding and Sherman (2006) found over emphasis on the teacher's role resulted in "futile effort to improve student learning" (p. 27). Similarly, Wilson and Strassfeld (2015) described evidence these policies encouraged short-term gains and did not aid in closing the achievement gap for low-performing schools. The authors argued real change occurred when collaboration and capacity building were aligned to teaching practices.

While evidence of teacher quality is not the purpose of this literature review and this study overall, it was important to highlight emphasis on individual accountability and evaluation procedures in response to lack of school improvement. Working in isolation was an obsolete phenomenon in describing successful organizations (Daft, 2012; Greenwood & Miller, 2010). Schlechty (2009) explained educators sensed loneliness, though collaboration among groups offered hope and increased likelihood of success. In the business world, relationships among members of the organization were a vital component of success (Collins, 2001). Yet, the ultimate appraisal of teacher quality and effectiveness in school reform was based on individual value (Hampton & Gruenert, 2008; Harris, 2013; Leana & Pil, 2009; Schlechty, 2009). This concept of human capital played a central role in developing evaluation models for success (Pil & Leana, 2009). With a considerable body of research arguing this model of reform does not produce necessary change, leaders may consider the collective effort of successful schools.

Policy makers devoted less time to areas of research describing structural factors influencing interdependence to improve effectiveness (Leana & Pil, 2009; Penuel et al., 2012). Leana and Pil (2009) stated, "Individual knowledge is not independent from collective knowledge" (p. 1103). Bolman and Deal (2003) asserted, "Targeting individuals, while ignoring larger system failures, oversimplifies the problem and does little to prevent is recurrence" (p. 25). The assessment measures of TKES increased awareness of collective effort as an integrated practice within the standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2015d). School administrators used the TKES Communication standard to identify whether teachers were communicating effectively to collaborate and network with colleagues to enhance student learning. However, reform policy makers

continued to promote individual evaluation measures despite evidence that successful

organizations engage in meaningful relationships. Investigating the influence of

organizational structure on teacher relationships may inform educational leaders of the

social connections increasing organizational capacity and performance.

Structure and Title I Schools

Exploring literature to capture ideas related to the influence of organizational

structure was especially important for economically disadvantaged and minority students

(Rutherford, 2006; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). Government officials identified low-

performing Title I schools as those not meeting state performance targets (GADOE,

2015c). These schools received additional funding to improve student achievement.

Georgia had more than 320 K-12 low-performing Title I schools, as indicated by

accountability measures (GADOE, 2015d). Georgia Governor Nathan Deal challenged

that "status quo isn't working" for low-income students (Deal, 2015). Some Title I

schools continuously demonstrated long-term achievement gains despite economic

disparity. Examining structural factors contributing to successful Title I schools may

provide evidence on how to better structure Georgia's schools.

Professional development was linked to higher academic achievement for

students in low-performing Title I schools (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Moore, Kochan,

Kraska, and Reames, 2011).   Moore, Kochan, Kraska, and Reames (2011) surveyed 59

principals of high-poverty, high-performing schools and 29 principals of high-poverty,

low-performing schools to examine differences in perceptions of professional

development. The principals who valued professional development provided a support

system embedded in the organizational design, which positively influenced academic

achievement based on statewide accountability measures (Moore et al., 2011). This structure consisted of focused time for planning and participation in learning opportunities for teachers. The high-performing principals favored implementation of professional learning standards to help teachers achieve their maximum potentials (Moore et al., 2011). Perhaps low perceptions of professional development in low-performing schools and positive perceptions in high-performing schools indicated a relationship between implementation of professional development and academic achievement.

Green and Kent (2016) studied teacher leadership through a case study in a Title I elementary school. Teacher leaders were given a specialized professional learning opportunity to increase understanding and skills related to coaching, leadership, pedagogy, and content. As a result, the participants reported a positive experience in their abilities to work with other teachers for the purpose of improving academic achievement. Green and Kent (2016) asserted, "Administrators can structure opportunities for teacher leaders to improve problem situations by focusing teachers' commitment and energy in an organized fashion to realize a desired outcome" (p. 15). School administrators from the study supported implementation of a teacher leadership program, which created conditions that empowered participants to work with fellow teachers for knowledge and skill development (Green & Kent, 2016).

Rutherford (2006) also studied the influence of organizational structure on teacher leadership roles. She collected data through interviews with district administrators, school administrators, teachers, and support staff in the district's lowest performing Title I elementary school. The school underwent structural changes to provide greater

opportunities for teacher empowerment by establishing leadership roles for teachers. Characteristics of the structural model clearly defined teacher leadership roles, shared decision making, and ongoing professional development (Rutherford, 2006). Findings suggested participants were empowered by the organizational structure to "cooperate and collaborate with their colleagues" (Rutherford, 2006, p. 71). This level of interaction and teamwork contributed to organizational effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1991; Rutherford, 2006).

Other researchers suggested effective change occurred with a focus on instructional practices (Brown & Hunter, 2006; Duke, 2000; Stichter et al., 2009). Stichter et al. (2009) compared instructional strategies in Title I and non-Title I schools to determine if a relationship existed among teachers. The researchers found specific instructional practices influenced student achievement, including modeling, organizational prompts, and attention signals. However, teachers in Title I schools spent less time activating prior knowledge than non-Title I teachers (Stichter et al., 2009). This finding explained a major difference in instructional behaviors between the two groups, highlighting the importance of implementing this strategy with high-poverty students. Highly qualified teachers in Title I schools utilized similar research-based instructional strategies and interventions to influence student success (Espinosa & Laffey, 2003; Stichter et al., 2009).

Duke (2000) investigated instructional strategies related to literacy among schools with socioeconomic differences. Duke (2000) focused on the amount of printed texts in the classroom environment, as this has been documented to explain for differences in academic outcomes. He argued that his study addressed the gap in the literature

regarding differences in print experiences offered to students in various socioeconomic groups. Using a random sampling of 20 elementary schools, Duke (2000) observed classrooms and recorded notes on the amount and type of print experienced in the daily activities. After conducting several statistical analyses, he discovered students in low-socioeconomic districts encountered fewer print texts and language opportunities than high-socioeconomic districts (Duke, 2000). This difference among socioeconomic schools suggested lack of opportunities with high-quality instructional practices impeded academic achievement for low-socioeconomic students (Duke, 2000).

High-performing schools establish a culture of high expectations (Glaze, 2013). Strahan, Carlone, Horn, Dallas, and Ware (2003) interviewed and observed 17 administrators, teachers, parents, and support personnel in a high-performing Title I elementary school to explore perceptions of success. The selected site was low-performing in previous years but exhibited consistent growth over time and exceeded performance targets, as measured by state assessments. A shared stance towards learning with teachers and students strengthened instructional practices linked to sustaining student success (Strahan, Carlone, Horn, Dallas, & Ware, 2003). Collaborative lessons, individualized instruction, team building activities, goal setting practices, and multiple opportunities for evaluation and feedback were instructional processes perceived to improve academic achievement (Strahan et al., 2003).

Researchers of Title I schools proved both instructional practices and organizational structure influenced student achievement. Improving schools involved increasing both individual and social capital. Hargreaves (2001) described the influence on student success when individuals increase intellectual capacity through collegial

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interactions. According to his research, school administrators and teachers of high-performing schools combined professional knowledge and collective effort to create a culture of learning promoting school effectiveness (Hargreaves, 2001). Instructional practices and structural conditions worked synergistically to address the needs of school improvement.

Organizational Theory

The theoretical foundation for this study was organizational theory. The ability to understand an organization required examining the components of organizational structure (Daft, 2013). Organizational theory was defined as the analysis of design features to understand organizational effectiveness (Daft, 2013). The complexity of organizational design theory was shown within contingency and structural factors that vary among organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Daft, 2013). Contingency factors included culture, environment, goals and strategy, size, and technology (Daft, 2013). Structural dimensions were defined as formalization, specialization, hierarchy of authority, and centralization (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Buenger et al., 1996; Daft, 2013; Greenwood & Miller, 2010; Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011). Understanding the influence of organizational structure on working effectively required examination of the fundamental decisions concerning the structural design of the organization. Organizational effectiveness required a different structure to facilitate and mature interpersonal behaviors, which may increase teachers' ability to effectively work together (Covey, 1991, 1993; Randeree, 2006). The factors of organizational theory were explained in this literature review to describe how the researcher understands the organizational structure of a low-performing Title I school.

Formalization was regarded as one of the factors of organizational theory (Daft, 2013). Standardized rules, procedures, and written documentation helped identify the level of formalization in an organization (Daft, 2012; Zeffane, 1989). Research showed the greater the size, the more the organization will rely on formalized structure to govern tasks (Tran & Tian, 2013). The concern for organizations was whether the level of formalization impeded on the flexibility and negotiation needed for interdependent workflow (Bonner, Koch, & Langmeyer, 2004; Bush-Mecenas & Duque, 2013). In their study of the influence of formalization on team empowerment, Hempel, Zhang, and Han (2012) found perceptions of a high level of formalization counteracted positive effects of decentralization.

Centralization was another factor used to associate teacher effectiveness and the influence of organizational structure. It referred to the "level of hierarchy with authority to make decisions" (Daft, 2012, p. 643). Centralized structure included a top-down approach to the decision-making process. The opposing perspective was decentralization, which allowed for decision-making at lower organizational levels by distributing power among individuals and/or teams. A leader enhanced team effectiveness when using principles of decentralization to structure an organization (Hempel, Zhang, & Han, 2012). Empowerment, or power sharing, was highly researched as a significant factor in promoting effective organizational performance (Hempel et al., 2012).

Finally, this study examined organizational structure to determine the span of control. Traditional organizational designs favored bureaucratic control that concentrates power and authority to one or two leaders. The purpose of this traditional structural

model was to regulate the work environment and control employee behaviors (Daft, 2012). Educational policy regarding low-performing schools used bureaucratic control to correct conditions impeding organizational performance (Bruce & Bouchard, 2011). There was some evidence bureaucratic authority can be highly effective when stability is a concern for the organization (Daft, 2012; Miles, Snow, Fjeldstad, Miles, & Lettl, 2010). However, present organizational theory research dismantled the traditional, bureaucratic structure and promoted a decentralized, community-based organizational form (Greenwood & Miller, 2010; Miles et al., 2010; Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011). The new perspective values shared responsibility and authority.

The significance of discussing organizational theory in this literature review was to explain a theoretical basis for the study of structural factors influencing organizational effectiveness. Describing the structural factors of organizational theory provided a framework to categorize research findings and connects present research to existing theory. Based on the factors outlined in this section, the researcher determined the organizational structure influencing the behaviors of individuals and groups within the selected site. Specifically, the researcher connected formalization, centralization, and control to the levels of maturity as perceived by the teachers in a low-performing Title I elementary school.

Bolman and Deal's Structural Frame

Bolman and Deal (2003) consolidated the ideas of organizational theory into four major perspectives identified as structural, human resource, political, and cultural. They defined each perspective with a different focus to explain how leaders can improve organizations through decisions related to structure (structural frame), people (human

resource frame), political dynamics (political frame), or culture (cultural frame). These four lenses, or frames, capture the "comprehensive picture of what's going on and what to do" in managing organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 5). Investigating an organization using one or more of Bolman and Deal's frames offered a conceptual model of the life of the organization.

In a recent study, Garcia-Tunon, Cistone, and Reio (2016) collected evidence using the four frames to define factors contributing to successful educational leadership. The researchers used qualitative and quantitative data in a single-case design to investigate key factors of successful leadership. Analysis of responses for each frame identified characteristics of the leadership style of one successful educational leader in Florida. They found evidence to support the use of Bolman and Deal's (2003) frames to investigate organizational effectiveness. The school leader exhibited characteristics found in all four frames (Garcia-Tunon, Cistone, & Reio, 2016). Garcia-Tunon et al. (2016) were convinced the "results of this study suggest that the ability to apply multiple frames is critical to effectiveness" (p. 619).

Applied practice of Bolman and Deal's theory was used in a qualitative study of two school administrators. Israel and Kasper (2004) studied the process of using the four frames to improve organizational effectiveness in one elementary and one middle school. Like the Garcia-Tunon et al. (2016) study, the participants discovered the need to use multiple frames to accommodate the changing needs of the organization (Israel & Kasper, 2004). While the administrators found success implementing characteristics of a single frame, they continually reframed the process to sustain improvements based on organizational needs (Israel & Kasper, 2004). The elementary principal started the

change process with the structural frame to create a system for organizational effectiveness. Once established, she used the human resource frame to develop a collaborative culture. This discussion was helpful in understanding how Bolman and Deal's theory can be used to describe the details of the organizational effectiveness.

This researcher applied the structural frame to understand and describe structural conditions of a low-performing Title I elementary school. To arrive at an understanding of the organizational structure, Bolman and Deal's (2003) structural frame provided guidance on how to describe and interpret decisions related to organizational design. The influence of organizational structure was interpreted through two perspectives, including efficiency and effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Covey, 1991; Daft, 2013; Green, 2000; Randeree, 2006). Efficient organizational structures were linked to specialized roles and hierarchical authority (Green, 2000; Randeree, 2006). In effective organizational structures, goals were achieved through "social interaction and adaptability" (Randeree, 2006, p. 400). Organizational effectiveness was more important than organizational efficiency (Daft, 2003). However, both perspectives were used in the structural frame to classify the structure of an organization. The following explained key applications of the structural frame to measure the level of organizational effectiveness.

Factors of the Structural Frame

Understanding the degree to which teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together required examining features of structural design. One assumption of this research is organizational structure either helps or hinders effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Covey, 1993; Rutherford, 2006). Jung and Kim (2014) tested the idea "structure matters for organizational performance," and

found empirical evidence linking structural decisions to perceived performance (p.635). Empowered teams "typically produce better results and higher morale than groups operating under more traditional top down control" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 109). This study uses Bolman and Deal's (2003) structural frame to describe and understand structural factors contributing to levels of empowerment in one low-performing Title I school.

Researchers identified influential structural variables influencing empowerment, including appropriate division of labor and suitable forms of coordination and control (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1993; Tran & Tian, 2013). Responsibility and authority were two structural variables known to influence the degree to which teachers are empowered to work effectively together (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Green, 2000). Responsibility referred to the allocation and execution of job roles and responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This division of labor was the "keystone of structure" (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The second critical issue of organizational structure was authority, or the coordination and control of organizational groups (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Daft, 2013; Green, 2000). Authority referred to the frequency of and access to meaningful information, resources, and decisions (Green, 2000; Leana & Pil, 2006). Structures related to responsibility and authority "make a huge difference in group performance" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 112).

Responsibility. The allocations of responsibilities across different groups and job descriptions were structural considerations of this study. Using the structural perspective, an organizational leader first prescribes and allocates responsibilities to individuals and groups (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Determining the structural arrangement of

responsibilities required clarifying organizational goals and defining roles of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal (2013) identified options for assigning roles, including function, time, product, customers, place, or process. Individuals are appointed to roles and given job descriptions for specialized functions of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Daft, 2013). A teacher's primary responsibility was to teach. However, there were other specialized roles based on grade level, content, and leadership knowledge (Chance, 2013). Understanding how individuals within the school develop responsibilities helped to comprehend the structural model of the organization.

A formal structural model used division of labor and specialization of tasks to promote efficiency of the organization (Chance, 2009; Green, 2013). Some researchers suggested formalized practices created uniform expectations and consistency among individuals (Daft, 2013; Sine, Mitsuhashi, & Kirsch, 2006). This clarity led to strong organizational climates and the ability to work effectively (Chen & Rainey, 2014; Dickson, Resick, and Hanges, 2006; Sine et al., 2006). According to Chen and Rainey (2014), "formal job descriptions and performance records help managers ensure that the people selected for teams have appropriate expertise, positions, skills, training background and experience" to foster effective teamwork (p. 950).

Dickson, Resick, and Hanges (2006) studied various organizations in food services, telecommunications, and financial services to determine whether climates were stronger in formalized versus generalized structures. They analyzed survey data including 3,783 managers from 123 organizations and determined formalized practices facilitated perceptions of a supportive environment. A positive work climate with

formalized practices facilitated agreement among individuals about required actions and individuals assigned to complete tasks (Dickson et al., 2006).

Sine, Mitsuhashi, and Kirsch (2006) also researched the relationship between formal structure practices and organizational performance. They selected a sample of early Internet service firms to determine whether formalized practices increased organizational performance for new businesses. Using quantitative analysis, Sine et al. (2006) discovered formalized practices increased performance for beginning organizations. Their findings contrasted early research suggesting informal, flexible approaches to responsibility increased organizational performance (Burns & Stalker, 1994).

The alternate view of responsibility encouraged flexibility and collaboration in defining job responsibilities. With an informal design, job responsibilities were determined collaboratively by members of the organization and easily changed to meet new challenges (Green, 2000). The structural framework consisted of individuals working across departments and creating a horizontal workflow (Daft, 2003). This sharing of roles and responsibilities among group members was associated with innovativeness and organizational effectiveness (Burns & Stalker, 1994; Meadows, 1980). Researchers made the same point that an informal structure lowers individuals' uncertainty of job responsibilities (Burns & Stalker, 1994; Schulz & Auld, 2009).

According to Schulz and Auld (2009), the perceptions of role ambiguity experienced by individuals were low within an informal organizational structure. Characteristics leading to lack of agreement regarding responsibility included contradictory positions of power, poorly defined expectations, and isolated proximity of

teams (Schulz & Auld, 2009). Schulz and Auld (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine perceptions of role ambiguity and the relationship to organizational design. The researchers collected responses from 78 individuals of various positions within a sporting organization. Results indicated an informal, democratic structural design lowered role ambiguity and was preferred by individuals in the organization (Schulz & Auld, 2009). These findings were supported in the literature suggesting shared participation of deciding job responsibilities ensures uniformity as individuals work collaboratively to establish and communicate job descriptions (Schulz & Auld, 2009).

A reasonable argument for the difference between formal and informal structure for job responsibility was in the maturity of the organization (Covey, 1991; Sine et al., 2006). Organizations in the early stages of development may require more formal structure to mobilize resources. Mature organizations required less formalized practices and more flexibility to adapt to new challenges (Burns & Stalker, 1994; Green, 2000; Sine et al., 2006). The level of responsibility was based on a continuum from formal to informal systems depending on the amount of authority given to individuals and teams (Daft, 2013; Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015). Bolman and Deal (2013) argued for formal prescriptions of job responsibilities to alleviate "problems of quality and equity" (p. 50). Yet, they agreed with decentralized forms of control following the allocation of work.

Authority. After determining who will do the work, individuals make structural decisions to integrate work efforts by way of authority. Investigating who is in charge was another structural consideration of this study. Structural options for authority were centralized or decentralized (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Daft, 2013). Centralized authority was top down command and control (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Daft, 2013). The

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decentralized structural approach included unlimited access to meaningful information, resources, and decision-making through social networks (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Green, 2000). Investigating access to human, financial, technical, and organizational resources showed integration of work efforts in the pursuit of common goals and provided a clear picture of the underlying structural frame of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Researchers provided empirical evidence to suggest centralized strategies promote efficiency, while decentralized strategies promote effectiveness.

Some educational leaders chose centralized strategies to coordinate and control work efforts. This system created a hierarchy of power whereby decision-making authority was centralized at the top level of management (Daft, 2003). Research showed the greater the size of the organization, the more the organization will rely on formalized structure to govern tasks (Tran & Tian, 2013). Additionally, organizations requiring stability used the centralized approach to focus work efforts (Daft, 2012; Miles et al., 2010). The concern for organizations was whether the level of centralization impedes the flexibility and negotiation needed for empowering behaviors (Bonner et al., 2004; Bush-Mecenas & Duque, 2013).

The second structural option for authority was decentralization. This strategy places decision-making authority at lower organizational levels (Bolman & Deal, 2013). An organization using the principles of decentralization promoted team effectiveness, because these practices influence empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Hempel, Zhang, & Han, 2012). Empowerment, or power sharing, was praised as a significant structural factor in promoting effective organizational performance (Hempel et al., 2012).

In their study of the influence of organizational structure on team empowerment, Hempel, Zhang, and Han (2012) found perceptions of a high level of formalization counteracted positive effects of decentralization. The researchers investigated individual perceptions to determine the effect of organizational structure on team empowerment. They found significantly higher levels of team empowerment in decentralized structures. These findings correspond to additional research associating organizational structure with team performance (King & Bouchard, 2011; Miles et al., 2010; Randeree, 2006).

Understanding the organization through the structural frame involved investigating how responsibilities were allocated and how authority was dispersed among individuals and teams. Centralized, formal organizational structures favored bureaucratic control concentrating power and authority to one or two leaders. The purpose of this structural model was to regulate the work environment and control employee behaviors for efficiency (Daft, 2012; Green, 2000). Educational policy regarding low-performing schools uses bureaucratic control to correct conditions impeding organizational performance (King & Bouchard, 2011; Randeree, 2006). There was some evidence bureaucratic authority can be highly effective, especially when stability is a concern for the organization (Daft, 2012; Miles et al., 2010). On the other hand, present organizational theory research dismantled the traditional, bureaucratic structure and promotes a decentralized, informal organizational structure (Greenwood & Miller, 2010; Miles et al., 2010; Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011). Bolman and Deal (2013) argued for a balance of both strategies based on specific needs of the organization. Whether formal or informal, a helpful structure ensured individuals and teams work effectively.

The significance of using Bolman and Deal's structural frame was to understand and explain how structure was shown to influence the effectiveness of an organization. The Pareto principle, or the 80/20 rule, was a distribution tool suggesting 80% of results come from 20% of the causes. This principle was known to improve productivity of organizations. Chopra (2017) applied the 80/20 rule to prioritize tasks and "capture the greatest impact" of performance (p. 25). Applying the Pareto principle to organizational structure assumes 20% of organizational performance comes from 80% of the organizational structure (Chopra, 2017; Truby, 2018).

The components of Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame enabled the researcher to create a blueprint of the major features of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Describing the features of the structural frame provided a basis to categorize research findings and connect this research to existing theory. Based on the factors outlined in this section, the researcher determined the organizational structure influencing the behaviors of individuals and groups within the selected site. Because there was no one ideal structure, it is imperative to understand the various strategies used to structure organizations to provide a clear, accurate picture of the selected site (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Specifically, the researcher connected centralization and decentralization to the levels of maturity as perceived by the teachers in a low-performing Title I Elementary school.

Organizational Structure and Empowerment

According to the research, the traditional structure of schools, which uses a hierarchy of control and power, was cited more than decentralization in the literature related to organizational theory and school reform (Bonner et al., 2004; Miles et al.,

2010; Rutherford, 2006). Leadership in a centralized, autocratic organizational design controls communication, interaction, growth, and self-management (Daft, 2013). The choices concerning organizational structure influence organizational behaviors of individuals and groups. Thus, a centralized structure creates an environment where people are dependent on the leader for decision-making, rewards, and reinforcement (Green, 2000; Volkema, 2010). A decentralized structure empowers teachers to play a greater role in the organization, which ultimately improves organizational performance (Gessler & Ashmawy, 2016; Short, 1992). Theories of empowerment were used to explain organizational effectiveness in the review of literature. Structural and motivational theories are the two perspectives associated with empowerment practices (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The conceptual framework of this study used the structural perspective to understand how organizational structure empowers teachers to work together effectively.

Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural perspective described structural factors of the organization influencing employee empowerment. Kanter's (1993) theory of structural empowerment also provided a framework to explain how organizational structure influences empowering behaviors. Kanter asserted opportunity, power, and relative numbers are the three central components related to the influence of organizational structure on employee behaviors and perceptions. Opportunity referred to "mobility and growth" (Kanter, 1993, p. 246). The second component, power, referred to the ability to make decisions that impact the nature of work. Proportional distribution of people was the third variable and referred to the diversity of the social composition of the group (Kanter, 1993). Understanding evidence of these three conditions allowed for

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identifying the structural conditions to determine interview questions regarding how teachers perceive the organizational structure.

Bolman and Deal (2013) and Kanter (1993) argued the power component was the key ingredient of employee empowerment. Thus, the purpose of empowerment in organizations "is to decentralize management and control throughout the organization" (Bednarz, 2012, p. 9). Empowering organizational structures provides individuals and groups with access to information, support, and resources (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2010). Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013) indicated these sources of power are proven to mediate positive attitudes towards empowerment. The organizational changes sparked by an empowerment approach improved the employees' perceptions of job satisfaction and innovativeness, which directly influence performance (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013). Gilbert, Laschinger, and Leiter (2010) discovered empowerment structures defined by Kanter's framework facilitated a productive workplace and lowered levels of exhaustion and burnout for healthcare professionals. These studies provided a better understanding of the effect of structural empowerment on performance.

Research related to empowerment alluded to the synergy created by coupling decentralized structures with teacher perception of empowerment (Randeree, 2006). Goldspink (2007) emphasized an organization designed with control hierarchies loosely coupled with democratic principles will not achieve significant gains in reform. This problem of controlling teacher behavior while promoting autonomy creates a contrasting view of the relationship between individual and organizational performance. Promoting independent behavior in a collaborative culture is well documented in school reform

research (Goldspink, 2007). For measurable, maximum performance benefits, organizational leaders must design and operate a school structure resulting in high perceptions of teacher empowerment.

Leadership Perceptions of Empowerment

School leaders play a vital role in the structural design for organizations (Daft, 2013). Those who use a decentralized structure to frame an organization foster teacher empowerment (Short, 1994). Kouzes and Posner (2012) believed leaders should "accept and act on the paradox of power" which holds that "you become more powerful when you give your own power away" (p. 244). Leaders acting under a decentralized leadership position share authority in decision-making and communicate information to achieve school autonomy (Daft, 2013; Gessler & Ashmawy; Miles et al., 2010). The fundamental difference between centralized and decentralized organizational structures was that employees working in a decentralized organization are trusted to exercise independent judgment in self-managing teams (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Short, 1994). This level of freedom was necessary for promoting teacher empowerment.

The decision-making strategy of the school administrator offered an explanation to the choice of organizational structure. A participative leader uses a decentralized approach to involve others in the decision-making process. Somech (2003) defined the participative, or democratic, leadership style as "joint decision making, or at least shared influence in decision-making by a superior and his or her employees" (p. 1003). Decisions were made jointly through collaborative teaming or fully delegated to workers. Principals chose whether to centralize or decentralize authority regarding the decision-

making process (Daft, 2013). Evidence of participative leadership was an indicator of an empowering structural design.

Empowering leadership was shown to improve worker performance. Huang, Iun, Liu, and Gong (2010) found participative leadership enhanced performance by generating feelings of empowerment among team members. Empirical findings such as these were repeated in the literature to suggest the joint effect of participative leadership and empowerment improved organizational performance (Gessler & Ashmawy, 2016; Huang, 2012). In their study, Lorinkova, Pearsall, and Sims (2013) gathered evidence to show empowered teams of undergraduate students improved performance over a sustained period of time. These results were associated with participative behaviors that led to improved "learning and coordination capabilities of empowered teams" (Lorinkova et al., 2013, p. 569).

In comparison, proponents of a directive style argue team performance was better enhanced by leadership that "focuses on behaviors related to giving detailed directions, expecting subordinates to follow those instructions, and making decisions with limited subordinate input" (Lorinkova et al., 2013, p. 575). The benefits of both directive and participative leadership were determined by the readiness, competence, and maturity of the members of the organization (Sagie, Zaidman, Amichai-Hamburger, Te'eni, & Schwartz, 2002; Somech, 2005). Researchers concluded both positions were proven to improve work outcomes (Lorinkova et al., 2013; Sagie et al., 2002; Somech, 2005). For the purposes of this research, it was imperative for the researcher and the reader to understand both leadership styles and their meanings and applications in order to describe the context of the organization and the leader's role in structuring the environment.

This researcher examined the organization's structural influence on effective team performance. Additionally, the psychological perspective associated with empowering leadership was also investigated to identify markers of effective team development. The dominant idea of psychological empowerment was that motivational terms, rather than managerial practices, increase worker performance (Tastan, 2013). Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, and Rosen (2007) described components of psychological empowerment as influence, competence, meaningfulness, and choice. Teams and individuals possessing those characteristics were motivated to perform well (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007). Leaders with knowledge of both theories of empowerment implement practices leading to effective empowerment practices.

Teachers' Perceptions of Empowerment

Teachers' perceptions of the levels of empowerment and team effectiveness were critical to answering the research questions of this study. It was important in this study to explore individual and team differences concerning views of empowerment to determine if and to what degree organizational structure influences empowerment. Restructuring efforts of failing schools suggest empowering leadership, characterized by a decentralized structural model, was necessary to transform performance outcomes (Enderlin-Lampe, 2002; Gessler & Ashmawy, 2016). Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013) emphasized when teachers possess an empowered attitude, the capacity for organizational performance increases. Thus, determining the level of empowerment perceived and experienced by teachers in a low-performing Title I school maximized understanding of whether teachers work effectively together.

A notable area of empowerment research pertaining to individual and team perceptions was psychological empowerment. The dominant idea of the psychological perspective was that empowerment was perceived as an internal motivation construct (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding empowerment were categorized as meaning, competence, self-determination, and influence (Spreitzer, 1995). Researchers investigating the perceptions of teacher empowerment used this psychological empowerment framework to articulate effects of employee empowerment on worker performance.

Teachers' perceptions of leadership style play a vital role in feelings of empowerment. Griffith (2004) investigated teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership in elementary school settings. Results revealed greater job satisfaction, reduced staff turnover, and improved school performance in organizations where principals were perceived as transformational leaders (Griffith, 2004). Principals used transformational leadership to empower teachers based on individual needs and intellectual stimulation.

The Structure of Effective Teamwork

An important focus for analysis in this study was the structure of the organization. The structural frame provides a model to explain key issues of organizational success. The researcher collected perception and behavior data to describe what was really happening in the relationship between organizational structure and empowerment. A primary research goal was to determine if and to what degree teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together. Studying perceptions and behaviors of individuals within the organization were the primary sources for data

collection in this study (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1991). Therefore, a theoretical

map for exploring organizational behavior was necessary to understand the relationship

among organizational structure, empowerment, and effectiveness. A key element of

organizational behavior was the point at which perceptions "focus on people and groups

and the relationships among them and the organizational environment" (Ott, Parkes, &

Simpson, 2008, p. 3). The following research examined the key issues of the effective

teamwork.

To evaluate the influence of organizational structure on working effectively

together, the researcher investigated the nature and degree of responsibility and authority

among individuals and teams in an organization. Researchers agreed organizational

structure plays a role in determining effective teamwork (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Chung

& Rainey, 2014; Covey, 1991; Leana & Pil, 2006). Effective teams were empowered by

the organizational structure to work interdependently, rather than independently (Covey,

2003). This required a social network structure that enabled flow of communication and

resources to empower collective effort.

Social Capital

Studying people in-depth within their communities of practice offered an

understanding of what empowers them to be successful. This involves understanding an

organization through individual and collective characteristics (Volkema, 2010). The

nature of relationships and degree of interactions among the individuals in an

organization significantly alter organizational effectiveness (Harris, 2014; Schlechty,

2009). The ability to create actual and potential resources was a result of successful

teamwork (Leana & Pil, 2006). The ideas of social capital theory were used to describe

the components of successful teamwork. Social capital referred to resources created by the network structure of individuals and groups (Coleman, 1988). Kwon and Adler (2014) gave credence to the interactions among the teachers as the source for positive effects on performance.

   Relationships. Within the definition of social capital, relationships were at the center of organizational performance. Pil and Leana (2009) observed that social relationships created access to resources such as collective knowledge, skill development, and ability. These researchers used teacher survey data and student test scores to determine differences in student achievement based on various indicators of social capital. One finding suggested the strength of social networks was associated with an increase in academic achievement (Pil & Leana, 2009). Other researchers promoted the idea that social connections among teachers increased student success (Leana & Pil, 2006; Mendan, 2012; Song, 2011). Harris (2014) reported the essence of social capital is purposeful, interdependent relationships to achieve a common goal. The key to performance was dependent upon effective relationships among individuals (Harris, 2014). This rationale was used to demonstrate that effectiveness was dependent on interdependent behaviors.

   Penuel, Frank, Sun, and Kim (2012) studied the social context of elementary and secondary school to reveal conditions of successful relationships among teachers. They measured social ties through survey data and defined interactions that influenced the successful adoption of school reform. Normative influences, those practices that pressure conformity, were found to affect change in practice for teachers. Penuel et al. (2012) presumed the frequency of interactions increases exposure to expertise, which would

significantly affect group performance. However, their results did not indicate the significance of this factor. Other researchers found the cognitive aspect of social capital enhances knowledge transfer and thus enhances organizational performance (Kwon & Adler, 2014; Leana & Pil, 2006).

Resources. The mobilization of resources was a product of social capital that enhances organizational effectiveness. Resources refer to collective assets and abilities that drive performance outcomes (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001). These sources of social capital can be financial, human, cultural, and physical. They were revealed in rules, norms, structure, and values (Bassani, 2007). Common expectations and trust were examples of resources caused by the relational quality among the people (Hampton & Gruenert, 2008). Activating these resources improves the quality of life and enhances organizational performance (Lin, 2001). Lin (2001) argued resources are more valuable than relationships; however, relationships support the transfer of resources. If relationships were the input, then human resources were the output of social capital.

Trust. The value of resources was dependent upon the effective use of social capital for performance. Researchers agreed that trust linked relationships and resources to build strong social capital (Byrk & Schneider; Harris, 2014; Pil & Leana, 2009; Schlechty, 2009). Trust was acquired through meaningful networks that bind people together (Comer, 2015). To illustrate, only when a community of teachers trusts one another without fear will the organization's financial (e.g., school budget), human (e.g., teacher quality), and cultural (e.g., shared values and practices) resources be mobilized to benefit from social capital (Bassani, 2007). Researchers used empirical evidence to suggest that informal, vulnerable ties enhance trust (Glanville, Andersson, & Paxton,

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2013; Pil & Leana, 2009). High levels of trust generate and sustain strong networks, which increase the capacity of the organization to achieve goals (Hargreaves, 2001).

In his study, Bryk (2010) credited improved academic achievement to the emergence of trust created by "strengthening ties among teachers" (p. 20). Bryk compared hundreds of low-socioeconomic schools in Chicago to explore why some schools demonstrate success, while other schools with similar socioeconomic status failed to improve. Bryk analyzed the seven years of longitudinal data to identify five conditions shown to establish and sustain school improvement. These criteria included systematic instructional processes, professional capacity building, stakeholder involvement, student centered climate, and influential leadership (Bryk, 2010). Building trust was considered the most powerful element in developing the five conditions. A lack of trust weakened organizational capacity to develop conditions associated with advancing academic achievement (Bryk, 2010).

Context. The degree to which relationships, resources, and trust were aligned to an effective social capital model was contingent upon context. Johns (2006) described context as the "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables" (p. 386). Context affected the quality of relationships. Therefore, it was important to understand the constructs of context including commitment, perceptions, and psychological contracts (Johns, 2006). Networks, norms, and shared beliefs were contextual factors shaping student outcomes (Milana & Maldaon, 2014).

Commitment towards shared goals was a resource embedded in the construct of social capital. Hampton and Gruenert (2008) investigated nine high-performing schools

to discover factors of success. The researchers found successful schools created an environment that promoted internal commitment. Relationships among principals, teachers, and students were reported to achieve commitment. Hampton and Gruenert (2008) determined collaboration and teamwork contributed to perpetuating a culture of commitment.

Perceptions also speak to the context of school success. Members of an organization exhibiting social capital pursue the common good. They "desire to be associated with a cause that is greater than themselves" (Schlechty, 2009, p. 189). This empowering perception existed due to a context characterized by interdependent relationships (Covey, 2004; Harris, 2014). Focusing on team, rather than individual, inspires productivity that generates social capital.

Mutual understanding and shared values were defined in the subtle, psychological contracts of the organization. A central argument throughout social capital research posited norms, or contracts, were embedded in the social construct and shape organizational behavior (Leana & Pil, 2006; Penuel et al., 2012; Plagens, 2006). Norms were a result of the interactions and influences among individuals (Oztok, Zingaro, & Makos, 2013). Penuel et al. (2012) supported the idea relationships among colleagues develop norms that shape collective action. Thus, each member of the group can modify the community through desirable and undesirable actions or attitudes (Coleman, 1988). Maintaining the existence of positive group norms was necessary for social capital to flourish (Leana & Pil, 2006; Penuel et al., 2012; Plagens, 2006).

Significance of Social Capital Theory

Relationships, resources, trust, and shared context emerge when social capital was evident in an organization. Evidence of social capital was used to describe the nature of dealings among individuals in the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Leana & Pil, 2006). Appropriate team structures vary depending on the goals of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Yet, the ability to effectively work together depends upon the level of collective effort established through building social capital (Harris, 2014). While organizational structure was the focus of this study, the research questions also required an understanding of how teams work effectively together. Thus, the elements of social capital provided a theoretical framework to describe attributes of effective teamwork.

Covey's Maturity Continuum

Applying empowerment theories to research was found in numerous studies (Bonner et al., 2004; Chen et al., 2007; Fernandez, Moldogaziev, 2013; Lightfoot, 1986; Kanter, 1997; Short, 1994; Somech, 2005; Tastan, 2013). This researcher found little evidence to describe how an organizational structure empowers teachers to work effectively together using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. Therefore, this literature review showed the relationship among organizational structure, empowerment, and effective teamwork to explain the use of Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric to determine the level of empowerment experienced by individuals in a low-performing Title I school.

One of Covey's (1992) conditions for empowerment was a helpful system and structure. Structural resources were critical to nurture conditions necessary for empowering behaviors, including relationships among people. Empowerment cannot be

mandated through centralized authority (Covey 1990). Rather, leaders can foster

empowerment by creating conditions that enable people to work effectively together. On

the continuum, a helpful structure created an open information system, sets direction for

responsibility based on organizational needs, and shares authority to complete all tasks

(Covey, 1992). On the opposite end of the continuum, a hurtful structure discouraged

empowerment in a way that prevents individuals from working together effectively.

To measure and describe the level of empowerment, the researcher used Covey's

Maturity Continuum, a model used to describe the structural progression of team

development through three stages (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1991). The level of

responsibility and authority was shown through the stages of the Maturity Continuum. At

the lowest level, individuals lack task specification and authority to make decisions

(Covey, 1991). At the highest level, individuals communicate and connect with teams to

work interdependently with little or no control from administration (Covey, 1991).

Covey (1991) believed people work effectively when they were working

interdependently. Many researchers agreed effective teams were interdependent, using

collective responsibility and authority to accomplish common goals (Bolman & Deal,

2013; Pil & Leana, 2009).

Covey's Maturity Continuum was used in this study to measure the degree to

which teachers are empowered to effectively work together. The term maturity reflected

the level of interaction and support of individuals in an organization. There were three

levels of the Maturity Continuum, including dependent, independent, and interdependent

(Covey, 1991, 2004, & 2008; Green, 2000; Marchese et al., 2002). At the lowest level,

dependent people were directed by others, use blame as a coping method, rely on others'

opinions for self-worth, and allow others to control them. Covey (2015) described

dependence as immobilization or "being a puppet pulled by someone else's strings" (p.

118). This level did not promote organizational effectiveness (Covey, 1991).

An organizational structure at the dependent level resembled the bureaucratic

model. King and Bouchard (2011) identified key factors of the bureaucratic model,

including "functional and hierarchical structures, emphasis on and compliance to rules,

requirements for specific skills and professional identities, and top-down governance" (p.

658). The traditional school model was classified as a bureaucratic structure (Goldspink,

2007; Greenwood & Miller, 2010; King & Bouchard, 2011; Miles et al., 2010; Randeree,

2006). School structure under the dependent level included formalized procedures and

centralized power, and success is measured by efficiency (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey,

1991; Goldspink, 2007). This linear structure may not promote empowering behaviors

based on the research suggesting empowerment requires shared power and

interdependence (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1991).

The next tier, independent, was characterized by individual victories through time

management, discipline, focus, personal goals, planning skills, organization, self-

leadership, and responsibility (Covey, 1991). Covey (1996) described this as the level of

I, because power was secured, but the individual only elects to use it for personal growth.

Individuals preferring the independent level had a "high need for achievement" and a

"strong desire to work independently" (Volkema, 2010, p. 75). The need for independent

power stemmed from a personal desire to control the environment rather than share

collective power (Volkema, 2010). Perrella (1999) defined this level as the "individual

contributor," because concentration is on personal and academic goals (p. 438).

The relationship between independence and organizational structure was derived from the argument that current leaders practice the use of organizational structures that isolate teachers as a means to improve efficiency (Harris, 2013; Kelly, 2011; Pil & Leana, 2009; Schlechty, 2009; Stichter et al., 2009). Structural conditions of the independent level of empowerment contribute to the "counterproductive creation and maintenance of silos that prevent effective collaboration" (Ghannad, 2016, para. 8). The independent structure consisted of a sequential network whereby information flows "sequentially from one group member to another," and individuals were only responsible for specialized roles and responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Covey (1991) stated: "Life is, by nature, highly interdependent. To try to achieve maximum effectiveness through independence is like trying to play tennis with a golf club; the tool is not suited to the reality" (p. 58). The highest level of the Maturity Continuum was interdependence. This level of social networking and personal commitment led to organizational effectiveness (Covey, 1990, 1991). Individuals exhibiting interdependent behaviors make and keep commitments, align actions with values and words, show consideration for the needs and feelings of others, express feelings and solve problems through courageous conversations, and celebrate the success and accomplishments of others (Covey, 1992). These behaviors cannot develop under dependent and independent forms of structure. Functioning at the interdependent level meant cooperating with others to achieve common goals.

Interdependence required helpful systems and structures that foster the conditions of empowerment (Covey, 1992). Interdependent behaviors require a form of structure with the conditions of empowerment (Covey, 1990). Both and Bolman and Deal (2013)

and Covey (Covey, 1991, 1992) discussed the developmental progression of effectiveness, from the simple (dependent) to complex (interdependent) structure of organizations. The research on Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame described how to organize individuals to capitalize on interdependent behaviors. The organization's structure was designed to distribute personal power and resources. In turn, the empowered individual elected to work with other individuals and teams, sharing power and resources. Organizational structure that allows for sharing of information produced more productive relationships by empowering individuals to work more effectively together (Kanter, 1994). Empowerment was the process whereby individuals and groups participate in decisions that mobilize collective effort in pursuit of common goals. Organizational structures that promote empowerment consisted of interdependent social networks (Lorinkova et al., 2013; McDermott et al., 1996). Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested interdependent "teams cannot function as a collection of individual teams" (p. 105). The basis of Covey's work was that empowerment leads to effectiveness (Covey, 1991, 1992, 1993). Covey's Maturity Continuum provided a measure to identify the level of authority among teachers to determine how structure plays a role in empowering effective teams.

Models of teamwork vary among organizations. Covey's Maturity Continuum offered a helpful perspective to understand teamwork and interdependence. Likewise, Bolman and Deal (2013) presented three networking models used to illustrate the three levels of Covey's Maturity Continuum through a structural form. The simple hierarchy was the traditional structure of school characterized by centralized authority with little connection of employee to employee. The characteristics of the simple hierarchy model

were similar to the dependent level of maturity. Bolman and Deal (2013) described the

circle network as another model of teamwork. In this model, independence was

demonstrated by a decentralized structure, which simplified communication and limits

interactions among others. Finally, the star network represented interdependence with

multiple connections among individuals in the group, increasing communication and

amplifying interactions among others. These models of teamwork provided a structure in

which one can describe the stage of team development at the selected site. The structure

of teamwork at the selected site was used to describe the level of maturity identified by

the participants.

The teachings of Covey (1991) posited quantum improvements do not occur

without belief in natural, guiding principles that mature as a result of an interdependent

culture. The foundational idea of Covey's Maturity Continuum was an organizational

structure promoting interdependence, the highest level of maturity, will improve

organizational effectiveness (Covey, 1991, 2004, 2011; Green, 2000). Kanter (1994)

established earlier the characteristics of effective relationships include interdependence

and a full commitment among individuals. Examining interdependent behaviors of

individuals within the organization was one goal of this research study to determine what

effect the organizational structure had on the level of empowerment among individuals.

Chapter Summary

The literature review summarized the discussion of many factors related to

improving academic achievement of Title I students. Researchers argued for the

effective use of instructional strategies to turn schools around (Stichter et al., 2009);

while Leana and Pil (2006) suggested collective effort evoked the greatest change in

schools. Experts agreed it was a combination of factors working towards shared goals

that ultimately promote positive effects on achievement gains (Penuel et al., 2012;

Stichter et al., 2009). Yet, school reform focused on teacher quality, which encouraged

isolation from the collective effort in pursuit of individual capital (Harris, 2014). A

primary goal of this study was to examine authentic interdependence within a school

environment. Covey's Maturity Continuum was used to explain the level of

empowerment by defining three levels personal and interpersonal growth (Covey, 2004).

The characteristics of social capital reinforce the idea that achieving better outcomes

means building a productive and cohesive culture. Understanding the structural context

and interpersonal relationships of a single case added to the body of literature raising

awareness of how empowerment and organizational structure shape sustainable reform.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable

resources, lack of improvement continued to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary

schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures

(Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld,

2015). The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers were

empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an

identified low-performing Georgia Title I Elementary school using Covey's Maturity

Continuum as the metric. The findings in this study may inform national policy makers,

federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation

programs, regional and local education units on how to better structure schools using

Covey's Maturity Continuum, allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to

more effectively work together.

 There are ten sections in this chapter. Following this introduction, the qualitative

research design and rationale are described based upon the guiding research questions.

Following justification of methods, I explain the criteria of the setting to clarify relevance

of the sample selection. After the setting, I establish the role of the researcher to discuss

my relationship to the problem, reveal biases, and identify methods to monitor

subjectivity issues. The next section describes criteria for the selection of participants

including attributes of grade level teams and plans for recruitment. The primary

instrumentation for data collection was an interview protocol, which is explained

following the section labeled "participant selection." After providing details of data

collection, I explain data management and analysis, including coding strategies,

transcription services, and computer software for storing and organizing findings of the

study. The quality of research was established through a description of the strategies

used to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Finally, I discuss ethical

considerations related to the collection of data from human participants and the

dissemination of findings throughout the process. Clearly describing and justifying these

factors were key to understanding the problem, research questions, and methods to

support the quality of findings proposed by this study.

Researcher Design and Rationale

Using qualitative methods, I investigated teachers' perceptions and experiences in

one low-performing Title I school in Georgia. Three research questions guided how to

conduct inquiry of the lived experiences of teachers (Maxwell, 2013). The first research

question provided details of the participants' lived experiences asking: "What are the life

and career experiences of teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I

elementary school?" The second question was, "Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as

the metric, at which maturity level do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia

Title I elementary school perceive best describes their organizational structure?" This

question helped the researcher understand the level of empowerment experienced by

teachers. The implications of this question depended on teachers' descriptions of their

lived experience within a particular organizational structure. The researcher used the

theory of Covey's Maturity Continuum to develop an understanding of the level of

empowerment perceived by teachers. Following the revelation of the level of empowerment, the final research question helped the researcher to understand the influence of organizational structure on the collective effort to improve academic achievement. The framing question was, "Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, what perceptions do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary School have regarding the influence of the school's organizational structure and their ability to effectively work together?" Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural theory was used to reveal important relationships between the context of organizational structure, teacher empowerment, and the ability to work effectively together.

The central concept of this study was empowerment, defined as responsibility (job roles) and authority (access to information, resources, and decision-making). The focus was to explore a case in depth enough to gain an understanding of the influence of organizational structure in a particular low-performing Title I school in Georgia. Thus, the case study design fit the purpose and research questions of this study. According to Merriam (2002), the case study research process begins with determining a special case for investigation. A case study investigates a "specific, unique, and bounded system" (Patton, 2002, p. 447). The school selected for this study was unique in that it was the lowest-performing elementary school in a particular Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) district. The purpose of this study was to gain an experiential understanding of the organizational structure and level of empowerment experienced by teachers in one particular Title I school in Georgia (Stake, 1995). In order to obtain teacher perceptions of the level of empowerment and influence of organizational structure on effectively working together, I used interviews as the primary source of data.

The type of case study chosen to examine the particular case of this research was the instrumental case study (Stake 1995, 2003; Zainal, 2007). Stake (1995) and Zainal (2007) suggested researchers select the type of case study by focusing on the purpose of the research. In this study, I used the instrumental case study type to understand general perceptions and behaviors of a small group of teachers working together. I was primarily interested in understanding the relationship among organizational structure, teacher empowerment, and effective teamwork (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1991). This required data collection and analysis pertaining to structural conditions influencing effective teamwork (Stake, 1995, 2003). Intrinsic interest for the one particular site was not the primary purpose of the research (Stake 1995, 2003; Zainal, 2007). I desired to explore the case in order to develop a clear understanding about if and to what degree organizational structure influenced teacher empowerment and the ability to work effectively together. The research site supported exploration of the research questions by providing detailed, lived experiences of teachers working together in a low-performing Title I elementary school. Trying to understand the theoretical framework of Bolman and Deal (2013) and Covey (1991) through a particular case required use of the instrumental case study design.

The constructivist epistemology influenced data collection in this study. According to Creswell (2014), constructivists seek to understand the context of a setting by personally gathering and interpreting information. This inductive approach applies to qualitative methods of data collection, including interviews, observations, and cultural artifacts framed by personal relationships (Creswell, 2014). The primary source of data collection was interviews to obtain teacher perceptions of the level of empowerment and

influence of organizational structure on effectively working together. Because the research questions relied on personal description, the participants' perspectives were derived from interviews to answer the research questions and enhance understanding of this particular case. Additionally, observations were made to connect teachers' perceptions to data derived from observing individual and team behaviors. Combining data collection methods provided greater depth of understanding to better interpret findings (Maxwell, 2013).

Setting

The location of the study was in a low-performing Title I elementary school in Georgia. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative strategy used to maximize learning through a comprehensive investigation (Merriam, 2002). This study utilized purposeful sampling to select a particular school of interest. Accessibility was a concern for the qualitative researcher (Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995). Ideally, the case would be selected from a local RESA region. There was one school in the researcher's region with the low-performing criteria of this study. Low-performing in this study meant a school identified as either a Priority or Focus School using the entrance criteria created by GADOE. Entrance criteria included a Title I elementary school among the lowest 5% (Priority) or 10 % (Focus) of Title I schools based on 3 consecutive years of CCRPI Achievement Gap data. While convenience was considered, I primarily sought to study one Title I elementary school in Georgia to deeply understand a particular case of low academic performance. These criteria helped to address the issue of lack of improvement in Title I elementary schools (Isernhagen, 2012; Jimenez-Castellanos, 2010; Peck & Reitzug, 2014; Orange, 2014).

Stake (1995) reasoned the main purpose for selecting a case involves maximizing the "opportunity to learn" (p. 6). The research questions focused the study on low-performing Title I elementary schools. The principal criterion in site selection for this case study involved low academic achievement. Every three years, GADOE identified schools in greatest need of support as a requirement of ESEA (Cardoza, 2015). This performance criterion comes from three years of consecutive data CCRPI proficiency ratings. GADOE defined Focus and Priority Schools as Title I schools failing to meet state performance targets for achievement, achievement gap, or graduation rate CCRPI indicators for three consecutive years (GOSA, 2017). From the list of Title I Focus and Priority Schools, primary (PK-2), middle (grades 6-8), and high (9-12) schools were eliminated to allow focus on elementary schools. The mean number of students per school, demographics and free/reduced lunch rate were calculated to define parameters for a typical low-performing elementary school (M. Vignati, personal communication, February 7, 2017). The mean was selected as the measurement for defining typical school enrollment and free and reduced lunch rate. A typical low-performing elementary school contained 549 students, and the free and reduced lunch rate was 86.36%.

The Title I status of the school meant services are provided for students of low-income families (USDOE, 2015). The Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 initiated policy pertaining to improving academic achievement for students enrolled in economically disadvantaged schools (Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). Title I schools receive additional funding to increase equitable educational opportunity for at-risk students (Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). Additionally, Title I schools are monitored through federal programs that provide feedback on progress in implementing

the required components of reform. The need for effective learning environments for children at risk due to poverty and demographic factors was a contributing factor to the selection of a research site. The selected site held Title I status for a minimum of three years, including 2014 to 2016. Despite challenges associated with low socioeconomic status, schools must continue to improve academic achievement and close the achievement gap.

The proposed site selected for this study was a Georgia Title I elementary school serving low-income families. USDOE (2015) provides financial assistance to Title I schools with a minimum of 40% enrollment from low-income families. The school percentage was 89.51% (GADOE, 2017), which relates well to a typical Title I school. This high percentage of low-income students was of interest to the researcher as students who attend impoverished schools were at risk for lower achievement and higher dropout rates (MacMahon, 2011). The school served 426 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. While lower than the mean, it was still perceived to be appropriate to the researcher. The demographic breakdown was 46% Black, 45% White, 5% Multi-Racial, and 4% Hispanic. The faculty consisted of 37 female and 5 male certified personnel with a demographic breakdown of 10% Black and 90% White. The average years of teaching experience was 10.72 years. The average years of administrative experience was 20 years. Ninety-eight percent of teachers were highly qualified based on Georgia law, with 38% holding bachelor's degrees, 31% master's degree, and 31% specialist's degrees.

Regarding the low-performing criterion, the proposed site scored below a 60 on CCRPI for three years and was also on the federal Title I Focus School list published in 2015. Based on three consecutive years of state achievement data, the proposed site was

selected as one of the lowest 10% of schools in 2015. Governor Nathan Deal (2017) used

the single CCRPI score to determine chronically failing schools. A score of 60 is

considered an "F" on the letter grade scale. The proposed site was placed on the Focus

School list in 2015 (GADOE, 2015c). The identification as a Focus School was based on

the CCRPI achievement gap score. For the research site, the three-year average of

achievement gap scores qualified the school in the lowest 10% ranking. Due to this

identification, the research site received additional support through funding and RESA

and GADOE intervention specialists (GADOE, 2015c). The following chart displays

CCRPI and Achievement Gap scores from 2012 to 2017.

Table 1

CCRPI Scores of the Research Site

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Achievement Score	60.5	46.4	66.4	63.3	49.2	57.4

Role of the Researcher

Because I am not a member of their faculty and staff, I adopted the role observer

and non-participant. Lack of daily involvement and prior relationships with the

participants prevented a complete or active membership within the setting (Adler &

Adler, 1987). Teachers would never fully accept the researcher as a full group member.

Therefore, I assumed the observer role to develop a relationship with participants and

gain trust without interaction on a daily basis (Adler & Adler, 1987). The observer role

allowed for engagement within the research setting, although I was separated physically

and psychologically from the group. The observer is a constructivist approach in which

the researcher functions as an observer to collect data co-constructed with the participants (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). Telling the story of the participants required some separation from intimate relationships to effectively collect data without influence of researcher bias. The observer role was not completely covert because the presence of the researcher undoubtedly affects the data collection process. However, using this role may allow me to establish a trusting position in the field while creating a gap of intimacy to manage predispositions and bias (Beuving & Vries, 2015).

The observer relationship is critical to obtaining legitimacy and trust with the group (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Social relations structure observations and interviews with participants (Beuving & Vries, 2015). Despite distance from the fieldwork setting, the researcher must become an accepted member of the setting (Adler & Adler, 1987). Communication with administrators and teacher leaders was the first step in establishing a rapport and legitimacy with the larger group. The principal and instructional coach were the initial gatekeepers introducing me to the group. I continued to build on our relationship through neutral, friendly conversations and marginal participation in the group activities. During site visits, I mingled with faculty in the office and hallway while waiting for scheduled interviews with participants. On one occasion, I sat through a Response to Intervention (RTI) meeting just to informally gather observation notes. On another visit, I was able to take part in a professional learning activity regarding reading intervention. During these informal visits, I was able to communicate with teachers and share status without a central position to the setting.

Participant Selection

The participants of the study were selected based upon Covey's three levels of maturity. Stake (1995) stated that the "opportunity to learn is of primary importance" in the selection of cases and participants (p. 6). The focus of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers were empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together. Therefore, teachers working at the research site were selected using purposeful sampling to provide relevant and rich information to answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). With the small number of participants in one Title I school, random sampling was not appropriate as the purpose of random sampling is to represent a large population to make generalizations (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

The research questions for this study included criteria for selecting participants. The sampling included teachers to provide perceptions of empowerment and the influence of the school's organizational structure on their ability to effectively work together. The proposed research site consisted of five grade levels divided into smaller subgroups based on content. I used multiple-case sampling to select teachers who could provide the most balanced, in-depth coverage of the research questions. A protocol using Covey's guidelines (1992) was be used to collect individual responses and facilitate discussion on specific insights and stories pertaining to the current conditions of empowerment in the school. The survey protocol determined patterns among participants to support selection of participants for individual interviews.

I used multiple-case sampling techniques to select participants for individual interviews. Miles et al. (2009) suggested a minimum of five cases organized on a

continuum to establish validity and enhance transferability of findings. I selected six participants to stabilize findings if attrition occurred. Five of the six participants completed three interviews. I did not complete the final interview with one participant. I attempted to reach her on several occasions but was unable to schedule a common meeting time. She did not respond to subsequent phone calls or emails. In this research study, theoretical underpinnings define the continuum as dependent, independent, and interdependent. The multiple-case sampling method was best for the research questions in that it allowed for exploration of various levels of empowerment while understanding shared perceptions of structural conditions among the group of teachers.

The self-inventory survey was used to select teachers for individual interviews. The researcher was interested in Covey's theory of empowerment. Therefore, choices for selecting individual interviews were based on different levels of empowerment ranging from dependent to interdependent behaviors (Covey, 1991; Miles et al., 2014). These interviews provided stories that described teachers' perceptions and interpretations of the lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher used Individual interviews to identify differences among individuals without the risk of reactivity in a focus group setting. Additionally, individual interviews enabled the researcher to create personal narratives adding rich detail to perspectives (Seidman, 2006). The researcher's interest required knowing the conditions of empowerment in a low-performing Title I elementary school, which meant understanding personal experiences of individuals within the school. Thus, individual interviews with teachers and administrators offered the best method of inquiry for this study.

Instrumentation

Interviews and observations focused on individual and team behaviors to examine whether organizational structure played a role in perceptions of empowerment. Leadership style, collective action, knowledge exchange, and shared goals were a few of the specific links to empowerment explored through data collection. Additionally, the researcher collected data to describe structural components influencing how schools arrange high-quality interactions and systems for monitoring collective accountability (Leana & Pil, 2006). To focus the data collection process, Covey's (2004) Maturity Continuum and Bolman and Deal's Structural Frame (2013) was used to explore the level of empowerment and structural conditions of the case. This research study consisted of relatively focused research questions. Therefore, setting priorities through the creation of front-end instrumentation helped to clarify concepts related to the research questions. An unstructured approach may not have yielded appropriate data to explain concepts presented in the research questions (Miles et al., 2009). The following instruments were used to collect data.

The Self-Inventory Survey

The researcher used self-inventory surveys (see Appendix A) to examine varying degrees of empowerment among teachers. The researcher used the inventory for selection purposes only based on criteria listed on the survey. Using Covey's Maturity continuum as the metric, a total of 21 teachers from grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade provided Likert-scale responses of three levels of empowerment, which included conditions for dependent (1), independent (2), and interdependent (3). Teachers ranked 1 (low) to 5 (high) the degree to which each of these conditions existed. The survey

included the following questions adapted from Covey (1992) and Bolman and Deal (2013).

Category 1. To what extent are team members engaged in:

1. Reliance on leaders and administrators

2. Polite conversation

3. Conflict avoidance

4. Classification of others based on stereotypes

5. Formation of cliques

6. Strong need for group approval

7. Vague goals and objectives

Category 2. To what extent are team members engaged in:

1. Second guessing leaders' decisions

2. Desire for a greater voice in decisions

3. Dissatisfaction with the current system

4. Bids for power by individuals or cliques

5. Frequent "hidden agendas"

6. Wide range of participation by team members

7. Strong need for structure (clear goals, rules, division of labor)

Category 3. To what extent are team members engaged in:

1. Empathetic listening to understand other points of view

2. Opinions changed based on new facts

3. Disbanding of cliques

4. Development of goals and objectives owned by team members

5. Shared leadership

6. Strong sense of group identity

7. Enforcement of team norms

8. Difficult for new members to join

This process allowed me to determine individual perspectives regarding structural conditions influencing empowerment. Responses were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. A random number identified each participant. The researcher calculated the sum for categorical response, ranked each category from highest to lowest, using the teacher's highest sum as their favored level of empowerment. As shown in Table 2, the responses were provided by teachers and ranked using the highest score of each level.

Table 2

Summary of Self-Inventory Survey Results

Participant	Sum of Level 1	Sum of Level 2	Sum of Level 3	Highest Level
5	23	21	22	1
2	22	21	20	1
22	28	7	26	1
6	18	20	18	2
7	17	19	18	2
9	20	21	22	2
10	19	20	18	2
11	23	29	24	2
16	22	28	25	2
17	22	26	17	2

20	19	23	18	2
21	21	21	18	2
1	16	19	35	3
18	16	19	31	3
4	21	21	24	3
8	18	19	22	3
12	19	16	20	3
13	19	19	24	3
15	17	17	23	3
19	20	15	21	3
24	17	23	29	3

The final percentage of teachers at each level totaled 14% Level 1, 43% Level 2, and 43% Level 3. The top two participants in the dependent level and top three participants in the independent and interdependent levels were selected for interviews to provide a similar ratio presented in survey results. Participants 2, 22, and 1 declined participation in this study. This did not impact participants for the dependent and independent level. However, additional requests for participation were made for the interdependent level including Participants 8, 12, 13, and 15. Participant 13 agreed to participate. Yet, upon arriving at the site for interviews, she declined. I asked Participant 19 if she would be willing to participate, because she came directly to me after the survey stating she would contribute to the study. The selection of participants equated to 17%

Level 1, 33% Level 2, and 50% Level 3. Pseudo names were given to the participants to protect their identities using a random name generator.

Table 3

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Participant Number	Pseudo Name	Gender	Experience (years)	Teaching Certificate	Level of Empowerment
5	Ruth	Female	15	T5	1
6	Sophia	Female	12	T4	2
7	Wendy	Female	12	T5	2
18	Naomi	Female	17	T4	3
4	Shelby	Female	16	T4	3
19	Kate	Female	15	T4	3

Individual Interviews

Using Seidman's (2006) three-interview model, the researcher explored team relationships, organizational structure, and sustained success. As a result of this process, I structured each interview to build depth of knowledge in the reconstruction of participants' perceptions. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) created by the researcher was used to collect data pertaining to the research questions. The questions were derived from the work of Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural approach and Covey's (2004) Maturity Continuum. The first interview asked teachers to describe their educational history leading to working in the current school. The purpose of this interview was to frame the context of the participant's story (Seidman, 2006). The second interview focused on the participant's current experiences using the individual

interview protocol as a guide. The participant was also asked to describe a typical day in the school. The third interview constructed the participant's understanding of experiences in a low-performing Title I school. The participant was asked to reflect on the meaning of past and present experiences (Seidman, 2006). The connections among these details imparted meaning by illuminating themes of the lived experience.

Data Collection

Two interpretations relevant to this study included teacher perceptions and experiences. The difference between perception and experience influenced interpretations of findings. The perceptions were what teachers say they do (R. Schmertzing, personal communication, October 4, 2015). Questions to consider: "What does organizational structure look like to you? How would you describe your level of maturity? Walk me through a typical day at school. What do you and other teachers think about what you have accomplished?" On the other hand, experiences are what the teachers actually do (R. Schmertzing, personal communication, October 4, 2015). Fieldwork experiences constructed meaning of how teachers perceive and interpret relationships and school structure. Three site visits with interviews and observations allowed the researcher to collect credible data and provide a rich description of the connections between perceptions and experiences.

Individual Interviews

The primary instrument used for collecting teacher perception data was interviews. Interviewing as a method of data collection required in-depth experience in planning, transcribing, and interpreting each participant's thoughts. Prior to interviewing participants, I used Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural theory to develop a list of open-

ended questions to establish the "purpose and focus of the interview" (Seidman, 2006, p. 81). The questions guided and structured the interview process. However, exploration of the participants' perceptions required active listening and follow-up questions not included in the interview guide. Three site visits using a variety of interview questions provided credible data for this study.

Observations

Adequately describing the behaviors of teachers provided a "vicarious experience for the reader" to support understanding of research questions (Stake, 1995, p. 63). Unstructured interactions occurred during the fieldwork experience through informal conversations and observations in authentic settings. The office area was a watering hole for interactions among participants and school staff. During one visit, I observed a professional training on a reading intervention. This allowed me to observe the nature of teamwork as well as protocols influencing interaction among teachers. Another observation occurred during a RTI meeting led by the assistant principal. These informal observations provided data on the lived experiences of the participants (Patton, 2002). Description of these contexts provided viable data to shape meaning and increase understanding of the case (Stake, 1995). I kept records of observations through writing reflecting memos (Maxwell, 2013). These observations and interactions described actual happenings of the experience.

Memoing

Fieldwork observations and experiences were recorded through memo writing. Maxwell (2013) defined memoing as any form of writing related to the research except for field notes, transcription, and coding. These reflections varied in topic but included

"methodological issues, ethics, personal reactions, or anything else" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20). The writing process revealed researcher biases, organized history of the study, and critiqued significance of events. I was able to find value of writing memos, because they continuously built rationale based on insight, literature, and fieldwork experiences. Reflective writing kept me immersed and engaged in the conversation of the literature (R. Schmertzing, personal communication, October 31, 2015).

Memoing was an invaluable tool to maintain records of thinking. This acted as preparatory work for data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The goal was to write immediately following experiences related to the study including site visits and discussion with dissertation committee members. It was important to capture the essence of interactions with people and artifacts in writing to use for ongoing data analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Memoing during exploration of the literature was also important to ensure accurate understanding of research goals and questions. Finally, reflective writing supported the credibility of the study by adding a layer of data to confirm and explain results.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this research study included procedures presented by Maxwell (2013) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). Data collection required processing multiple forms of data including interview responses, field notes, memos, artifacts, and other print documents. It was imperative to conduct data analysis throughout the data collection process (Miles et al., 2014); therefore a cycle of collecting data, transcribing, memoing, and coding occurred as an ongoing method to maintain integrity of the study.

Computer capabilities for transcribing, word-processing, storing, and organizing

data were used throughout data analysis. The researcher created memos using Google

Drive Docs following a day of interviews and organized them by interview date.

Interviews were transcribed using an online service entitled Rev. The process involved

uploading audio from the computer to the secured website. A Rev team member

transcribed the file and emailed a transcribed version in Word format to the researcher.

Rev ensured security with encryption of files and confidentiality agreements. The files

were deleted from Rev per request of the researcher after downloading to a personal

computer. The researcher examined the files for errors by listening to the audio while

reading the transcript. Additionally, the participants received and assessed copies of the

transcripts via email. They made corrections to spelling and word choices.

After completing member checking, the researcher entered the data into

MAXQDA Analytics Pro software, a qualitative analysis program, for organization of

data and visual representation of codes. Transcripts and school documents (school

improvement plan, progress monitoring sheets, protocols, and handouts) were uploaded

as PDF files into the program. The files were initially organized into folders according to

interview date. However, after coding cycles began the files were organized based on

themes and categories.

First Coding Cycle

I first read the interview transcripts of each participant separately to familiarize

myself with their lived experience. Writing narrative profiles required a sequential

approach for viewing and analyzing transcripts. The files were organized into folders by

participant name. Following Seidman's (2006) sequential process, the researcher used

the software to mark and label passages of interest and view the compelling information into an Excel spreadsheet. Then, the researcher read the new version and crafted a narrative for each participant. The interaction between the transcripts and me was powerful as the initial coding cycle provided a coherent story portraying participants' beliefs. Personal experiences were later compared to discover interconnections among the participants creating a social context. I appreciated this step in the analysis process as it led me to admire participants' experience and fired an eagerness to share their stories.

Table 4

Example of the Historical Account of Sophia

Interview #	Excerpt
1	I like reading, and I like teaching reading, and writing, and all that goes with it.
1	It is the hardest grade, but it is the most rewarding grade, because you can actually see these strugglers become this blooming, you know, yeah.
1	I just feel like this was probably the place I am meant to be is right where I am at.
2	Once you are trying to get used to it, it is not fun, but I mean, if it is going to help the kids.
2	It is just really nice to just see kids excited about their progress.
3	Everybody has their own things that they are trying to manage and have going on.
3	I am more of the, "go ahead and do it right as soon as I have time," cause if I do not I will forget to do it.
3	You have to be able to let go of control of things, and I have trouble with that.

Second Coding Cycle

Following prioritizing historical accounts of participants for the narrative profiles, the researcher assigned descriptive, in-vivo, and provisional codes to words, short phrases, and extended sections of interview data and researcher memos. I used a qualitative data analysis program to store, arrange, and manage data. Prior to data collection the researcher generated provisional codes using the research questions and conceptual framework (Miles et al., 2014). A broad theoretical category was included connections to social capital theory to understand relationships among the people (Miles et al., 2014). This "start list" included categorical words such as organizational theory, empowerment, effective teamwork, and maturity. This approach focused data analysis on key interests of the study. The researcher color-coded each category for visual interpretation. While reading the transcripts, I tagged sections of the data pertaining to the provisional codes. A new document group was created based on these tagged entries.

With qualitative research, unexpected categories may occur due to the participants' distinctive perceptions. These explicit organizational patterns are further analyzed into substantive and theoretical categories later in this chapter. Substantive categories reflect the content of the perceptions and experiences by explicitly stating the participants' statements and actions (Maxwell, 2013). These patterns offer meaning in context of the lived experiences of the participants. While reading the transcripts using this coding method, I revised codes to address categories emerging in the data. These categories included specific meanings pertaining to theoretical constructs of the study. A value code was added along the way to represent participants' values, attitudes, and

beliefs (Miles et al., 2014). Another revision was adding an In Vivo code to the word

"push" as participants repeatedly used this word in phrases pertaining to the setting. To

ensure accuracy of retelling the lived experiences of the teachers, I used categorized short

phrases to summarize actions of the participants for each code.

Table 5

Examples of Initial Provisional Coding

Theoretical Category	
Code Name	Code Description
Decentralized Organizational Structure	Code color was green. This code was used to chunk evidence of decentralized structural conditions such as authority to make decisions and flexibility of responsibilities.
Centralized Organizational Structure	Code color was red. This code was used to chunk evidence of centralized structural conditions, such as hierarchal authority and limited flexibility in responsibilities.
Structural Factors of Empowerment	Code color was blue. This code was used to chunk evidence of empowerment, including opportunities to make decisions, power to control meaningful tasks, and proportional distribution of people.
Effective Teamwork	Code color was orange. This code was used to chunk evidence of effective teamwork using ideas of social capital theory (relationships, resources, trust, and context).
Covey's Maturity Continuum	Code color was yellow. This code was used to chunk evidence of maturity levels, including attributes of dependent, independent, and interdependent behaviors.
Substantive	
Value	Code color was purple. This code was used to chunk evidence of participants' attitudes, values, and beliefs.
Push	Code color was brown. This In Vivo code was used to chunk evidence of the word push. Push was repeated in the language of the participants and coded separately for emphasis.

Third Coding Cycle

     Coding the text was an intricate process of reading and rereading to assign meaning to words found in the various forms of data (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). With the text coded, I began making notes of themes and grouping segments of coded text for further analysis. MAXQDA created a visual concept map to illustrate the frequency of codes. With this model, codes were easily accessible for writing as I could click on the code and data would load into an Excel spreadsheet. The coded segments were also listed in order of priority. This information supported theme development ranking codes with respect to the amount of data associated with the code. This helped to see potential patterns in the data. I reread the data multiple times to ensure I was not highlighting data based on researcher bias.
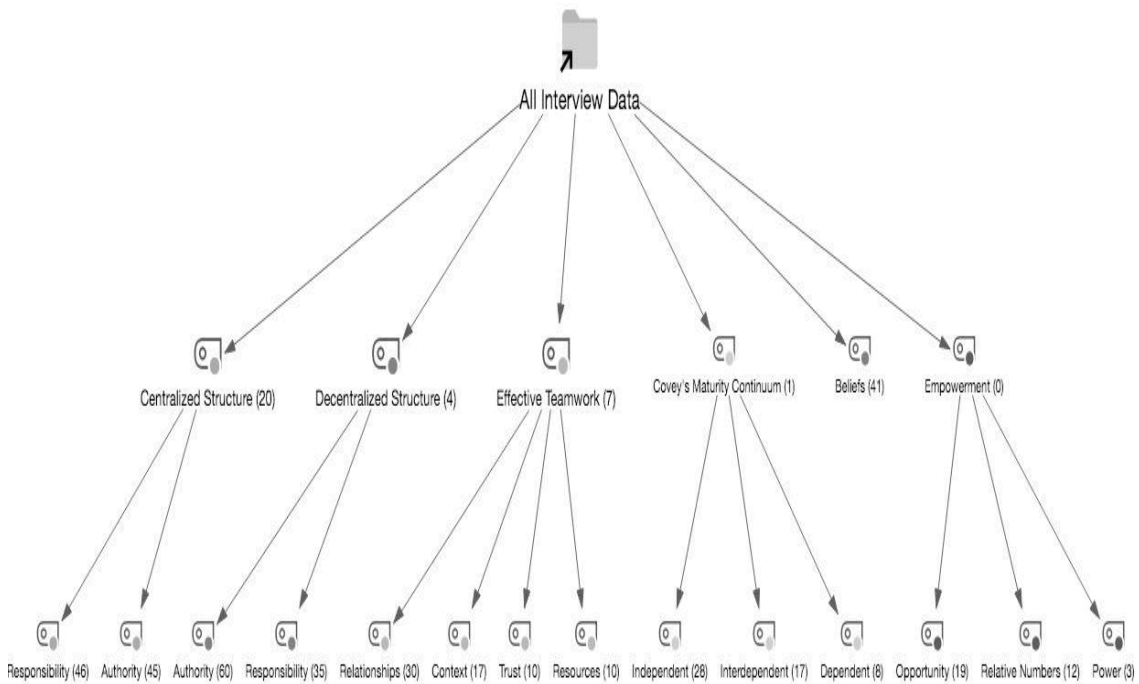

Figure 1. *MAXQDA Concept Map*

The third coding cycle delved deeper into the data by analyzing the summary codes and grouping into smaller categories. I modified provisional codes by adding subcoding to classify elements of the primary codes (Miles et al., 2014). Opportunity, power, and relative numbers were categories added the empowerment code. Relationships, resources, trust, and context were categories added to the effective teamwork code. Dependent, independent, and interdependent were added to the maturity code. The process of finding patterns in the data required identifying "threads that tie bits of data" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 87). Communication was added as a code during analysis as it was revealed communication was influencing the line of authority connecting other structural factors together.

During the third coding cycle, I used the code matrix browser through the MAXQDA program to create a matrix of the data. The matrix was created to condense and display data for reflection. Data were categorized into sets based on themes emerging from data. Once a set was created, the program would create a code matrix that visualized data to help me draw conclusions and summarize findings. It also allowed for quick access of participant explanations for reporting.

The researcher used the results of the analysis in Chapter 5 to create a network display describing the structural configuration of the research site. The structural model included major themes to demonstrate how the relationships among teachers and organizational structure relate to empowerment (Miles et al., 2014). For example, data analysis provided evidence that centralized structural factors created a vertical line of communication preventing all members from having access to information. Figures of the models are included in the discussion to complement the research narrative.

Describing individual experiences in the low-performing school involved investigating the pieces that collectively influence performance. Understanding and describing the interactions among these findings provided a palpable discussion to explain their success.

The researcher used the results of this study to suggest structural factors contributing to teacher empowerment in Chapter 5. The assumption of the researcher was structural factors influence the level of empowerment from the perspectives of the participants. However, data analysis process identified other contextual factors, such as self-managing teams that led to reexamination and development of the conceptual framework of the study. The reciprocal nature of qualitative inquiry creates a nonlinear approach to research design (Maxwell, 2013). However, constructing an explanation of the structural model of the research site may add to the literature supporting effective professional learning practices to ensure success for all educators and their students.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To establish credibility, the researcher collected rich data, used triangulation, validated data analysis with the participants, and used quantitative measures to support student achievement claims. To begin, data collection occurred for several months within the school to obtain multiple sources of data including interviews, artifacts, photographs, questionnaires, and observations. Additionally, the collection of survey and student achievement data supported ideas related to student perception and achievement data. During the stages of categorizing data, the participants verified the identification of themes and patterns of data analysis. This strategy, known as member checking, provided the opportunity for the participants to validate the evidence (Maxwell, 2013).

Dealing with validity threats allows these methods to enhance the richness of the data and holistically describe the context of the setting, which enables some transferability of the study.

Dependability

Miles et al. (2013) view dependability as how the researcher addresses issues of quality and stability. In consideration of this view, the researcher used the process of auditing and triangulation to show consistency and integrity of data. The audit trail process involved documenting all matters of the study through memoing. My memos included organized records of idea development, data collection, personal reactions, ethics, and methodological issues (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). Reflective memos were electronically completed in order for the path of research to be easily accessible in case clarification was required.

Triangulation was another strategy for ensuring dependability; therefore, multiple data collection methods confirmed understanding of the case (Merriam, 2002, Stake, 1995). The researcher used a methodological protocol to check the consistency of findings among three methods of data collection including transcribed interviews, researcher memos of interactions and observations, and questionnaire responses (Stake, 1995). The research questions were focused; thus, the researcher was able to clarify themes from interviews including organizational structure, empowerment, and effectively working together. The self-inventory questionnaire given at the beginning of the focus group interview was a method used to confirm the data collected from individual interviews. As with interviews and memos, themes in the data were identified using the same coding technique of data analysis.

During data analysis, the researcher used color-coding and organized data sets to identify like findings and confirm description of findings. These findings were included in a rough draft of writing used for member checking. Member checking also helped to triangulate the researcher's observations and interpretations (Stake, 1995). I emailed the summary to each of the six participants and the administrators and allowed two weeks for review. I confirmed the receipt of the items in a timely manner.

Transferability

Generalizability was a critical issue of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Miles et al., 2013; Stake, 1995). Unlike quantitative researchers who make generalized statements based on statistics, qualitative researchers must rely on their interpretations of the study to transfer findings to another situation (Merriam, 2002; Miles et al., 2013). The generalizing process for this study began with selecting a case with characteristics similar to other settings. The research site had characteristics similar to other Title I elementary schools in the state of Georgia including average demographics and free/reduced-price lunch data. School leaders with comparable data may consider the conclusions of this study applicable to their situation. Also, the researcher used variation in selecting participants so readers can compare samples of the various levels of empowerment in other settings. The major strategy used to establish transferability was providing a rich, thick description of findings (Miles et al., 2013). This means readers must create an image of organizational structure and teachers working together within in the setting based on the researchers' description (Merriam, 2002). Finally, the researcher suggested where the findings could be tested further using similar characteristics in the conclusion section of the report (Miles et al., 2013). This involved providing comparable

settings based on type of organizational structure and the level of empowerment determined by teachers to influence their ability to work together. The response to the challenge of transferability was to write an in-depth analysis providing explicit details that illuminate research questions and persuade other readers to explore the purpose of this study with their organizational group.

Confirmability

Maxwell (2013) identified researcher bias as a major validity threat in qualitative research. The threat of researcher bias caused me to identify and continuously check personal assumptions. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested that the only way to counter subjectivity was to use "reflections on the self, the body, and the politics" (p. 189). Personal experiences and identity were potential validity threats unless exposed through reflective memoing (Maxwell, 2013). For example, I have been employed in Title I schools for 17 years. Experience with relationships among teachers has revealed differences among schools that work interdependently and those that function at a level of dependency. This sparked motivation to study collegial interactions of teachers in a successful Title I school. To correct this subjectivity, I used journaling to write down evidence of assumptions during data collection and analysis.

Ethical Procedures

This researcher was sensitive to the protection of human subjects. The teachers and administrators risked discovering they are less empowered as a result of structural decisions impeding effective teamwork. They also risked second-guessing their decisions of power as awareness of emotional growth may signal a change in the current paradigm driving the climate. Knowing the risks of qualitative research methods helped

to ensure participants' identities were protected and accuracy of data was validated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research met the definitions and requirements cited by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Valdosta State University. It was found to be eligible for exemption under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) part 46 requirements (Office for Human Research Protections, 2016). This study involved interview and observation procedures of willing teachers in an established education setting. The researcher recorded information in such a manner as to protect the participants from being identified. Additionally, any disclosure of the participants' responses would not reasonably place them at risk for criminal or civil liability and damage financial standing, employability, or reputation (IRB, 2016).

After receiving IRB approval, I obtained informed consent of observations and interview with teachers and administrators for the purpose of ensuring privacy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This procedure required teachers and administrators to voluntarily participate. Following the guidance of the IRB, the informed consent process involved explaining the study, allowing potential participants to ask questions, and providing adequate time for decisions (IRB, 2008). Before the investigation began, an informed consent form was provided to potential participants to reveal the purpose, methods, duration, and possible risks of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This provided a straightforward disclosure, free of deception, to help the decision-making process for potential participants (IRB, 2008). After a week to allow for questioning and reflection, participants decided if they wanted to participate. During the survey and interview process, a verbal consent was read to the group. The agreement statement used the guidelines provided in a Valdosta State University model document. Data gathering

involved some invasion of privacy (Stake, 1995). However, full disclosure of the research and explicit protocols for participant agreement offered protection against intrusion or interference of others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The confidentiality of the information required secure methods for collecting, managing, and destroying data. Therefore, all data was treated as confidential and gathered using formal strategies (Maxwell, 2003). The researcher established anonymity of the site and participants by giving alias names using pseudo-codes (Office for Human Research Protections, 2010). The code list was destroyed upon completion of dissertation requirements ("Guidance on Maintaining Participant Anonymity," n.d.). Participants were not required to provide a signature on the consent form, as this is the only document where teachers' names could be identified. Print and digital records were only available to this researcher. Interviews were recorded on a recording stereo microphone with built-in storage. Information on this device was transferred to a Mac computer with XTS-AES 128 encryption, which made the data inaccessible without the appropriate password. Additionally, Ironkey, an USB storage device, was used for backup storage with built-in encryption for protection of data. Using these devices ensured management of data and participant confidentiality.

To ethically obtain answers to the research questions, the researcher established a working research relationship with participants. This meant the research itself was affected by the relationships established during data collection (Maxwell, 2013). Building trust empowered participants to actively engage in the project. Without trust, the researcher would not be able to gain access to necessary information. Trust building activities involved communicating full disclosure of the research design, protecting

participant privacy and confidentiality, using member checks, and telling the truth throughout the course of the study (Miles et al., 2014).

I have worked as a teacher at a Title I elementary school for the majority of my career. This should make building relationships with participants more natural, as we share similar experiences. Consensual agreements were negotiated to describe parameters of the relationship (Maxwell, 2013). Professionalism was key to establish a balanced research relationship (Maxwell, 2013). Currently, The Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) provided professionalism standards, which was recognizable to teachers across the state of Georgia (2015e). These standards were included to ensure that both researcher and participant were using the standards of professionalism.

Additionally, immersing myself in another school system required awareness of Georgia's Code of Ethics. Mandated reporting related to the welfare of children meant that I must follow the mandated reporter law to protect the children of Georgia. This would have damaged the study by deteriorating relationships if a situation arose. However, under Georgia Law, educators are mandated reporters and required to report reasonable cause of abuse or neglect (Office of the Child Advocate, n.d.). Privacy was not threatened due to issues related to the mandated reporter law. I was able to proceed with data collection with all participants. Data collection procedures included extra participants to address ethical dilemmas concerning loss of participants. With the exception of one participant who did not complete the third interview, participants finished the research process including three interview sessions.

Chapter Summary

I used an instrumental case study design to address the lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I elementary schools. The purpose was to interview grade level teams and six individual teachers in a low-performing Title I school to determine if and to what degree organizational structure influenced empowerment and the teachers' ability to work effectively together. The research site was determined by federal guidelines that identify chronic low-performing schools using state assessment data. Purposeful sampling was used to select grade level teams for focus interviews. Data collected from a self-inventory survey was used to identify teachers at various levels of empowerment for individual interviews. Using Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural theory and Covey's (1991) Maturity Continuum, this researcher created a self-inventory survey and questions for interviews. Seidman's (2003) interview protocol was implemented to ensure thorough, exhausted data. Data analysis involved coding meaningful words to find consistency among the data and determine themes. I addressed issues of validity by using strategies associated with triangulation, member checks, saturation, peer review, thick description, and audit trails. Ethical issues were addressed following guidelines provided by the IRB and Valdosta State University. Addressing important issues of case study design and planning structured data collection and analysis techniques helped to ensure researchers and educators consider the findings credible.

Chapter IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable resources, lack of improvement continues to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). This study addressed lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. The findings in this study may inform national policy makers, federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, regional and local education units on how to better structure schools using Covey's Maturity Continuum, allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to more effectively work together. Using qualitative methods, the researcher investigated teachers' perceptions and experiences in one low-performing Title I school in Georgia.

Summary of Participant Narrative Profiles

Six teachers were selected for interviews to explore the research questions. The researcher visited each participant three times during November and December 2017 to collect interview data. During the interviews, participants shared their perceptions and experiences at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school. The

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following is a series of participant narrative profiles created to help get a sense of their identities. Seidman (2006) recommended crafting narrative profiles to reflect on the experiences of participants and make sense of interview data. This process involved rereading the transcripts, notating passages, and writing a coherent story of the interview process for each participant. The researcher submits this presentation of participant narrative profiles as evidence of learning from the experiences of others.

Ruth

Ruth loves frogs. She smiled, shrugged her shoulders, and said, "I just love frogs." Her classroom was notably accessorized with frog decorations. The classroom rule chart was adorned with a child-like frog with large eyes crossed in the middle, blushed cheeks, and tiny feet covered by kids' sneakers. Looking to the left and a bulletin board, almost the length of one classroom wall, was covered in green fabric with frog border patterns sectioning the board into three equal areas. The titles of each section were various shades of green and identify standards, learning targets, vocabulary, and anchor charts. Green and white baskets were stored under the bulletin board for student work and resources. Above the bulletin board was a number chart with twenty individual frogs wearing a number between 1 and 20. Looking up and hanging from the ceiling were chubby, dark green frogs with a number on their bellies to represent the group name for each table. On the other long wall, a "Hopping Helpers" sign displayed hanging frogs with students' names written on them. Other frog decorations included a behavior and birthday chart, green baskets on each student table, alphabet banner, calendar, and weekly focus wall. Students played a game with fly swatters shaped like frogs to hit the correct

answer. With a victory smile and glowing eyes, Ruth pointed to a chart stating, "Leap into learning."

Ruth has other passions besides frogs. She also loves dogs, an admiration we both share. I used our affection for dogs to establish trustworthiness and understanding to improve the overall interview process. We discussed happenings of our "fur babies" before beginning each interview. She did not allude to children, but offered funny stories about her relationship with her husband. She discussed the value of talking to her husband about important decisions and obtaining his approval on ideas. Then, she poked fun at him trying to help her around the house, which only got her "mixed up and everything." Ruth's openness to the experience contradicted her notion she does not "like any kind of change." She was attentive to her inner feelings and provided insight despite unfamiliarity with the researcher.

Interviews took place during her afternoon planning time while students went to specials, also known as physical education, art, and music class. Ruth began the first interview with a description of her educational history, which started with a degree in psychology. She stated, "I have always been interested in psychology. So, I just decided that was what I wanted to do." She elaborated on the influential moment she decided to change direction and become a teacher. Ruth reflected on mentoring a middle school student for work on the day of the September 11th terrorist attacks in America. As this historic event happened, a school administrator came on the intercom and announced for teachers to turn on televisions for more information on the attacks. Ruth watched the expressions of shock and horror, a reaction that fundamentally shifted her purpose that day "just watching this other teacher." Ruth considered the experience with older kids as

an emotional foundation for changing her career. She decided she wanted to work with kids but not necessarily middle school students. She went back to school and earned a degree in early childhood education. She believed her degree in psychology really helped working with children. She reflected, "I've gone through a lot of different things getting here, but I feel like this is definitely where I need to be."

Ruth was a "veteran teacher" with 15 years of teaching experience. All of her teaching experiences had taken place at the research site. She taught the same grade, in the same classroom, for 14 years. This was her first year in a new grade level. She indicated the decision to move was not her own but an arrangement she partially desired. All things considered, she remarked, "I've been doing that for so long that it was just time to try something different." In her new position, she was responsible for 28 students in a new grade level in a classroom on a different hall.

In her previous position, she taught in both departmentalized and self-contained settings, but mostly departmentalized, specializing in either reading or math. At the time of our visits, she taught in a self-contained setting and was responsible for all content areas. She reflected, "I think rotating was definitely my favorite. If you have a student that is a behavior issue, they're getting to move, and you're only spending this amount of time with them before they go to another teacher." She further explained, "I did not think I would like it. I was against it at first. After having it, I really liked it. It was good and refreshing for the teacher." Ruth perceived departmentalization as appropriate for upper grades since students can become behavior problems and changing classes offered a reprieve for teachers. She explained self-contained was good for lower grades as it saves time by eliminating transitions.

Ruth described a typical day in her classroom. She began the story with, "Now we are eating breakfast in the classroom so the kids come in and eat their breakfast." Teaching students to be responsible citizens was a part of her mission. She focused this time of day on her interest in recycling. She taught students how to organize products by material including paper and plastic. She had recycling containers in her classroom that students used to throw away recyclable items. Once a week, Ruth took the materials to the local recycling center.

The day continued with "small group math time" where Ruth and a paraprofessional worked with a small group of students and "one part of the group goes to EIP." This was followed by a whole group session and another period of small groups. She described this small group session.

My paraprofessional is working with a low group, I'm working with a low group, my two middle groups are working with partners, and my high group is working independently on the math activity that we are doing that goes along with the start of the day.

This routine continued after recess with a new focus on reading. She ended her day with kids going to specials. Students attended music class the first nine weeks and physical education the second nine weeks of school.

School goals for the year "are to get students to reading on grade level, and to increase the number of students who are exceeding on the Georgia Milestones." Ruth's prior experience enabled her to "see where we need to go, where they will be heading to." She pointed out, "We have a big focus on reading." Ruth described herself as habitual stating; "I do certain things at certain times of the day, even when I am at home. I have a

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certain way things get done, in a certain order." She used routine strategies to support

students reading on grade level. As a Needs Improvement School, a reading mentor was

provided by the state to increase capacity for teaching reading. The "GOSA lady"

prescribed daily activities for beginning reading including identifying letter sounds,

breaking words down into individual sounds, and blending letters to read words. The

strategies also included memorizing and practicing sight words along with reading

prepared sentences using sight words. Ruth commented, "That is something they do

everyday, and then it just progresses." In her previous grade level, she saw progress

having a "daily routine."

Additional effort to support the reading focus was using "DIBELS progress

monitoring once a week." Teachers used DIBELS to monitor at-risk students receiving

intervention strategies to acquire foundational reading skills. Motivating students to care

about scores on the DIBELS measure was a classroom goal Ruth was working on with

her grade level. She stated, "We are having a real issue with that this year, and so we

were talking about what we need to figure out a way to motivate them." In her previous

position, she regularly assessed how many words students read in a minute and required

students to track their progress on a personal chart. Ruth stated, "It really pushed them to

want to do better and to try and read more words." She shared this success with her

grade level team in hopes of adding it to classroom instruction.

Ruth was a member of several teams. Because she teaches math and reading, she

was a member of the literacy and math teams. She was also a member of the Response to

Intervention (RTI) team due to prior experience. Other team members were "based on

what you are doing departmentalized." She felt "everybody has some kind of input in some way on a committee." Ruth appreciated relationships with team members.

That is why I have stayed as long as I have, because I really feel like I have a support system around me, because some of the people I've worked with for a long, long time, and I just feel like they're very knowledgeable.

Sophia

Interviews took place in Sophia's classroom. Her detailed, organized room was arranged into learning stations. The center of the room consisted of four long blue tables facing each other with five blue student chairs at each table. Each desk had a basket to organize books and materials. Each chair had a seat pocket, an attached pouch for storage, with individual textbooks and notebooks. The teacher's desk, a blue kidney-shaped table with six small chairs and one larger green chair lined the left side of the room. On the right side of the room, Sophia created a computer area with four computers and a reading center with a red plush chair shaped like a hand and a bookshelf filled with neatly stacked genres of picture books. A whiteboard and mounted interactive projector hung in the front of the room. Storage cabinets, student hooks for book bags, and a sink with an attached water fountain lined the back wall of the room. The class turtle, perched on his rock under the heat lamp, seemed undaunted by my visits. Positive and instructional décor abundantly adorned the walls. Alphabet charts, reading goals, incentive and flexible grouping charts, word wall, GSE posters, examples of student work, and anchor charts for writing sufficiently illustrated the primary content focus of the room.

Sophia greeted me with a friendly smile and engaged in social conversation. Before starting each interview, Sophia intentionally and swiftly tidied the room along the way to the kidney table where we sat for our interviews. She sat poised, shoulders back, and hands rested in her lap. Sophia was a veteran teacher with over 12 years of experience in various grade levels: pre-kindergarten (PreK) through fourth grade. Sophia stated her teaching experience included three different counties due to her husband's profession, which caused them to transfer locations. Her first experience taught her which grade suited her the most. She reflected, "I started in fourth grade, and it was terrible. Then, I moved down to third grade, and it was not that great. Then, I moved down to first grade and kind of found my niche." The second experience was positive, as she taught in her favorite grade. This was Sophia's third year at the research site. She was hopeful to stay, because both she and her husband originated from this county, and she was comfortable in her school.

Sophia established early in the conversation her beliefs regarding the teaching profession. "I just think it's a calling. You just feel it. I mean I knew when I was in third grade that I was going to be a teacher." Following through on her young ambition, she taught English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies, and Science at the research site. Although she taught a variety of grade levels and content areas, she found her passion teaching reading. She emphasized, "Reading is my thing. I want to teach the kids to like reading and to enjoy reading." She was certified to teach all content areas PreK-5th grade, but found her "niche" in her current placement, despite it being "the hardest grade." The challenge of teaching students to read motivated her. "It's nice, because even though first grade is really hard, you see the most progress. It's just really nice to

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see them excited about their progress." She also loved the age of the students she taught, because they were able to absorb so much material in the short duration of one year. "I think that they are kind of just like little sponges. They still want to please you, and everything is exciting."

Besides the age of the student, Sophia valued team teaching with her math partner. In this setting, she was responsible for ELA curriculum, and her partner taught math for 56 students. Both teachers taught the social studies and science curriculum for homeroom students. She described benefits of departmentalization for students and teachers.

> I think it's good for the kids, because about the time that they're tired of me, they
> get to see someone else. I just think that since I like reading, and I like teaching
> reading, writing, and all that goes with it that makes me a better teacher. My
> whole world is focused around reading.

She explained specializing in one area afforded her an individualized teaching experience, which created a personal excitement shared with students.

Sophia emphasized a primary focus of the school was increasing student achievement, "just because we are a Needs Improvement school." She did not advise on math goals, because "I don't teach math, so I don't know." She responded to ELA achievement as a "push for data-driven instruction." She described progress-monitoring tools for reading used by all ELA teachers to monitor student progress. Sophia indicated student growth was the primary measurement of student success. The progress monitoring tools provided "a consistent measurement of where they started, and how far they're moving." To improve student achievement, Sophia implemented small group

instruction for struggling readers using strategies provided by the state-mandated reading mentor. She also used "formative and summative assessments in the classroom" to track progress.

The second school goal Sophia highlighted was a campaign to emphasize a "positive experience" at school. She discussed the roll of PTO in planning community involvement. "They've taken a really big role this year with a lot of things for us." She implied the long-established membership of the PTO facilitated support as "the ones who were in some of the lower positions are now in the higher positions." She explained her role in building positive communication with parents. She commented, "Parents don't know all the good stuff that is happening." Thus, she used text messages, email reminders, and weekly newsletters to report "all the cool things." She also invited parents to school with an "open-door policy." She expressed, "I feel that is a lot of what we've been working on this year. I feel like it is doing pretty well. I feel like people are welcomed."

Sophia described herself as proactive and comfortable in her current work environment of three years. She was a member of the literacy committee, which met monthly to identify and monitor areas of focus for reading initiatives using local and state data sources. Sophia also worked in partnership with grade level colleagues to create weekly newsletters and lesson plans. During weekly professional learning meetings, she shared classroom data, lesson plans, and instructional practices with teachers in her grade level.

Though she participated with her grade level team, she enjoyed working independently too. Being the only teacher on her team responsible for ELA enabled her

to work on her own time without interruptions of students or teachers. "Since I am the only one doing it, I can do it at home. I don't have to have team meetings with six other people who want to talk about soap operas or whatever." She noted, "I would like to collaborate with someone else and have some ideas, you know to bounce off of, but then again, I just like doing my own thing and working it out." She confessed her personality makes it hard to "let go of control of things" and "find good people that you can trust."

When asked to give a final reflection of her experience at the school, she shared, "I feel at home here. I feel like there is no one in the school that I would be hesitant to go to. I think all the teachers are really out for each other. We work really well together." Throughout the three interviews, she used the word "we" in describing her experience. The word "we" yielded an overall sense of team. She concluded with, "We all want what's best, you know, for the kids, and what's best for the grade level."

Wendy

Interviews with Wendy consisted of casual silence and straightforward responses. Each visit occurred during her scheduled planning time. I would enter the room and meet her at the round table where she sat surrounded by progress monitoring sheets, graded papers, and intervention resources. During the first interview, she coolly addressed the paperwork saying, "I am responsible for testing kids every two weeks to progress monitor and keep documentation on that." As I entered the room for each visit, she chatted with another faculty member. Those discussions involved scheduling, instructional, and academic concerns. As I learned, she served on the Better Seeker Team (BST) as an advisor to the principal, gathering and sharing insight and information from grade level

colleagues. She also led a curriculum team and served as a mentor and point person for questions.

The design of Wendy's room looked identical to other participants' classrooms with an interactive whiteboard in the front and storage cabinets, sink, and water fountain in the back of the room. Wendy arranged student desks in groups of four or five providing ample circulation space for teacher and students. Individual desks sat in isolated areas in the front and back of the room. These desks were reserved for a few students with behavior issues creating distractions for other students. A row of computers lined one wall along with a space for independent work that included shelves with books, games, and baskets of resources. Content posters, behavior charts, and classroom expectations displayed on the four walls presented information to support learning. A behavior chart with a color code system hung in the front of the room alongside a poster of classroom and school expectations. A green slip of construction paper positioned in a pocket with a name written across the front disclosed students' behavior. Green meant students met classroom and school behavior expectations. Other colors signaled inappropriate behaviors and consequences.

Wendy's educational experience did not begin with the traditional undergraduate educational program. She received a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and worked in retail management for six years. She decided to enter education due to the demands of retail management. She replied, "That is too many hours for me, so I'm going to look at education. . . .I have small kids at home, this is helpful to me, to be a better parent to them." She was hired for one year at the alternative school in the county

and "went through the Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (TAPP) to get certified in education." She described her rigorous training experience in the TAPP program:

> We did a portfolio. We had to go to RESA so many nights, so we would take classes. We had to do modules, we had to do field studies where we would go into different schools. We would still do student teaching. We had to have so many hours of doing so many things per quarter. We got extra observations, where the RESA people would come in on top of your administrators.

She described her determination despite the challenge of working full-time, completing coursework for a teaching certificate and master's degree, and raising small children. She was one of two participants with a master's degree.

In her 12 years of educational experience, Wendy talked about her jobs at various levels. She described her first educational experience in an alternative high school stating, "It was different leaving business, corporate world to come into education, and I'm put in alternative school." In this experience, Wendy developed positive relationships with "friendly people" who took her "under their wing." Following this experience, she took a position at the research site as a para-professional until she received a certified position in fourth grade. She shared her joy working with the students:

> I like the independence working with the upper grade and the middle/high school grades. I like being able to tell them what you need them to do and they just kind of go over there and do it, and you just kind of facilitate.

An administrative decision moved Wendy from an upper to lower elementary grade, a move she did not appreciate at the time. She shared:

I was either pregnant or miscarried, or something, that year. I was like, yeah,

maybe I do need to move down. Maybe that is less. At first, I was like, "Ugh,

really?" I felt kind of punched in the chest. But then, I was like, "You know

what? this is a good thing, let me go ahead."

This move turned out to be a demanding but positive experience for Wendy. It

challenged her to work with smaller kids, as they were more dependent on the teacher for

support than upper grades. However, Wendy believed she was "making the biggest

impact with the lower grades."

Wendy experienced self-contained and departmentalized models in various

combinations of subjects including all content areas; math and science; science only; and

math, social studies and science. She explained teaching science in a departmentalized

setting is her favorite classroom model.

I was able to do a lot more hands on activities with the kids. I had to learn one set

of standards. I did not have to teach everything and learn all of this for every

subject. That was probably my best year.

Teaching math in a lower grade required a new skill set. Wendy expressed the challenge

young students face learning "outside the box strategies" and the importance of grasping

foundational concepts. She confided, "It's been an adjustment, but we are getting there.

I am learning them, and they are learning me. I am trying. They're trying, and trial and

error, we are getting there."

Wendy described her school as a family whereby members put forth effort to

accomplish school goals. She emphasized, "Overall student success is what we are

pushing for." She made the point, "Reading and math are our primary focus. That is the

heart of learning." Administrators "spearhead" school initiatives pushed down from central office to improve academic achievement. She stated, "Everybody puts in their effort, but you got the different spearheading to help make the move smoother so it doesn't fall on one somebody." She described initiatives to improve academic achievement as "absolutely data driven." Wendy served as the grade level representative on the math team and Better Seeker Team (BST). She met weekly to present and analyze data, gather input, and inform decisions on teaching and learning.

Wendy's purpose for education was deeply embedded in her heart. Other participants described her as an "authority figure" for students. Wendy affirmed, "They just kind of respond differently to me versus some of the other teachers." So much so, teachers send students to her classroom for mentoring, which sometimes overwhelmed Wendy.

It gives more work to me. And then I feel like sometimes people get to kind of escape a little bit. I do not want to be the dumping ground, but ultimately, I want these kids to succeed. If putting them back with me, although I don't want these big kid numbers, is going to be what makes that kid move, then bring them on.

Wendy devoted herself to both the students and the community. "I just try to get to know all of my kids and parents. Being in the area, I hear, and I see, and I know certain things that it gives me compassion for some of the kids and their situation." Her commitment was reflected in her words, "I enjoy being here. A lot of things have changed since I originally started and it is an adjustment, a lot of stuff, but I like being here. I am right here at home. I'm from the county."

Naomi

The first interview with Naomi took place in the office conference room. It was a simple, small room nestled between the counselor and assistant principal's office. The room consisted of two mirrored windows and one table with six chairs surrounding it. The walls were painted a basic cream color and unadorned. Subsequent interviews took place in Naomi's classroom. Despite being the same size as other classrooms, the space felt large with only a few student desks, one teacher desk, and a kidney-shaped table in the front of the room. Naomi neatly organized materials in storage cabinets and baskets in the back of the classroom. The floor and desks were free of clutter and appeared pristine. Her back door faced the parking lot, and we laughed at her ability to park so closely and quickly be on her way after a day of teaching. She smirked and described the process of signing out in the front office as slowing her down.

During each meeting, Naomi greeted me with a congenial smile and warm hug. She graciously prepared the conversations with questions regarding the progress of the research and work-related interests. During interviews, she leaned in and rested her elbows on the table and folded her hands under chin as if expectantly waiting to share her experiences. She communicated with spirited facial expressions and hand gestures. Although interviews took place afterschool, teachers and children frequently interrupted our visits, as well as phone calls from parents, teachers, and family members. Yet, she never rushed to speed up the conversation but intently listened and thoroughly communicated.

Naomi worked in the county as a certified elementary teacher for 17 years, nine of those years at the research site. Her experiences included teaching first through fifth

grades in both regular and small group settings. She also taught a variety of content areas. At the time of the interviews, Naomi was in her second year of teaching upper grade small group reading intervention classes. In discussing her work experience with struggling readers, she revealed:

> Reading is my passion. It is something I have a lot of research training in. I love to teach a child to read. It is just something I very much enjoy, just the growth that you get to see, the exciting moments that you get to see in reading. I really enjoy teaching children to read.

Naomi described her commitment to teaching as "very Type A, and if I'm going do it and believe in it, I want to do it right." She spent time describing her philosophy of teaching reading and argued for a change in how students at-risk for failing reading receive instruction. She noted, "I have probably 12 years or more invested in guided reading and feel like it makes all the difference. It is your belief system. So, I'm a firm believer in guided reading."

Naomi provided details of the instructional model she used in the daily routine. She pulled six groups of 12 kids for 50 minutes from the regular reading class to provide early intervention services. She originated the idea and believed "it works better" based on data comparing last year's program model to this year. She responded, "In the past, we've always pulled just six at a time for EIP, and when you're going to third grade hall, and then the fourth grade hall, and the fifth grade hall, you're losing time. Thus, this year, she created a new model to pull more kids, "so it maximizes class time." She stated, "I like it a lot better. I think it works."

Naomi strategically crafted her reading intervention program using phonics and guided reading instruction. During a daily session, small group and independent learning took place. Six students engaged in computer programs based on individualized learning plans, and six students worked in a small group with the teacher on phonics and comprehension. After 25 minutes, the two groups switch stations. Her instruction included technology-based practice, independent reading, higher order thinking questions, and small group intervention. She checked student progress using school-wide tools every two weeks and once a month. She elaborated, "They're all making growth, great progress. So those are my two components within my lesson. I do my phonics, and I do the guided reading type style."

Naomi described two school goals, including increase reading achievement and implement Positive Behavior Supports (PBIS) to improve school climate. She explained her role in coordinating and accomplishing these tasks. She related the reading goal was to increase academic achievement by building fluency and comprehension skills. To increase scores on the Georgia Milestones assessment, she explained, "We do a lot of interventions to help with that. DIBELS is where we track our data. Then, we use that data to determine what we need to do in the classroom." Naomi served on the School-wide Assessment Team (SWAT), or the "DIBELS people." SWAT consisted of a group of teachers responsible for giving students benchmark assessments three times a year to identify students at-risk for reading difficulties. Naomi met with this team after testing to provide suggestions for interventions and placements for early intervention programs.

Naomi took student discipline seriously and helped improve school climate by increasing teachers' capacity for building "a more positive environment" for students.

Many of our conversations expressed Naomi's great interest in PBIS through her role as the PBIS coach.

> You have Mr. Tony, the administrator, and then me, and then we have a team. My role is to, number one, make sure that it runs smoothly in the building, make sure everybody knows their part and what they're supposed to accomplish, and to make sure everybody is comfortable with PBIS. I help facilitate all the meetings and prep all the stuff for the meetings. I am the one that goes back to the teachers to meet with them when decisions are made. I also bring the feedback to the group [PBIS team], if I get feedback from the teachers. I serve as a mentor person with it too, because classroom management is one of my strengths.

Naomi promoted the school's efforts to collect behavior data, including classroom and office referrals, and used it to communicate student progress. She explained the significance of using data to inform decisions regarding school climate goals. She stated:

> We track the data; we bring that data to the meetings and to the teachers. I'm the one in charge of making sure the teachers get their data once a month and try to encourage them to look at it. We see what's working and what's not.

Naomi shared leadership teams met regularly to examine data and determine target areas for improvement. Data informed decisions regarding effectiveness of teaching and learning programs. The data regarding academic achievement showed whether students met specific learning targets. Data also controlled perceptions of teachers' effectiveness in working effectively to increase academic achievement.

Naomi shared that teachers work in teams to make suggestions and achieve the same goal. She emphasized, "We all have the same mindset. We might not always agree

on the choices that we make, but we always manage to come to a center." Though she school goals motivated her desire to succeed, her mindset was mostly guided by personal, spiritual beliefs. She stated:

> I give glory where it is due. It's a prayer. I pray daily for these kids, for God to equip me, because I can't do this on my own. I am so passionate about wanting them to move. I just love it. I love what I do.

Shelby

In the beginning, Shelby appeared apprehensive, as a lack of reciprocal interaction between us created an awkward feeling. Though casual and friendly, she folded her arms across her chest and stayed at a greater physical distance. I thought I was not effectively communicating, perhaps I was, and making her nervous. I focused on positive body language, facial expressions, and feedback while maintaining eye contact. Yet, I still felt as though I made her uncomfortable as she spoke quickly with direct responses. She timidly ended conversations with "I hope I helped you," "Did I talk too much," and "I don't want to throw anyone under the bus." During the first interview, she confessed taping the interviews made her nervous. During the last interview, the uneasy feeling lifted as we had more personal interaction with discussion of family and upcoming events for the holidays. We discussed the perils of writing a dissertation and she boldly offered the encouragement, "You will get there. Once you are up again, it will be fine. It is just getting started." Our longest, most in-depth interview was the final interview, which described the push and drive of working toward school goals.

Interviews took place in Shelby's classroom. She divided the room into learning centers. The whole group section consisted of eight long tables divided equally on two

sides in the center of the room with rows of student chairs neatly tucked under the tables. A large, colorful rug centered in front of the room and facing the interactive whiteboard appeared empty without the students. A wooden rocking chair with a down seat cushion was positioned near the rug denoting a place for intimate story reading. The computer center, along the wall closest to the door, consisted of five desktops with headphones placed on the monitors. A kidney-shaped table with five small chairs and one adult-sized chair sat nestled between shelves of teaching materials and organizational storage containers. Shelby covered the surface of the walls with literacy-rich posters describing and illustrating expectations for behavior and academics. On the last visit, the rows of desks in the center of the room changed from eight to six. The principal hired a new teacher to alleviate overcrowding in the grade level after Thanksgiving. Shelby exhaled and confessed, "Oh my goodness what a difference! I did not know how overwhelmed I was until the new teacher. Just seven being gone has just made a huge difference."

Shelby's experience in education began in another county sixteen years ago. She took on the role of teacher in another Georgia elementary school halfway through the school year. She graduated in December and became a first-year kindergarten teacher in January. Similar to her current situation, the teachers were experiencing overcrowding in the classroom, and administration decided to hire Shelby to reduce class size. During her six-year stint in the other school, she met and married her husband of 12 years and had their first child. Shelby's husband wanted to own a lot of land. They decided to buy a home and property in the county, because it "was way cheaper." She commuted back and forth from home to work with a newborn baby for a year. Shelby reflected, "I got pregnant, and trying to commute with a new baby was just too much. We were on the

road all the time." Thus, she started applying in the county and surrounding area for an elementary position closer to the homestead. She admitted, "I got desperate there for a little while, cause I didn't think I was going to get anything."

Shelby was relieved when she got a call from the county to interview for a job. Yet, the intensive interview process tested her confidence. She endured an interview with a leadership team consisting of various system- and building-level administrators. She remembered, "I never experienced such a thing. It was a big board table full of people. I had all these people throwing questions at me." She anxiously called her mother after the interview, sure she would not be offered the position saying, and "Nobody wants me." The stress of looking for a job closer to home ended when the principal of the school called and offered a position the day of the "county interview." Shelby worked as a teacher at the research site "ever since," 10 years in upper and lower elementary grades.

Shelby expressed dissatisfaction with the decision-making process at the research site. In discussing her future in education, she stated, "I don't know if I'll make it. I might make it, but I don't know if I want to make it." She loved teaching and working with kids, especially younger kids. Yet, she discussed frustration with other people making decisions that prohibited her from working with kids in the way she perceived would best benefit them. She perceived data protocols undermined her skill as a teacher. She stated, "I'm not saying that I'm not getting data, but I don't know that I necessarily have to do it that way." She believed she knew where her kids stood academically based on interactions with students. Prescribed lesson planning and data protocols were "things getting in the way" of her focus on the kids.

Another challenge she faced involved previous administrators occasionally requiring her to change grade levels due to budget and enrollment issues. She began her journey as a PreK teacher at the research site. However, after three years, the administrator moved her to second grade, because she "cost them too much money" as a PreK teacher. She worked as a second grade teacher for two years before she was moved again to her current grade level. This move was caused by an increase in student enrollment. Last year, she once again worried about administrative decisions regarding placement. She shared her frustration, "I know last year before all the change happened, I was told I may be going back to second. I was going to do it but I was not happy about it. But you do what you're told." She described how the principal was new to the position this year. She described the new administrative team as relatable and liberal. She did not regard previous administrative teams in the same way.

In the first interview, Shelby debated on whether she wanted to continue in her current grade or move back to PreK. She favored her current position; however, she felt overwhelmed with the high enrollment. She expressed, "When I'm having a rough day, I like to just go see PreK kids. They're just figuring it out, and it is the funniest thing to watch." It is important to note a change in her perception following an additional teacher being added to the team due to enrollment growth. With a relaxed demeanor on the final visit, Shelby confided, "I feel a lot better. I hope they just leave me alone, because that is where I'm happy."

Shelby's role required her to teach four content areas to one group of students in a self-contained setting. She contended, "I don't believe they are ready to be flip-flopped back and forth. It is a lighter load, but for the kids, I don't know." Uncertain of the

details, Shelby described the school goals as increasing reading and math scores, especially in the students with disabilities subgroup. This involved monitoring student progress to determine students' growth in content areas. Shelby complained, "Because I am not departmentalized, I'm doing all the progress monitoring. It is so time consuming."

Shelby assured me of her effort in following protocols to increase student achievement. She provided a synopsis of the administration, scoring, and data interpretation for the progress monitoring protocol. She took me through the laborious process using a sample student. She perceived this data determined student success. She added, "We are watching to see if they're making progress through the progress monitoring." Shelby described her role as a member of BST. She represented the grade level by attending meetings with other grade level representatives and administrators to provide input and "create goals for the school improvement plan" and "be the spokesperson for different parts of the school." She explained, "We share with the faculty, during faculty meetings, and make sure anyone, who felt like we needed to make changes or anything like that, was(sic) free to express to their thoughts too." Shelby defined additional responsibilities on the literacy and math team as "working on getting data, to collect it...and making charts that displays(sic) our data." With a hint of sarcasm, she smiled and said, "When you're lucky to teach both, you get to be part of both like me."

Shelby disclosed personal beliefs regarding the school goals about academic achievement and the monitoring process. She stated, "I know where they are. I know what they need." She passionately compared her beliefs regarding student success.

Placing her hands over her chest, she pleaded, "My heart is on these babies. What I value as success is different." Shelby perceived success as watching a student grow on a learning continuum increasing in complexity throughout the year. Shelby also had a deep understanding for students' home lives. She avidly believed she leads learning for children of poverty; students deserve an effective and sincere teacher. She confided a reason for staying despite differences in opinion was to be an advocate for her students. Shelby acknowledged feeling "a little bit of pressure." Administrators focused on achieving passing scores, and "they don't think what these kids are going through at home." She believed student growth was significant but not the focus, and the focus was "all that matters." Her purpose for maintaining her position at the school emphasized another effort. She expressed, "I wonder what they go home to. They need good teachers. I mean I hope I am decent at least. You know what I mean. They just need love." She described her nurturing relationship with one student.

> I have got one that does not have a mom. His mom passed away a year and a half ago. At the beginning of the year, he kept his head down, he had his hood over his head, he did not respond. Now, he just comes up, hugs on me, and tells me he loves me. He gets clothes, he gets food, but Daddy does not give him the affection like a momma would. I think he just needed that.

Shelby expressed a heightened sense of resilience among the staff. She stated, "I think we all feel the pressure a little bit, maybe not as bad in my grade level. Maybe that is why I love staying here. I can't imagine how those teachers feel."

Kate

Interviewing Kate was a creative thrill as I sat in her classroom, which always had a unique project on display. Day 1, students exploded an apple. Day 2, students made Scottish bread. Day 3, students controlled robots with an iPad. She did not have student desks but large tables raised at waist-level for students. A kidney-shaped table with six student chairs sat along another wall. A computer station with six computers lined an adjacent wall. The computers offered students access to knowledge and multiple tools for presenting ideas. A bulletin board posted behind the computers consisted of four sections labeled self-discovery, research, communication, and word wall. The informal room design appeared to foster collaboration and community in the absence student desks and academic posters on the wall.

Kate described the structure of her room as abnormal, because she modified the classroom to provide individual choice and autonomy. Students created a personal workspace whether on the floor or at a table. Kate also provided customizable formats for displaying and representing information. Multiple representations of disheveled resources appeared crammed in baskets in the back of the room and on a shelf in front of the room. These print materials included books, pamphlets, magazines, artwork, and encyclopedias. Kate snickered and said, "I actually make them use encyclopedias. They hate it when I do that." The surplus of classroom materials dominated by textual information may indicate compensation for early shortcomings. In describing the beginning years of teaching, she commented, "The biggest difficulty was not having the resources that I needed." Kate's students do not encounter the same struggle as they were provided access to multiple means of information.

Kate provided challenging learning opportunities tailored to individual student needs. She spoke intuitively about barriers obstructing student learning. She was keenly aware of her students' unique learning styles. She shared an anecdote of a particular male student who is often misunderstood in a traditional classroom setting. She stated, "If you can let him work on his phone or a Chrome book, that boy will go at it." Kate described a typical day in her classroom as a journey and adventure. She suggested a problem and provided resources, including personal experiences and knowledge, for interpretation and representation of individual student learning. She reflected, "I want for them to be able to go on adventures to different places and learn about all the cool stuff they want to learn about." She described recruiting student interest in research allowing a group of students to investigate the filming location of Harry Potter. Some students worked alone, while others worked in a group to achieve their own personal learning objective. Kate invested personal funds to design these classroom activities to "guide children into learning."

Kate's instructional design evolved over the years. She described, "It is different than it was when I first started teaching." She began the conversation regarding her transformation by offering an expressive account of her first teaching experience.

My first year of teaching was at a very low-income school in Mississippi, and we had no books, no computers, no nothing. I went from having this huge dream when I came out of college that I was going to go into this room, I guess, that may be magically already decorated or something and clean and have everything that I need before me to teach very eager children. When I walked in, the windows were broken and dead roaches were everywhere and I had nothing, like nothing.

She described how students lacked reading skills. She confessed, "I did not really know how to teach a child to read coming out of college." Another challenge she faced "was not having the resources" to meet the demands of teaching. We laughed at her memory, "Let's get real, back in that day; the Internet wasn't really big either." For Kate, the first five years were characterized by a shortage of resources and inadequate teaching methods.

Kate gained experience in content knowledge and pedagogy after she moved to Louisiana and encountered her first professional learning experience. The administrators adopted a new reading program and purchased implementation training. Kate reflected, "I still to this day refer back to those trainings with Open Court, because they made it fun for the teachers. It was just wonderful. They gave me all the knowledge that I needed." During this time, Kate emphasized, "DIBELS was really big." She received additional training in how to assess critical reading skills, which deepened understanding of reading theory.

With a new confidence in reading instruction, Kate moved back to Mississippi in a similar environment as her first experience. It was during this time she encountered "a strange teaching experience" called "the scripted curriculum." Kate's reading instruction went from teacher led to a scripted program. Kate elaborated:

> You were required to read your script the night before and if you did not, they knew. They really did. They could tell. The whole school did this from kindergarten on up and the children were not allowed to speak or do anything without a signal.

The scripted literacy instruction positively impacted student achievement. Kate professed, "As weird as this curriculum was, these kids at this school could read and it was totally strange." The scripted program negatively impacted Kate's autonomy as a teacher. Kate continued to pursue professional learning despite limitations of a controlled curriculum. She attended training on student led instruction, which suggested teachers empower and engage students to discover learning based on personal interests in subject matter in small group settings. She also took a course on brain-based learning, which focused how the brain works to increase student engagement and retention of information. Kate developed a different reasoning using principles of engagement with the student in mind.

Kate left Mississippi with research-backed strategies and came to Georgia. Kate's new experience in Georgia recharged her passion for teaching. She proclaimed, "I'm putting it out there, and I'm more guiding them instead of up there throwing information at them. I'm making them find the information on their own." She described a typical day in her classroom as a journey, "like we are going on an adventure."

> This is where we are going to go and this is what we are going to do and this is
> what we are going to learn. I just try to get them through the journey, through the
> adventure and actually get them to learn something through it.

Kate's transformation to student-led instruction engaged students through inquiry and goal setting. She characterized herself as a facilitator of learning. She brought this idea into her teaching techniques. She believed in teaching students to "discover on their own." She supported students with sources of information and opportunities to work in

teams to accomplish a task. She explained her role was to ask guiding questions and craft

the context for the learning. In this way, students gained real world learning experiences.

Kate guided students along the way asking questions such as, "Are you working as a

team? Who is leading here? What's next on your plan here?" She stated, "They can do

it on their own, they just have to find it." It has not been an easy transition to "step away

and let the kids start teaching each other." She said, "It has been hard to let go."

However, through trainings on how to effectively group students based on similar

abilities, Kate was proud that "what they do is real, it is real."

Kate felt empowered in her role as a teacher. Kate taught in two elementary

schools in the county. She spent two and a half days at the research site a week. Her role

provided her with "a lot more freedom." She reflected:

> I remember back in the day, we used to have all these windows in the room in
>
> Mississippi. I remember I'd look out the windows sometimes like, you know if it
>
> is my break time or whatever, and it is like so gloomy. They did not put any
>
> flowers or nothing out there. I would sit there and think, is this what I am going
>
> to look at for the whole rest of my life? And I remember I loved that school, but I
>
> hated looking out that window. Is that like the strangest thing in the world?

Kate visited two schools, traveling "back and forth" between the locations throughout the

week. She believed her director found it the "strangest thing that she got this person to

come here and work at two different schools." For Kate, the empowerment to teach in

her own style made her happy. Thus, she was content in her position.

In her role, Kate does not "really deal with all the leadership people." She

claimed the principal as the one in charge of regular education teachers, along with the

instructional coach and assistant principal. In speaking of the role of the principal in making decisions, Kate quipped, "I hope so, if she doesn't, I don't know who else does." Kate moved beyond asking for permission with administration to liberally telling them her decisions. Past experiences did not allow this freedom. She reflected, "I remember calling in sick, and I would sit home and not rest all day long, because I was so scared that they were going to be so mad at me because of their attitude when I would call them." Because of this self-proclaimed freedom, Kate responded, "I'm the happiest this year that I've ever been."

Chapter Summary

This chapter included narrative profiles of the six participants selected for the study. Using narrative profiles allowed me to tell the story of each participant in their own words. Participants shared their perceptions of their lived experiences providing insight into research questions. I interviewed participants in classrooms during their planning time or after school. Classrooms consisted of either tables or desks depending on the age of the students. Kate has structured her classroom differently than other participants with a loosely organized seating arrangement and limited instructional décor. Along with other topics, participants shared thoughts on academic achievement, organizational structure, teamwork, and empowerment. A significant part of data analysis involved reconstructing interviews into narrative profiles to share discussion of the interview process.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF THEMES

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable resources, lack of improvement continues to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures (Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). This study addressed lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. The findings in this study may inform national policy makers, federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, regional and local education units on how to better structure schools using Covey's Maturity Continuum, allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to more effectively work together. Using qualitative methods, the researcher investigated teachers' perceptions and experiences in one low-performing Title I school in Georgia. In this chapter, I provide five analytical themes used to characterize the degree to which teachers understood their empowerment: (1) Simple Hierarchy: Chain of Command (2) The Decision-Making Process (3) The Nature of Teamwork (4) The Maturity Continuum (5) and The Human Resource Frame Themes emerged from a thorough examination of all data collected in this study.

Using the guidance of Maxwell (2013), the researcher divided teachers'

perceptions into two broad categories to identify and address themes. Theoretical and

substantive categories were the general codes used to retrieve themes from the data. The

researcher derived the theoretical categories based on understanding of prior theory

embedded in the research questions. Participants' beliefs were coded as a substantive

category, which included their "knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals,

and other interpretative perceptions of their lived experience" (Miles, Huberman, &

Saldana, pg. 75). Table 6 shows a sample of the matrix used to code data for data for the

concept of the centralized structure and subcategories. This matrix enabled the

researcher to organize thematic discussion pertaining to theoretical and substantive

categories. Interview and observation data provided information to address the research

problem by synthesizing individual perspectives and discovering what actually occurred

in a low-performing Title I school in Georgia. The following discussion presents an

integrated sketch of themes associated with the organizational structure framing teachers'

shared experiences.

Table 6

Sample of Data for the Concept of Centralized Structure

Examples of Themes within the Concept	Examples of Subcategories within the Themes	Sample Chunk of Data from the Categories
Responsibility	1. Principal selects roles. 2. Principal negotiates roles.	They just assigned us. (Ruth) Principal puts us in those roles. (Naomi) Looked at the pros and cons of moving to a lower grade. It is a good thing. (Wendy)
Authority	1. Teachers perceived simple hierarchy arrangement. 2. Power came from top-down approach.	She is the main person in charge. I know she has to do what she is told from the superintendent. (Ruth) It is sort of like a chain. (Sophia) Administrators make sure everybody's on the same page doing what we are supposed to do from things pushed down from the county. (Wendy) You have the administrator, and then me, and then we have a team. (Naomi) First person that would be in charge would be the principal. (Shelby)

Organizational Structure of the School

A blueprint of school structure was determined using emerging themes. The

structural configuration of the school was a large part of the design of the study.

Responsibility and authority are two central elements in structural design and

subcategories for the analysis of data (Bolman and Deal (2013). An empowering

structure often contains a hierarchy that helps rather than hinders individuals in an

organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Covey, 1992; Gray et al., 2015). This flexible

system includes arrangement of roles and synchronization of responsibilities. An

additional element is participation in shared decision-making. School administrators and teachers working collaboratively to resolve issues encourage perceptions of empowerment (Gray et al., 2015). The communication network tying it all together ensures harmony among the group (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015). These conditions relate to the degree of empowerment. Thus, the more organizational structure supports opportunities for teachers to develop capacity in interdependent roles, the more effectively they work together through shared decision-making and collaboration.

The figure below represents the school structure based on perceptions from the participants. Participants shared a sense of participation in school-based decisions through a supportive structural design. They described a collective belief in a formal structure as a means of collaboration and communication. This design includes regularly scheduled times for teachers to meet and a communication channel for exchanging ideas. Teachers do not feel powerless; as the structure is not so rigid they feel dependent, or controlled by administrators. Participants described limited access to the top levels of the hierarchy, which may explain individual missions based on organizational goals. The design may suggest departmentalization of content created by formalized roles encourages independency, as communication channels are vague between grade level and content teams. The school's model represents a modification of Bolman and Deal's (2003) simple hierarchy. This model adds a level to the hierarchy consisting of committees based on school goals. The lines show communication of information among the group.
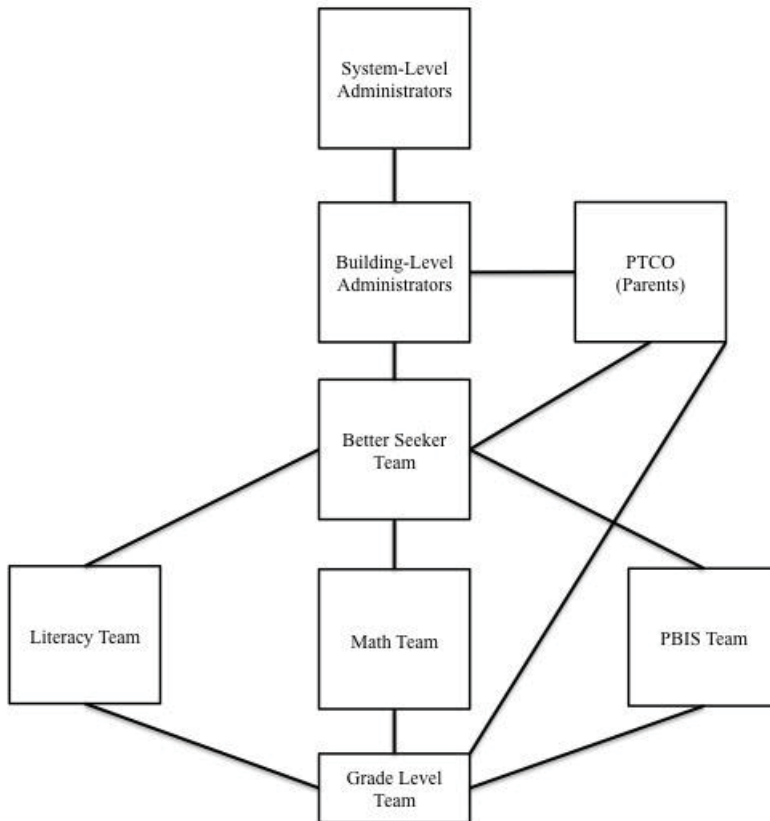
Figure 2. *Chain of Command*

Simple Hierarchy: Chain of Command

Participants described the organizational structure as a simple hierarchy, including vertical coordination of subordinates with district-level administration at the top, building-level administrators and instructional coach the middle, teacher leaders below administrators, and grade level teams of teachers at the lowest level. Thus, thematic discussion begins with the central issue of their group experience. Participants referred to this structural configuration as "a sort of chain." Sophia described the administrators' role. She stated, "Just to kind of make sure we are on our toes doing what we need to be doing. [Principal] and [assistant principal] come in and out of our rooms

all the time. And [instructional coach] actually too." Wendy provided details stating,

"Administrators are kind of making sure everybody's on the same page doing what we

are supposed to do from the things that are being pushed down from the county." The

"push" often described during interviews among the participants creates pressure among

teachers. In referring to the chain of command, Shelby shared:

> I think it's just a state thing. I guess it's a push, you know. I think it's just the
>
> pressure comes from the state, then the state goes to the county and then the
>
> county presses it on to the school.

Naomi described organizational structure stating, "You have the administrator, and then

me, and then we have a team." She also provided a variation specific to her experience

adding, "I'm the one that meets with [system-level administrators] when they come and

do walkthroughs. Basically, I'm the go between the central office and [assistant

principal]." Naomi also described the administrators as "very good at delegating." This

arrangement frees district-level administrators to focus on system goals while leaving

daily functional and overall success of the school to building-level administrators,

including principals and assistant principals (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Perceptions of Responsibility

The keystone of organizational structure is the allocation of job roles, also known

as responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Responsibility is one of the main elements of

empowerment. Allocation of responsibilities should be based on organizational needs

and expertise (Covey, 1992). Empowered teams are those using collective responsibility

to accomplish goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Leana, 2009). The level of responsibility is

an indicator of the degree of empowerment. At the lowest level, individuals lack task

specification and authority to make decisions (Covey, 1991). At the highest level, individuals communicate and connect with teams to work interdependently with little or no control from administration (Covey, 1991). Covey (1991) believed people work effectively when they are working interdependently.

One distinction of the schools' organizational structure is the allocation of responsibilities to individuals and groups. The model includes formalized practices to assign roles and responsibilities and synchronize work. This characterization may suggest centralized practices by administrators as a structural support for the organization. Participants spoke about the allocation of roles during the interviews. Participants shared how the administrator used formal authority to "assign roles and responsibilities without teacher choice." Except for Kate, participants shared similar stories of how the principal reallocated teaching assignments based on structural issues.

Wendy reflected on the administrator's decision to change her role in response to student enrollment and achievement. She shared, "Everything was going good at that time but then they started looking at the numbers." She described an increase in student enrollment in lower grades requiring additional teachers. The principal considered student test scores as a factor in role allocation and began "shifting everyone around." Wendy noted, "One teacher wanted to go but her scores were higher than my scores, per se, and so she ended up staying." The principal informed Wendy of the decision to move her to another grade level. To persuade Wendy, the principal offered "all the pros of going down to the lower grade, without the stress of SGP reporting." Wendy responded to the suggestion that moving to the lower grades would decrease her troubles.

At the time I think I was either pregnant, or miscarried, or something like that,

that year. I was like maybe I do need to move down. Maybe that is less. At first,

it was like, 'Ugh, really?' I felt kind of punched in the chest, but then I was like,

'You know what?' This is a good thing let me go ahead."

Wendy's description highlights uncertainty when organizations start to shift and formal

negotiations influence teacher perceptions of the environment.

In a similar story, Sophia described delegation of roles characterized by power of

authority. Sophia was "settled" and "comfortable" in her position when the principal

revealed her choice to move Sophia to another grade level. Sophia admitted, "I don't

really like change." The principal convinced Sophia she would be satisfied in a new role

stating she thought Sophia "would do very well." Understanding Sophia's passion for

reading, the principal further lead Sophia's thinking telling her she "would really be good

to transition now as we are adopting this new reading program." Sophia responded, "If

you think I'll do good, fine." In responding to the decision, Sophia admitted she misses

parts of her past experience but is content in her current position.

The principal also negotiated and bargained Naomi's move to upper grades using

trust as motivation. Re-framing the challenge as a "win-win" agreement is a technique of

interpersonal leadership involving mutual benefits (Covey, 2004). The principle of win-

win is fundamental to an interdependent level of empowerment. Following standardized

assessment, the principal proposed restructuring roles to place effective teachers in tested

content areas. With a pride and joy, Naomi recalled, "Then after seeing my test scores,

the principal asked me to go to a testing grade." Naomi ambiguously responded, "You

want me to go from first to fourth grade? Are you sure?" The principal responded with

"Just trust us. You got this." Naomi reflected with appreciation for the younger students. Like Sophia, she experienced contentment in her current position stating, "I can remember, after the end of the year, looking back thinking, 'Don't ever move me down.' I love the older kids." Naomi corroborated Sophia and Wendy's story in that the process for assigning roles is prescribed by formal authority.

Shelby also received multiple messages she would be changing grade levels due to restructuring of the organization. Shelby began her career at the research site as a Pre-K teacher. She perceived budgeting issues related to her certification, which "cost them too much money," caused her move out of Pre-K. She boldly confessed, "They kicked me out of Pre-K, put me in kindergarten, then they moved me to second." Teaching second grade students was good, because Shelby enjoyed their independence in completing assigned tasks and longer attention span. After two years, the principal told Shelby she would move once again. She perceived the move as a result of enrollment issues. She reflected on the move stating, "My numbers were too low, and [current grade level] numbers were too high." The uncertainty of changing roles recently challenged Shelby. She remembered, "I thought they were going to move me again last year, but I prayed enough and got my wish to stay." Shelby's underlying assumption was that the assignment of roles is steered by administrators.

Ruth has the most experience teaching in one role at the research site. Until this year, Ruth taught 14 years in the same grade level. She questioned the idea of moving to another grade level in conversations with her husband. She stated, "I had been thinking about possibly trying that." She also informally mentioned the idea to the assistant principal. Changing grade levels would be different. Ruth toyed with the idea of change,

though it made her uncomfortable. The decision was made for Ruth when the principal told her, "We are going to move you to [another grade]." Ruth believed the principal did not know about her thoughts of possibly trying a new grade level. The affirmation from the principal's directive gave Ruth peace that "somehow or another it was some connection" and that was where she "was meant to be."

Despite uncertainty of new assignments, participants described positive results related to organizational restructuring. Sophia and Shelby grappled with the idea of changing grade levels. Sophia stated, "I'd like to move down to kindergarten, only cause they have a parapro. But if I had a parapro now, I would just love to stay." Shelby suggested, "I've actually thought about going back. When I am having a rough day, I like to just go see Pre-K kids. They're just figuring it out, and it's the funniest little thing to watch." Naomi and Ruth also found security in their new positions. Participants transformed uncertainty into settled situations, which offers reasoning for effectiveness.

Administrators relying solely on position power to allocate responsibilities risk supporting conditions facilitating teacher empowerment. In this case, the principal used authority to assign roles, but used interpersonal skills to suggest mutual satisfaction with the decision. Participants described lack of confidence in the change. However, through the negotiation discussion, the principal convinced them to feel good about the decision and commitment to the responsibility. The combination of formal authority with interpersonal relationships may suggest an organizational structure aligned to the readiness and empowerment level of members of the organization.

Leadership Teams

In addition to grade level responsibilities, administrators also selected "leadership teams" and team members. These committees included a literacy, math, Response to Intervention (RTI), Better Seeker Team (BST), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) team. Participants corroborated the idea that administrators determine the selection of team members based on years of experience and current teaching position. Ruth stated, "They just assigned us." This statement may reflect high levels of formalization within the organizational structure. Assignments for the leadership team, known as the BST, are based on current position and seniority in the grade level. Shelby agrees with this idea stating, "I believe I was more than likely chosen for BST because I am the only one that has experience in my grade level." Like Shelby, Wendy perceives her role on the BST was determined by years of experience. She stated, "The BST was determined on maybe who has been here the longest or maybe most experienced in a grade." Sophia also believed seniority and experience played a role in her determining who serves on the BST.

Administrators determine members for other teams based on specialized content areas. The majority of teachers are departmentalized, meaning they teach in teams with either math or reading as their primary content area. Thus, teachers specializing in reading are assigned to the literacy Team. Likewise, teachers who teach math are assigned to the Math team. Self-contained teachers served on multiple committees. In response, Shelby commented, "Then you're lucky to teach both. You get to be a part of both like me."

Naomi offered a slight variation on administrators' selection of committee members. She agreed with other participants that administrators select members for the committees. Naomi explained an informal selection process observing the fit between individual and the larger group. She perceived the selection is based on "who they felt would fit well in those roles" rather than the hierarchal status described by other participants. She explained, administrators say, "These are the set of teachers we need on the literacy team, these are the set of teachers that would do good on the SWAT team."

Reliance on administrators to determine selection of teams is a natural beginning stage for creating self-managing teams with individuals at lower levels of empowerment and need for stability (Covey, 1992; Daft, 201; Miles et al., 2010). The principal's directive style in structuring leadership teams may suggest an early stage of team development that required establishing a system to support shared goals and objectives. Participants exhibited a range of empowerment levels from low (dependent) to high (interdependent). This range suggests members are becoming comfortable with individual and team responsibilities. The principal's formalized practices to determine job descriptions created uniform expectations and consistency among participants' stories.

Informal Roles Among Teams. Participants described a clear chain of command to coordinate work efforts, which is a component of hierarchal structure. In regards to teams among the organization, participants explained specialized roles for some members of the team. Team leaders perceived themselves as communicators. Other group members perceived themselves as collaborators achieve tasks. A teacher leader, selected by administration, is responsible for ensuring the team's ability to meet regularly and

communicating team decisions to administrators. This structural option is an example of a centralized flow with an emerging level of empowerment. This level of empowerment creates a hierarchy of authority with some flexibility and negotiation in the decision-making process. Administrators use direct authority to choose teacher leaders to serve an informal role as facilitators and consensus-builders among the team (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In this structural configuration, teachers perceive team authority in negotiating decisions via a centralized network.

Naomi was the designated leader for the PBIS team. She played a critical role in communicating information, increasing acceptance of decisions, and challenging the PBIS team. She fosters productive behaviors by collecting and monitoring data to ensure optimal implementation of the PBIS plan. Naomi described goals as the PBIS coach. She stated, "I make sure that it runs smoothly in the building, make sure that everybody knows their part and what they're supposed to accomplish, and make sure that everybody's comfortable with PBIS." She is responsible for "facilitating all the meetings and prepping the meetings." She takes pride in coaching others to act as a "positive reinforcer" by observing teachers using a tool, which compares the number of positive to negative statements.

Naomi described the hierarchal network of communication. When decisions are made by administrators or the PBIS team, she "goes back to the teachers to meet with them." If teachers offer suggestions, she brings "the feedback back to the group." Naomi perceived a high level empowerment in her role as she influenced team members to contribute productive behaviors and communicate suggestions. In this structural frame, empowerment includes keeping teachers informed and encouraging participation. A

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missing structural consideration may be that teachers lack authority to push the team to greater challenges because of misleading security in formalization of roles.

Administrators also selected teachers to serve on the BST team. Naomi, Shelby, and Wendy explained the nature of communication in the organization. Participants voiced an opinion in decision-making, but described how decisions are returned to the BST and administrators for final choice. Wendy stated the BST meets once or twice a month with the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach to receive information regarding the school improvement plan, program implementation, and concerns. Wendy stated that each BST member "is assigned a group of people to share the information." Wendy and Shelby communicate information with their grade level through informal meetings. Wendy reflected, "I share and then I take their questions and concerns back to BST." She described BST members as the "spokesperson for different parts of the school." Participants often described this task as "collaborative planning." The simple task of communicating information through lateral dealings and communal feedback may suggest a formal structure of work among the team and low level of empowerment.

Role of the Instructional Coach. The instructional coach is a visible leader acting as a figurehead for a variety of initiatives. Wendy offered a description of the instructional coach's responsibilities stating, she "is kind of all over everything, so she's real organized with putting stuff on paper and documenting stuff. She keeps a lot of stuff going, spearheading." Shelby named the instructional coach as one of "the three biggies."

Participants perceived the instructional coach as a level below the principal with authority over others. Common responsibilities between the two women involved observing and directing teachers, analyzing assessments, and directing goal setting. The instructional coach's role is considered authoritative, much like the principal and assistant principal. Ruth added the instructional coach assigns duties along with the principal and assistant principal. Kate positioned the instructional coach as a supervisor stating, teachers "have to go to the instructional coach or maybe even the assistant principal and then principal." Wendy corroborated the idea stating, "We actually go to the instructional coach. She would be the instructional lead teacher. So, she would be the go to about everything without going to the administration. You know, principal, vice principal." The instructional coach also observes teachers with the principal and assistant principal. In discussing teacher observations, Wendy positioned the instructional coach with the administrators stating, "they're constantly in our classrooms." The difference rests in the fact that the instructional coach "was in the classroom before she was promoted." Teachers perceive the instructional coach as someone with shared power built into the formal structure of the organization.

One primary role of the instructional coach is coordinating school improvement efforts in the area of academic achievement. Naomi suggested the instructional coach determines data collection schedules and directs weekly meetings to analyze student results. Participants spent time discussing these regular meetings under the direction of the instructional coach. During these meetings Sophia described how the team works with the instructional coach to determine "how to keep the kids moving, what to do with those kids who aren't moving, things like that." Likewise, Naomi shared, "Every other

Wednesday it's a requirement. We have a grade level data talk meeting with [instructional coach], and then we go over data." The quote "with [the instructional coach]" came up frequently during interviews. These meetings are a critical protocol for focusing on the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Participants also described the instructional coach as fundamental to the success of the school. Ruth believed the instructional coach is a "huge asset to me as a teacher." In describing the instructional coach, participants did not directly state she was on the same level as the teachers. Yet, they often described situations in which they sought her counsel on decisions, especially in the area of reading. Participants sensed a relationship based on lateral backing and encouragement. Shelby perceived the principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach as "real personable." She also stated that she does not "think anybody feels uncomfortable going and talking to them." Naomi began her career teaching in the same grade with the instructional coach. She compared herself stating, "I'm very data-driven, just like [instructional coach]." The instructional coach told Naomi "how impressed she was" with her kids on test scores. This compliment encouraged Naomi, strengthening her confidence in the work.

The Decision-Making Process

Empowering leadership involves sharing authority with others and raising their level of autonomy in decision-making (Lorinkova et al., 2013). Giving teachers' autonomy, or control, to make organizational decisions is a self-governing practice known to encourage individuals to take action and enhance team performance (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Lorinkova et al., 2013). Leaders encouraging autonomous decision-making trust in the competency of teachers to contribute opinions and

suggestions and significantly influence organizational outcomes. The reversed process is

heteronomous decision-making, which implies a leader acquires input but ultimately

coerces others to comply with directive decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Lorinkova et

al., 2013). Teachers are treated as powerless members of a team as leaders exercise

greater control over school management and resources (Bolman & Deal, 2013). School

leaders promote effective organizations when teachers are trusted to exercise independent

judgment (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Short, 1994, Somech 2003).

Participants defined the organizational decision-making process as an alliance

among leadership and teachers (Daft, 2013). The alliance facilitates information sharing

among administrators and teachers. Administrators talk to leadership team members to

gather insight used for making balanced decisions. They agreed on bargaining decisions

when logical solutions to individual or team-based problems are communicated to

leaders. Leaders then agree or disagree to the solution as an individual course of action.

Wendy described a concern her team shared with administration concerning a shortage of

light outside the lunchroom area. This "simple concern" was discussed at a BST

meeting, and "by letting them know, it was able to get fixed and now teachers feel a little

bit safer coming in because it's light out there." Participants agreed they shared input on

decisions through standardized procedures in their assigned leadership team. This is a

false sense of empowerment, as they did not perceive shared authority for school-based,

"leadership decisions."

A reason for the alliance may be that administrators intend to facilitate

empowerment but function with limitations regarding access to power in decision-

making. Ruth commented the principal makes "all the decisions" for the school, but the

principal is told what to do from the superintendent. She shared, "I know that she is the main person in charge." Sophia agreed responding she was not responsible for making final decisions. She perceived this to be the responsibility of administrators, including principal, assistant principal, and instructional coach. Naomi described administrative decisions as "set in stone." Thinking through issues and problems with others empowers individuals to act and is evidence of independent behaviors. This is a major achievement shown to improve performance of the organization (Huang et al., 2010). However, dependent conditions exist when individuals feel compelled to ask for answers or rely on the one-boss to make decisions (Covey, 2003). This arrangement is not an indicator of an empowering structural design.

Participants provided a look into their typical work routines, including mandated instructional practices. Two language and literacy specialists serve the school by providing research-based practices for improving academic achievement. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) funds these specialists. They are a part of the initiative to improve failing schools. Participants discussed training, which included techniques from the "GOSA lady" to help achieve the school goal of increasing students reading on grade level. The GOSA specialists select, train, and monitor literacy strategies designed for the organization's needs. Teachers are required to implement the strategies and monitored twice a month by the specialists. The mandates of the program limit decision-making by teachers, as they cannot bargain to build a balanced agreement. This dependent interaction places another link in the hierarchal chain of authority. This dependent condition may suggest teachers cannot choose to work effectively together under directive processes.

Participants agreed on contributing ideas in the decision-making process. Administrators share information and gather feedback regarding school-wide initiatives through grade level meetings. Participants perceived false opportunities for empowerment. Wendy scoffed, "meeting, meeting, meeting." Teachers participate in weekly meetings "concerning the school or grades." The grade level representative from each team "collaborates" with other team members by sharing data and discussing solutions regarding school improvement. Shelby provided a summary of this school-wide process:

> The BST team got together and kind of helped create the goals for the school improvement plan, but then the faculty, during faculty meetings, it was shared with them too, and made sure if anyone felt like we needed to make any changes or anything like that, they were free to express their thoughts too.

This process afforded teachers the opportunity to "share different input about how students are growing, what's working, what's not working." Ruth believed that the process "makes everybody feel like they have a say so, or some kind of input, instead of just having one group that does it all." This may suggest the principal's strategy to negotiate win-win agreements. The principal established equity through standards and procedures of the decision-making process. Participants shared compliance with the coalition, which reduces confrontational tactics and encourages momentum (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This procedure uses independent standards, such as motivation and satisfaction, to make teachers feel good about the decision. The win-win approach is one condition of empowerment (Covey, 2004). However, the principal has yet to transfer real power to teachers.

Participants perceived a voice in the decision-making process through grade level meetings with BST leaders. In some cases, concerns are brought to the administration through the BST, but teachers do not receive a desired outcome. Wendy and Sophia voiced concern over scheduling recess in the morning. Yet, morning recess remained in the schedule. Participants discussed concern over serving breakfast in the classroom. Administrators held the decision to continue despite disagreement among the teachers. The quality of communication between teachers and administrators suggests an improper alignment of organizational and personal needs. Administrators designed conditions to push down patterns of behavior to shape school success. Teachers are completing organizational tasks with a machine-like efficiency. Participants shared the same methodical decision-making process using protocols "passed down from the district." Teachers are required to fit in this style via formal rules and requirements.

Teachers are given some voice and sense of empowerment by sharing information in team meetings, thus creating a superficial satisfaction. Individual preferences are discussed but only on a personal level outside the structural configuration. Sophia perceived empowerment when she asked administrators to prevent cereal with milk in her class during breakfast, because she "didn't want milk all over" her room. The principal changed the meal plan so that her students receive cereal bars instead of milk and cereal. Perhaps, hierarchal lines of communication are creating breakdowns by shaping socializing effects among members of the group. In teams, they accept the alliance for decision-making but do not approve on an individual level. Perhaps rules for dependency on administrators for authority in decision-making change when independent needs arise.

Naomi and Kate provided the highest personal level of shared decision-making. Naomi perceived it as "a few teachers in the building allowed to be leaders." Both Naomi and Kate claimed freedom in making decisions. Naomi stated, "The assistant principal gives me a lot of freedom to make decisions. He gives his input, but he does give us a lot of freedom to voice our opinion." She also explained an experience where she wanted to change the demographics of the small group setting. She thoughtfully presented her idea to the administrators and remembered "I was a little nervous at first, because if it doesn't work, they were going to come back to me." This sense of failure may suggest insecurity in diverging from the hierarchal nature of work. Administrators approved the change, and Naomi believes "It has maximized class time" and "benefits the kids more." Naomi's fear of accountability may also reveal another aspect of the principal's win-win strategy. Naomi was self-evaluating using data outlined in the school improvement plan. Thus, Naomi understood the goal of improving reading achievement and created a performance agreement to meet it.

Kate also described freedom in her position to make decisions. She described a different fit in the style of the organization. She worked independently in her role but discussed interpersonal competence with the principal. This came from a personal preference of moving from "not really asking," to "I'm telling you."

> I went in there and I said, 'Ms. [Principal], I just want to let you know I'm going to another school today. I've got to set up over there.' And I forgot about the meeting with my son. I left out of there, walked down the hallway, went back, I said, 'I forgot to tell, I also have to leave early and go to this meeting with my son, and she was like, 'Okay, that's okay.'

She believed this freedom is the root cause of her happiness in her position. Her elevated sense of efficacy may suggest high levels of empowerment. She brought this position into her teaching techniques. She believed in teaching students to "discover on their own." She supported students with sources of information and opportunities to work in teams to accomplish a task. She explained her role is to ask guiding questions and craft the context the learning. In this way, students gain real world learning experiences.

The problems and solutions require "a lot of community effort on everybody's part." Wendy described the decision-making process as "kind of like a partnership." When problems are programmed in the social process, leaders rely on agreement norms for major decisions. Amongst the teachers, Shelby expressed various roles associated with access to decision-making power. When a need or concern arises, teachers agree that they can access other teacher leaders for support and/or "bring up suggestions or concerns." They feel like they "always have someone to go to and talk to for extra support on something or ideas." Leaders do not have the capacity to manage all information pertaining to decisions (Daft, 2013). The participants shared leaders gather information when organizational performance is at stake. Often, decisions go through the hierarchal process and ultimately ending with leaders making the decision on which problems to invest in and solve. However, participants revealed an independent level of empowerment investing trust in fellow teachers to make them feel more powerful and able to take action on their own.

Nature of Teamwork

In the following section, I focus on the nature of teamwork among the teachers influencing how well they work together. The concept of self-managed teams has been

associated with teacher empowerment and commitment (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Dee et al., 2003). Participants grabbled with confidence in collective power, sharing feelings of both commitment and compliance. The level of empowerment influencing how teachers work together affects commitment (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; McDermott et al., 1996). Individual and team perceptions revealed challenges in establishing a balance in a system with varying degrees of authority. I analyze the strategies they used to organize self-managed teams, take personal responsibility for the outcomes of their work, manage and control their own performance, and take the initiative to help others improve.

Working relationships among teachers are developed to achieve commitment towards a common goal (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The common goal among participants was increasing academic achievement based on standardized test scores. Participants described a clear structure of responsibilities and authority for carrying out tasks related to this goal. Team teaching was used to organize the teaching environment (Dee et al., 2003). Each grade level consisted of two teachers, one for math and one for reading. Team teaching naturally created a group of individuals with similar disciplinary backgrounds. Understanding participants' perceptions of team teaching provided insight into the level of empowerment through participation in teamwork.

Common Commitment or Compliance

A subcategory evolved providing insight into teachers' ability to effectively work together. Commitment towards shared goals is an attitude strengthened by disciplined, working relationships among members of a team (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Covey, 2004; Hampton & Gruenert, 2008). Structural components, including clearly defined roles and

frequency of interaction among members, combined with shared goals and team commitments are foundations for effective working relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2012; Leana & Pil, 2006). Senge (2006) compared committed and compliant attitudes. He described real commitment as feeling fully responsible for actions leading to success of goals. Compliance is accepting the vision and responding to expectations. Perceptions related to how individuals interact with one another to achieve common goals may suggest whether they are in a state of genuine compliance or commitment. The difference between commitment and compliance is key to determining the level of empowerment. Low levels of empowerment are characterized by compliant behaviors in a hierarchal structure. An empowering structure consists of individuals freely choosing to do whatever it takes, even changing the rules, to accomplish a common goal (Senge, 2006).

Teachers in a state of compliance play by the rules defined by leaders and social contracts (Senge, 2006). Participants described and agreed on the division of roles based on grade level position and years of experience. Sophia stated, "We kind of work together just because our children are more similarly aligned." Teachers do what is expected pertaining to grade level expectations. Wendy elaborated, "I do the math and Sophia does the reading." Shelby confirmed, "We have one teacher for reading and one teacher for math." The majority of meetings are focused on content, decreasing frequency of interaction among all teachers. Participants let it be known that they are only responsible for the defined role. Both Shelby and Ruth contended the lack of flexibility to crossover roles makes them feel a "little less part of a team." Bolman and

Deal (2013) caution leaders on excessive autonomy as this may cause people to feel isolated.

Though separated by content, participants perceived a common goal is to raise academic achievement, particularly increasing the number of students reading on grade level. Ruth stated the common goal is to "get students reading on grade level and increase the number of students who are exceeding on the Georgia Milestones." Wendy corroborated Ruth's feedback saying, "Overall, just student achievement. We are making sure the kids are getting what they need, and that we are teaching the standards." Participants shared similar stories of actions for carrying out tasks to accomplish the goal. The guidelines included teaching students using assigned practices, monitoring student progress with common assessments, and meeting with team members to determine if set expectations were met. These actions may suggest conditions of compliance as participants followed a clear, cohesive set of procedures defined in a mental model presented by administrators.

Compliance is also demonstrated in perceptions pertaining to consequences resulting from branching out the guidelines. Shelby mentioned her desire to change the instructional routine. With some bitterness, she described the process of asking permission from the instructional coach to change the rules. She stated, "we asked, and they told us we could." This statement came on the heels of her describing discontentment with "people trying to tell me how it should be done." Other participants validated Shelby's opposition to the process with underhanded comments of compliance. Kate shared a story of "sneaking around cooking in the classroom." Wendy confessed, "We all kind of lean on each other, because every time we get new administrators, their

thinking changes and how the school is ran." Participants often commented on disapproval of mandated choices after the audio recorder was confirmed off.

Sophia and Naomi added additional goals they perceived as part of the school-wide vision. Sophia included, "We are trying to build a better perspective of what we are doing in the county." The marketing campaign includes directives from the superintendent to push more positive messages into the community through social media and face-to-face interactions with parents and community members. Naomi agreed with Sophia regarding creating a positive experience. Naomi perceived genuine commitment towards improving the climate of the school through positive strategies. She feels empowered to create rules associated with the school-wide PBIS initiative. She added a school-wide goal is to "go from punitive to positive, trying to build a more positive environment for students." As participants develop their own sense of vision, conflict may arise, or they may settle for compliance.

Accountability

Members of effective teams hold themselves collectively accountable (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Covey (2004) defined accountability as "standards of performance and time of evaluation" (p. 183). The systematic procedures delegated by administrators created a clear, mutual understanding of accountability measures. These clear expectations are another example of the win/win negotiation strategy of the administrator. Participants agreed on the common approach for accountability and held themselves responsible for the data collection and review process. They followed a collective action plan to remedy the problem of low academic achievement. The perceptions of the participants revealed conflicting beliefs between collective and individual approaches of accountability.

Holding the Team Accountable. Participants described attitudes and actions

towards achieving the common goal of improving academic achievement. Participants

described a common "push" or "drive" to increase academic achievement on state

assessments. They agreed the experience includes a data-driven, "overload of data,"

process with specific and measurable performance goals using school-level assessments.

Wendy implied, "The data is what drives it. So, ultimately that is how we determine if

students are being successful." Shelby confirmed Wendy's feedback stating, "It has been

a lot of just sharing data and making charts that displays our data. It seems to be the big

push." Naomi further described the plan of operation pertaining to data collection and

review.

> So we progress monitor with DIBELS, math and reading. We do that every two
>
> weeks. Then we use that data to determine what we need to do in the classroom
>
> to build upon that.

Shelby discussed the time it takes to complete "the requirements." She admitted, "It has

taken me the whole week just to get one progress monitor on them. And I mean, I have

used all my small group time."

Participants described a culture of assessments, using the term data-driven. They

determine success by student test results on state standardized tests. Progress monitoring

probes are given weekly to determine whether students are achieving success. Naomi

explained data is used to determine what teachers "need to do in the classroom." Wendy

shared, "The data is what drives it, so ultimately that is how we determine if they are

successful." Shelby shared her perception of a data-driven culture.

I feel like the focus is so much on the data, and getting the testing and everything, that I spend so much of my time just testing, when I could be really working with them on what they, I mean, I know you need data, but I don't know that we need as much.

Shelby also confided that the focus is only on "doing well on the Milestones. That is the focus and that is all that matters." Shelby and Wendy revealed student achievement based on standardized testing is "pushed down from the county." Wendy commented, "Data driven, yes ma'am, absolutely data driven. Overload of data." Ruth commented, "You're expected to perform miracles and you know it is just not going to happen."

Participants also discussed concerns regarding time to administer data and meetings to review data. Naomi replied, "We gather data. We look at our data. We discuss it as a team. It is very difficult just because none of us have the same planning time." Yet, she stated, "It is a requirement. We have a grade level data talk meeting with [instructional coach] and we go over data. During the meeting, teachers fill out a form on Google Drive, which is reviewed by administrators and central office staff. The progress monitoring efforts were created as a formal rule to monitor academic achievement and teaching practices. This may suggest administrators push teachers to care most about school needs (data) rather than personal needs.

Holding the Individual Accountable. Participants shared a common approach to hold the team accountable for improving academic achievement. They also pinpointed an individual approach, an empowered decision shared among the teachers but outside the formal guidelines of teamwork. A recurring theme in the data was student growth. Teachers were compliant with the data-driven, school-wide vision of student success.

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Wendy grappled with "you don't want to say through the data but really through their Milestones results." Shelby stated, "What I value as success and what someone else might value as success is different." A performance decision made by participants revealed an individual level of empowerment. Participants agreed upon a shared commitment toward student growth. This empowering decision came from learning the value of individual student success. Shelby believed student growth is more important than passing a standardize test and provided a description shared by other participants.

> If they're in the fourth grade and they're reading on a Kindergarten level, they're
>
> not going to pass the milestones. But they may jump up to a third grade level, but
>
> they still aren't going to pass the milestones but look at that growth they made.

Naomi corroborated this appreciation stating, "I get to see their growth, to see how they're gaining." Similarly, Sophia described her appreciation for local assessments stating, "It is more of a consistent measurement of where they started, and how far they're moving." Ruth described a push for students be on grade level at the end of the year, especially in reading. She gave her perceptions on what should determine success stating, "I really think progress is what we should be focused on."

Participants believed student growth measures provide important information on academic achievement. Likewise, Kate shared advice this advice.

> That's what we need to realize as teachers. It's okay that that group, it doesn't
>
> look like this group, and that's okay. And I bet that group is still proud of what
>
> they did, and they did something.

The idea of student growth is an example of a shared contract created interdependently by the teachers. Each participant described this norm as necessary for understanding

academic achievement. For empowerment to flourish, teachers must maintain the existence of shared group norms. Interdependent dealings among individuals to shape organizational behavior are evidence of empowerment.

High commitment practices and collective accountability are necessary for teachers to effectively work together (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 2003). In their organizational structure, participants described individual commitment towards accountability in their content area. Perceptions of working effectively together involved meetings to share data in an effort to assess the "program." Participants shared insight pertaining to their individual content areas but did not connect this performance to the collective effort. They often stated, "I don't teach that subject so I don't know," or "I can't speak for Math, because I don't teach it." The lack of commitment towards collective accountability may suggest a need for restructuring teams to strengthen team-level ties between reading and math content (Leana & Pil, 2006).

High commitment practices and collective accountability are necessary for teachers to effectively work together (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 2003). In their organizational structure, participants described individual commitment towards accountability in their content area. Perceptions of working effectively together involved meetings to share data in an effort to assess the "program." Participants shared insight pertaining to their individual content areas but did not connect this performance to the collective effort. The autonomy of individual work efforts may suggest a need for restructuring teams to strengthen team-level ties between reading and math content (Leana & Pil, 2006).

Communication Networks

Strengthening interactions with others at work fosters effective teamwork. Frequent and boundless opportunities for interaction are necessary conditions for empowerment to occur. The hierarchal network of the organization may contribute to teachers being torn between dependence and empowerment. Participants accepted lines of authority as traditional principles of organizational design. Administrators and instructional coach are in direct contact with team leaders. Teachers interpret information and communicate ideas via team leaders or the instructional coach. There are limited lines of communication among all the teams prohibiting connections throughout the organization. Multiple connections, or all-channel network, distribute information more freely enabling shared decisions among groups and roles (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Communication among team members is another structural factor related to effective teamwork (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Leana & Pil, 2006; Mendan, 2012; Song, 2011). As previously discussed, teachers participated in a system for accessing information including leaders attending meetings and sharing feedback to team members. Interview data pertaining to communication were included to develop a networking model among teachers. A recurring theme involved lack of information flowing freely among the participants. Sophia reported, "I don't know about all the grade levels. I'm hoping everybody else is like that too." Naomi commented, "I'm not on the literacy team, but I can speak for the PBIS team." She also stated, "But I have not gotten feedback, so I don't know what they're doing as far as how they're implementing it and making changes and things like that. Shelby corroborated this feedback stating, "I just

got a email the other day that said this is our vision and this is our goal and I read it, but I don't remember it. I'm going to be honest with you." With communication flowing freely up and down the hierarchy, administrators are able to monitor performance (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As an unintended consequence, teachers are isolated and working independently to comply with accountability measures (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Daft 2013). True independence, as reflected in communication of the student growth norm, empowers teachers to "act rather than be acted upon" (Covey, 2004, p. 58). However, independent thinking alone will not empower performance in teams. To achieve maximum team effectiveness, interdependency is a level of empowerment cultivated by purposeful relationships.

Relationships

Relationships are at the center of how well teachers effectively work together. The most effective way to interact with members of a team is truly working interdependently (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 2004). The foundation for effective interdependence is a structural configuration enabling unique patterns of interaction. Participants previously described team teaching. Teachers with similar skills work collectively towards a common goal using performance measures as evaluation (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Now, participants highlight informal ties, which impacts interdependent interactions to encourage empowerment. Participants equate other colleagues as "team players" and "family" who care about one another. Wendy shared her thoughts on relationships among teachers. She stated, "I think here at this school everybody is really, truly like a family." She characterized the environment as a "family setting." Members of the family "agree to disagree and move on."

Participants may feel like family, because the principal, in a formal position, encourages participants to show kindness. She sent weekly reminders through email of the "importance of being kind to one another." The principal also provided quotes during faculty meetings and bulletin boards around the school. Kate expressed, "when you're made to feel like you're cared about, you want to go to work more." Naomi shared the same belief. She stated, "I feel like people really step up here and try to be personable as much as they can even in the midst of chaos."

Participants proclaimed they "work well together." Wendy believed that communicating and collaborating "brings everybody together." Sophia described the relationship among her grade level team.

> All three of us are good team players, willing to contribute and work towards the good of the whole grade level, not just let me shine, let you shine. Let our whole grade level shine, because then it shows how everybody's working together. So, I think that's pretty nice.

Participants often shared thoughts of relationships among the team in the context of grade level teams rather than the organization as a whole.

Trust Agreements

Trust links the other attributes together to build and cultivate relationships (Byrk &Schneider; Harris, 2014; Pil & Leana 2009; Schlechty, 2009). From relationships flow agreements between members of the group (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Participants shared trust issues among team members. Sophia admitted, "You have to be able to let go of control of things, and I have trouble with that." With some uncertainty, she described her relationship with her partner teacher. She consistently checks her partner's paperwork

for accuracy, often reassessing students despite correct efforts. In this way, she feels she

can meet with parents and provide accurate information and "personally say I tested your

child and this is so." Criticism may demonstrate lack of trust.

Shelby offered a wary experience in seeking permission to try a new schedule in

her classroom. Shelby believed the new schedule would benefit students by providing

smaller groups for instruction. She brought the suggestion to the instructional coach to

acquire permission. Shelby reflected, "I asked [instructional coach], and she told me we

could do it as a trial run. If we figured it worked, we could keep it that way." Shelby

described frustration with "people trying to tell me how it should be done, when I know it

is not the right, exact way to do it." Shelby discussed trust among administrators. While

discussing the pressure of data-driven results, she commented, "If I'm not showing

growth, they're going to not want me." Some uncertainty exists among teachers whether

administrators will change their grade level. However, administrators were not readily

discussed in any of the interviews, except to provide structural characteristics of

responsibility and authority.

Other times, participants provided some evidence of trust building strategies.

Treating others with the same principles that you wish to be treated enables trust (Covey,

2004). Wendy provided a story where she gained empathy for teachers of other grade

levels. She stated, "Before I thought, 'All you're doing is reading books. That is not

hard.' You just have to kind of open your eyes." Naomi found trust among the team in

shared norms. She lamented, "We're all in the same boat. We are all overwhelmed and

tired, but kindness can go a long way. Just remember don't try to change something you

can't change." This approach may change the nature of the relationships raising the level of trust.

The role of the empowering leader is to facilitate self-managing teams moving individual members from dependent to interdependent behaviors (Covey, 1991; Green, 2000). The discussion on the nature of teamwork defined a system used to by teachers to take action and accomplish shared goals. The model suggested effectiveness is considered in terms of team teaching as individuals meet to share knowledge and obtain feedback on performance. Autonomy is passed into the hands of administration. However, empowerment does appear in a collective commitment towards student growth. In their description of the work they are doing, participants revealed conditions hindering effectiveness, including lines of authority and communication. They may desire a restructuring of teamwork allowing for authentic autonomy using characteristics of self-managed teams to acquire and sustain empowerment.

Level of Maturity

I analyzed the degree to which teachers are empowered using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric (Covey, 2004). This model consisted of three levels of maturity identified as dependence, independence, and interdependence. I used a team sports metaphor to shed light on perceptions of maturity and relate findings to Covey's Maturity Continuum. Like the Maturity Continuum, a structural progression occurs in sports from baseball (individual), football (independent), to basketball (interdependent). The nature of teamwork among members was compared using the nature of the game. A structural profile based on what the team is trying to accomplish captured participants' perceptions of team structures. The role of teacher and principal were compared using the role of

player and coach. The pattern of interaction among team players and with the coach was used to compare teachers and administrators. Team members working interdependently are considered more empowered than players working dependently or independently under the coach's control (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The decision to use the team sports metaphor was made to help participants interpret perceptions of empowerment in relation to organizational structure.

Using Bolman and Deal's (2013) description of team configurations, I asked participants to select a team sport analogy to identify a level of empowerment. The three sports included baseball (loose connections), football (individual effort tightly synchronized), or basketball (flowing relationship among team members). Participants identified with one metaphor and described how the nature of the game compared to their experience. I used these metaphors to make a strange concept, the Maturity Continuum, familiar to participants.

Baseball was described as an organized team where individuals are often left alone, separated by distance and loose connections. Though individuals are working independently in baseball, this sport was used to compare the dependent level of the Maturity Continuum. As in baseball, a dependent level of empowerment is the lowest level of the progression characterized by a one-boss arrangement and simple coordination of team members. The nature of the game is not particularly empowering, because roles are routine and repetitive (Dee, 2013). The illustration below represents the structure of baseball.
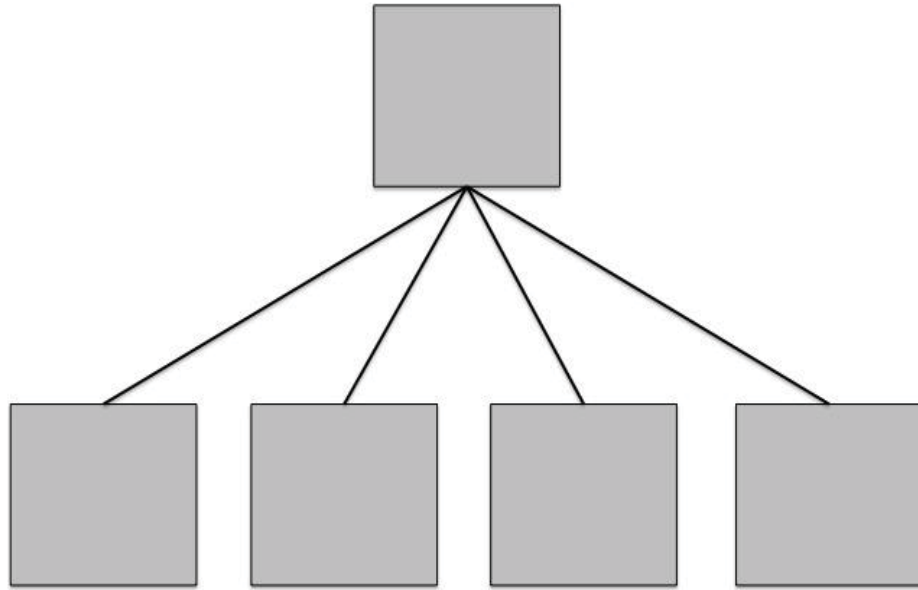
Figure 3. *One Boss.*

Football was used to compare the independent level of empowerment. The structure of football was described as individuals tightly synchronized. Players achieve goals through a prearranged plan controlled by top-down commands from coaches. Individual stars could be created based on skill in one part of the team. Players perform in close proximity, but the arrangement is a simple hierarchy limiting access to all members of the team. Authority is top-down command with the head coach at the top followed by coordinators and coaches. The independent level of the Maturity Continuum resembles the nature of teamwork in football. At the independent level, teachers are working through sequential relationships, like sequenced plays in football, under direct authority of an administrator. Independence is the foundation for the next level of the progression. It is during this stage, teacher learn to act without being acted upon. They are individually producing results in a team formation. The following figure represents the nature of teamwork in football.
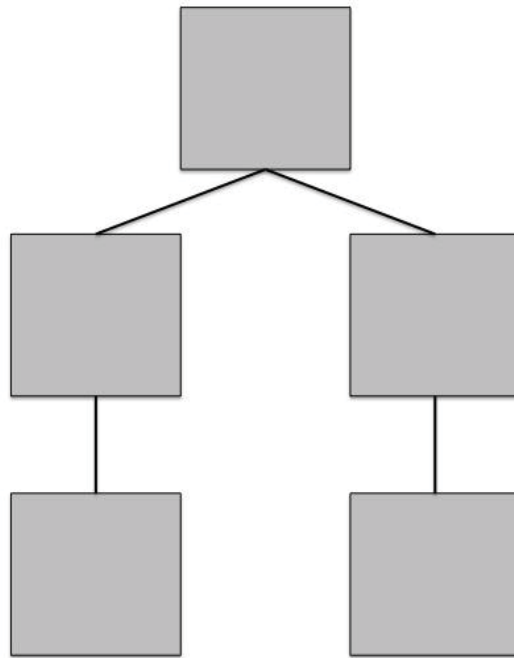
Figure 4. *Dual Authority*

Interdependence is the highest level in the Maturity Continuum. I selected

basketball to represent the interdependent level based on the nature of the game.

Basketball was described to participants as an interdependent group with freedom to

make quick decisions. The coach periodically intervenes to reinforce team cohesion and

negotiate efforts (Bolman & Deal, 2013). True interdependence is the progression from

individual efforts to collective potential (Covey, 2004). Likewise, a successful basketball

team requires an all-channel network of communication to score a goal. Team members

anticipate each other's moves and act in response to a harmonized effort. These habits of

effective interaction develop interdependence. Interdependence is a condition of

empowerment known to improve performance (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Chen et al., 2007;

Covey 2004; Lorinkova, 2013). The following figure demonstrates an interdependent

network.

Figure 5. *All-Channel Network*
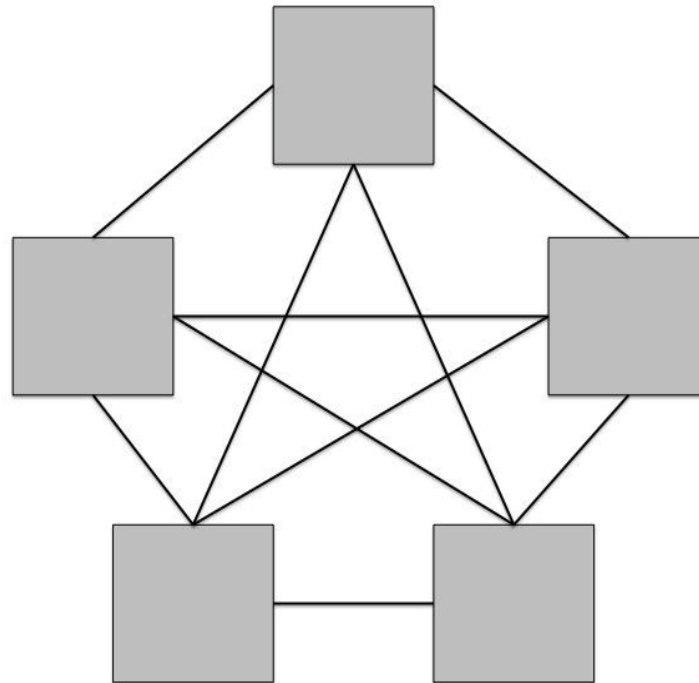
Baseball

      Dependence is the lowest level on Covey's Maturity Continuum (Covey, 2004).

Individuals are dependent on the supervisor for access to information, resources, and

decisions. Success is accomplished through efficiency as individual members of the team

complete specialized tasks in isolation. The concept of dependency is used to compare

traditional school structure where formalized procedures and centralized power control

interaction among teachers. Baseball does not equate to the dependent level, but it does

offer a comparison in the loose connections created by the nature of teamwork. Players

are distanced among each other on the field and only a few ties at a time are required to

make the play. Decisions are made on an individual basis pertaining to fixed rules.

Players are influenced by dependent relationships for support in accomplishing goals. Likewise, the autocratic leader discourages meaningful interactions restricting the level of interaction among teachers in a dependent structure. Teachers do not have legitimate control of their professional lives in a dependent structure.

Participants did not identify with baseball to describe their nature of teamwork. Naomi expressed, "definitely not baseball. I don't feel alone or that I'm out here drowning by myself." Though participants did not name baseball, perceptions provided some insight into dependent experiences. Participants commonly discussed intellectual efforts as an example of student dependency. Kate described frustration when teachers constantly used gifted students as a support system for underperforming students.

> It is not really good to put them in a group with a bunch of lower children even
> though that's easier for the teacher and for everybody else because the gifted child
> is made to do all the work. And it's not fair for the gifted child.

In this experience, Kate perceived dependency as counting on others think through problems.

Participants described individual teacher dependencies, such as needing another teacher to discipline students and complete tasks. Sophia explained teachers send misbehaving students to Wendy. She recounted, "I will say that everybody else on this hallway, this isn't really fair to her, but sends all their misbehaving kids to her." She also inferred she was pleased the new teacher was not "dependent on us" in locating grade level resources, because she shares them using Google Drive. Wendy also commented on the new teacher stating, "So, we all have to collaborate with her, because we've been still doing the plans and she just kind of picked up and added in where she can until she

kind of gets familiar with everything." Participants perceived dependency as needing

help. Even if a teacher's dependence required additional work for another teacher,

participants voiced support until the other person can take control or accept the dependent

behavior for the good of the group.

Participants shared less patience with students displaying dependent behaviors.

Ruth discussed a challenge with her students being "so dependent on you." She agreed

with colleagues who told her, "They're not going to be to do anything." Participants

perceived dependent behaviors as a weakness. A common perception was that students

in upper grades were less challenging to teach, because they "were more independent."

Sophia agreed, "Second was a little bit better, because they're a little bit more

independent." Wendy stated, "You tell them what to do and they just kind of go over

there and do it." Participants shared some value in dependency concerning personal

worth. They find a level of satisfaction in "innocence and nurturing." Both Sophia and

Shelby described a desire to return to PreK for the opportunity to feel loved by younger

spirits.

Football

The next level of the Maturity Continuum is independence. Independence

"empowers us to act rather than be acted upon" (Covey, 2004, p. 58). Conditions of

independence include isolation of teachers due to limited communication networks and

specialization of roles. Football is used to explain this structural configuration. The

actions of independent groups become the starting point for the next play on the field.

These plays are directed by top-down control. Likewise, an independent level of

maturity reflects individual teachers working to do their part for the success of the

organization. Teachers may work in teams but only in their specialized role. Success

comes by the integrating the efforts of each team in advancement of the same goal.

Ruth, Sophia, Wendy, and Naomi identified teamwork through the football

metaphor. In their opinion, the nature of teamwork is characterized by synchronized

individual effort and shared responsibility. Sophia reflected, "I wish we were more like

basketball, but I have to say football, just because we don't switch. I am the only one

who teaches reading in [grade level]. So, I really don't have anyone I can go to." She

shared, "everyone is doing their own things that they're trying to manage." Working

independently has "it's good points and bad points." Sophia admits, "I kind of like doing

my own thing." Naomi identified football as the sport most like the nature of teamwork.

She stated, "We kind of flow the same way. We work together and do a lot of the same

things and think a lot alike. We work really good together." A common theme from

teachers included the idea that they "work well together."

According to Wendy, teamwork involves everyone's effort to get "children to

learn and to progress forward." Wendy corroborated Sophia's perception of football

responding, "My main focus is math. We just have to focus on that one main thing, so it

works for me. Everybody does have a position and you are expected to play your role."

Wendy also believed in the metaphor of basketball acknowledging, "Even though my

title might say this, you have to be flexible and wear many hats. You have to cross over

to something else to reach your greater goal." She restated that the collective goal of

student achievement is achieved by "everybody doing their own thing."

Teacher perceptions of students are also compared using the continuum of the

sports metaphor. Wendy shared stories of personal appreciation for students who work

independently. Wendy stated, "I like the independents. I like being able to tell them what you need them to do, and they just kind of go over there and do it." Ruth shared a similar perception in that she "likes the independents and working with the upper grades."

Basketball

The highest level on the Maturity Continuum is interdependence. Interdependence between team members and leaders exists when power is purposefully balanced to enable mutual commitment to organizational goals. Interdependence is a condition of teacher empowerment characterized by combining talents and abilities to increase capacity for organizational performance (Covey, 2004). The leaders role is to disperse authority, which encourages individual and collective responsibility for the work. Basketball coaches understand this idea of getting things done through interdependent relationships. As an interdependent sport, basketball requires a flowing relationship among all team members. Players are individually anticipating the moves of teammates and quickly making decisions to adjust outcomes. Teachers identifying with basketball recognize "working together can accomplish far more" (Covey, 2004, p. 59).

Kate and Shelby identified basketball as the nature of teamwork. Shelby selected basketball based on the position of players. She was not a part of the team teaching structure of other grade levels. She sensed being part of both a grade level and content team. She stated, "Everybody has their own position, but we all want the same end goal." Shelby elaborated, "We all want the end goal for students to succeed and progress. We all have to work together to make that happen." She defined teamwork as "working on breaking down progress monitoring data." Individual teachers bring data to the meeting

to decide "who was proficient and who was in progress." She believed planning lessons on the same subject required collective effort. Shelby voiced, "I don't know if we were departmentalized I would feel as much like part of a team. Teaching the same thing and working together with the same lesson plan tends to help us stay united."

Kate also selected basketball to describe the work arrangement. She related the discussion on the nature of teamwork to her students. Kate has perceived her role isolates her from "the leadership and regular ed people." Therefore, she used her students as the emphasis for teamwork. Kate organized students into small teams and encouraged them to use reciprocal communication to accomplish tasks. Kate facilitated learning by "guiding students instead of throwing information at them. The kids remain in groups and learn from each other." Kate shared it was hard in the beginning for students to establish an interdependent team structure. Students would say, "We need help." It troubled Kate to watch students struggle with decisions. She believed passing the demand onto students taught them how to manage themselves including planning work and taking action. She stated, "Let them think. They got through it as a team, and they did it without my help." Kate looked beyond the typical school arrangement to encourage interdependent habits.

The Maturity Continuum was used in this study to measure the degree to which teachers are empowered to effectively work together. An empowering school structure is a helpful system facilitating interdependent behaviors, including the distribution of responsibility and authority (Covey, 1996). The level of empowerment is measured from simple (dependent) to complex (interdependent) structural configurations. The level of maturity may suggest conditions impeding organizational performance (Covey, 1996;

Gessler & Ashmawy, 2016; Short, 1992). The nature of teamwork was based on participants' perceptions of collective responsibility and authority. The team sports analogy offered models of teamwork along a similar progression from low to high empowerment. Teachers identified the level at which they perceive their empowerment in relation to organizational structure. These discussions offered insight into the level of maturity and conditions of empowerment influencing what was happening in the workplace.

Empowerment and the Human Resource Frame

This study used Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame to examine how organizational structure influences how teachers effectively work together. Structural conditions such as task specialization, shared decision-making, and networks of communication facilitate teacher empowerment. Decisions made jointly through collaborative planning improve work outcomes (Somech, 2003). The majority of data collected through interviews emphasized the design of the organization. Participants recurrently shared a data-driven commitment supported by leadership.

Academic emphasis is a structural condition known to positively contribute to academic achievement (Gray et al., 2016). It refers to the extent to which a school climate is driven by the quest for academic excellence" (Gray et al., 2016). A school climate with a strong academic emphasis reinforces behavioral changes regarding good use of data. Collecting and sharing information pertaining to productivity and success influences positive collective beliefs. Teachers set high, attainable goals, and students work hard to achieve mastery. The opportunity to learn through these self-managing practices positively impact teacher empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2013, Gay et al.,

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2016). An empowering organizational structure enables teachers to meet and collaboratively plan to develop interdependent teaching roles.

Administrators and teachers focused on learning using data to inform decisions pertaining to academic success. The push for data-driven accountability was a daily reality for the participants. Along with structural conditions, participants shared a collective belief influencing empowerment not pertaining to structural conditions. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested leaders use multiple frames to defend against "thrashing around without a clue about what you are doing or why" (p. 21). After collecting and analyzing the data, I discovered participants pointed to another perspective in their ability to effectively work together.

The human resource theme emerged from the data overlapping the structural approach. This perspective is focused on "what organizations and people do to and for one another" (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Supporting human resource conditions motivates teachers to perform interdependent tasks giving them the energy they need to succeed (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The central idea of the human resource frame includes empowering leadership that aligns organizational and individual needs. A "good fit" is necessary for individual teachers to acquire job satisfaction and for teams to acquire collective talent and capacity (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117). The quality of relationships reveals how satisfied teachers are at work. Specifically, the motives behind teacher's behavior, or core values, offer insight into relationships with other teachers (Chen et al., 2007). Although participants shared varying degrees of empowerment, they all advocated for putting "kids first" as core individual and team motivation.

Listening to their conversations, participants often shared softer stories regarding their love for students. They discussed the perceived perils of teaching in a data-driven culture with a powerless energy. They seemed to tolerate the formalities of task roles to get the job done. As one participant told me, "We might not always agree on the choices that we make, but we always manage to come together." Pertaining to low achievement scores, Shelby added, "We are just trying to get our school to be out of red. We want to be out of red." After discussing the "growing pains" of adding new assessments, Sophia commented, "It is not fun, but I mean, if it is going to help the kids, then you do it." Naomi corroborated this statement with, "They may not want to, and they may complain, but at the end of the day, they'll do it." However, the fit between the individual and organization was inefficient to something larger than themselves. Participants felt more connected when discussing the tender side of teaching pertaining to empathy and advocacy for students.

Their perception of students described how satisfied they were at work. While discussing the struggles of teaching, they would often return to their purpose of helping students learn and grow in a safe environment. With a big, familiar grin, Ruth shared, "I love the kids." The voice in their authentic stories were important to express how teachers formed relationships with students to fit individual styles of teaching. Kate shared this story of teaching her students.

> Some kids you already know, it doesn't matter what you do, you could do a flip
> for them and they're still going to look at you like, I don't want to do work. But,
> as a general rule, when you sit there and you just have a little conversation with

them, they'll let you know, and that's how you know. They love you. They do. They do.

Wendy's involvement in the community where she lived and worked was a noticeable, interpersonal competence among her colleagues. She had compassion for the students, because she knew a lot of what was going on in the home and community. She shared these words to describe teacher behaviors necessary for success.

> You can't be stuck and complacent as I'm just your teacher. You have to have compassion for these kids. You have to understand that this is somebody's child. This is the best that they got. It's not like I'm holding my best at home. You get what they have. And that may mean that your stepping out of your comfort zone and be the doctor, be the counselor, be the talker, or whatever that kid needs at that time.

Naomi, also a leader in the building, provided mentoring for positive behavior and reading interventions. She spoke emphatically regarding pressures of teaching pertaining to accountability. She equally shared personal relations with students and the meaning shaped by these interactions. She stated boldly, "These kids have known me so long that I've built a relationship with them." Shelby believes she has stayed in education, because "I want to be with these kids, because they need good teachers too. They just need love and someone loving to work with them." Patterns of beliefs revealed teachers' enthusiasm for building relationships with students.

Accountability challenges threatened individual preferences. Participants sensed administration, building and system level, were blind to the interpersonal journey necessary for effective teaching. This imbalance created pressure shaped by centralized

decision-making. A controversial issue, participants shared conflict between student-focused versus data-focused. With her data notebook spread open on the table, Naomi claimed, "I wish that someone would recognize that it needs to go back to the kids. Kids need to be the focus, not finances, and not this program, and not this test." Sophia desired to focus on individual student preferences. She explained, "I didn't feel like I was working with the whole kid. You're just so focused on I really, really need this kid to pass, because this is reflective of me as a teacher."

As individuals mature in their level of empowerment, conflict intensifies (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Participants noted areas of interpersonal tension with administrators. Naomi suggested, "Everybody's just tired and overworked, and that is where some of their passion is getting squashed." Shelby alluded to some level of discontentment when she declared, "I love the kids though. It is not the kids." The socializing effects of participants created a visible line of individual and organizational preferences. Participants reflected a strong view of human relationships as a source of effectively working together. The perception that administrators ignore their individual need revealed signs of confrontation. One participant stated, "I don't want to get fired." Another stated, "I don't want to get anyone in trouble." The maturity of teachers may be growing at the individual level, but the level of empowerment as a collective effort may be lower as a result of the private response to authority (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Lightfoot, 1986).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the perceptions and experiences of six teachers in a low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school. Findings centered on five major themes, including (1) Simple Hierarchy: Chain of Command (2) The Decision-Making Process (3) The Nature of Teamwork (4) The Maturity Continuum (5) and The Human Resource Frame. A chain of command consisted of administrators controlling the decision-making process through a channel of communication. This communication network was comprised of lines of authority beginning with administrators who push down decisions to teachers. Input regarding decisions flows back up the channel, but administrators were the ultimate decision-makers for the school. The inability to make meaningful decisions was a behavior related to lower levels of empowerment. Teachers displayed independent levels based on Covey's Maturity Continuum. The chain of command with limited access to power sharing may have contributed to teachers' independent thinking, as they worked in silos to achieve personal victories.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

Introduction

After years of investing considerable amounts of effort, time, and other valuable

resources, lack of improvement continues to persist in Georgia's Title I elementary

schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures

(Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld,

2015). The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers are

empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an

identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school using Covey's Maturity

Continuum as the metric. The findings in this study may inform national policy makers,

federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation

programs, and regional and local education units on how to better structure schools using

Covey's Maturity Continuum, allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to

more effectively work together.

There are seven sections of this chapter to describe results developed from this

study. Following this introduction, the research questions are answered based on

perceptions of the participants. The researcher determined five themes to create a

theoretical framework for deeper analysis of the data. These themes supported answering

the research questions. After answering research questions, the researcher interprets

findings based on the conceptual framework from the literature. Three interpretations

describe meaning in the scope of the study, including long-term structural configurations linked to teacher empowerment. Next, the researcher presents strengths and weaknesses of conclusions, including issues of transferability. The next section describes theoretical implications for positive school structural changes as appropriate for the organization and the individual practitioner. After providing implications, the researcher explains limitations to trustworthiness that arose from execution of the study. Succeeding limitations, recommendations are suggested for further research grounded in the strengths and limitations of this study. Finally, the researcher provides a conclusion, a bottom line message, to capture the essence of the study. This chapter suggests meaningful literature offering better choices for teachers to meet individual and team needs and support overall endurance and effectiveness.

Research Questions

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

Perceptions of the life and career experiences of teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school convey the context and clarify intentions of the participants (Seidman, 2006). The researcher came to know the participants through their personal experiences leading up to current working conditions at the research site. This information was valuable to understanding the process and context through the participants' voices (Seidman, 2006). Categories were developed based on individual profiles and review of the research pertaining to experiences in the teaching profession.

Years of Experience. Teaching experience is positively related to academic achievement as measured by standardized tests (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). The number of

years' experience among the participants totaled 87 years. The lowest number of years' experience was 12 (two participants) and the highest number of years' experience was 17 (one participant). Teaching experience alone does not influence academic achievement. Teacher effectiveness increases at a greater rate in empowering school structures (Gay et al., 2016). However, compared to teachers with fewer years of experience, more-experienced teachers are increasingly effective at improving academic achievement (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ladd, 2013).

The majority of participants' experiences were at the research site. Wendy shared administrators changed more than members of the staff. This encouraged teachers to bond together. Both Sophia and Naomi instructed teachers on an instructional strategy during a professional learning meeting. Kate was the only teacher who described professional learning experiences outside the school. She perceived these learning opportunities as critical for improving teaching practices. She did not feel confident to use those strategies until coming to the research site and teaching in isolation in a specialized field. Her autonomous perspective gave the conversation a feeling of independent empowerment. Other participants described professional learning as directed by system or building-level administrators. They mainly shared contentment, but results suggested participants perceived a better plan than the one directed from top down authority.

Wendy and Ruth teachers are teachers who received professional degrees outside of education before deciding to teach. Wendy earned a degree in business administration. She initially wanted to teach business but changed her mind after taking an elementary paraprofessional position. Ruth perceived her psychology degree helped her "work with

children" to understand socializing behaviors to build better relationships. Both teachers taught at the research site, since earning an education degree. Their stories added an enduring perspective with a shared wisdom rooted in a place of comfort.

Kate and Sophia had the least experience at the research site. They both taught over nine years at other locations. At the time of this study, Kate had one year and Sophia had three years at the research site. Kate's teaching method differed from the other participants. Her instructional strategies included student-led learning stations and self-discovery lessons. Sophia and other participants described a similar teaching style consisting of teacher-directed instruction, flexible grouping for remediation, and assessments aligned to school achievement goals. Though they came from different backgrounds, they shared an emotional connection to the teaching experience.

Teaching Certification. All of the participants were certified teachers. Kate was the only teacher with initial certification outside of Georgia. At the time of the study, Kate entered her first year as a certified teacher in Georgia. Previously she obtained certification in Mississippi and Louisiana. Current education policy outlines specific criteria used to evaluate effective teachers (Plagens, 2010; Schuster, 2012; Stichter et al., 2009). Certification status is a variable of teacher quality impacting academic achievement. At the simplest level, schools receive funding based on indicators of highly qualified teachers including number of teachers holding a clear, renewable Georgia certificate teaching in their field of certification (Hourigan, 2011). The presence of a highly qualified teacher does not increase the likelihood of teacher effectiveness (Smith & Gorard, 2007). However, the collective years among participants deserved

consideration as researchers included appraisal of teacher quality as a vital component of organizational success (Goe & Stickler, 2008; Looney, 2011).

Collaboration. Working in isolation is an obsolete phenomenon in describing effective teacher performance (Daft 2012; Greenwood & Miller, 2010). Participants described working in isolation relative to job descriptions. Sophia stated, "It would be nice to have ideas to collaborate with someone to bounce off of." Human capital is based on individual capacity to add value to the organization's overall success and includes attributes of teacher quality (Pil & Leana, 2009). Participants described individual capacity impacting organizational effectiveness, including response to data-driven and lesson planning protocols. Participants perceived greater meaning in working collaboratively to improve academic achievement.

Collaboration among teachers increases the likelihood of organizational success (Schlechty, 2009). Several participants defined collaboration as meeting with team members to review and discuss lesson plans and data sources. For example, Wendy discussed, "We collaborate, at least weekly, to talk about stuff and go over lesson plans." Protocols created by system-level personnel ensured teachers "do a lot of the same things in the sense of they gather data." Participants were influenced by expectations, or possible rejections, of team members. With some vulnerability, Sophia stated, "Luckily, we are doing the lesson plan tuning, because if not, am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?" Feedback from weekly meetings reinforced a sense of security (Short, 1994). The belief teachers collaborated during scheduled meetings implied a formal structural configuration influenced perceptions of a low level of empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Family. Participants described functioning as a family taking pride in their traditions. They valued the person more than just another professional. Naomi stated, "Always remember who the person is." Encouraging one another during difficult times strengthened the family bond among the team members. Participants had the responsibility to "check on one another." Wendy shared this tradition possibly derived from a high turnover rate in administration. Teachers leaned on each other to cope with changes in administrative "thinking."

Another tradition involved valuing students as "a whole kid" not just a standardized test score. Meeting the emotional needs of students was "the heart of teaching." Participants shared the importance of improved academic achievement, but they emphasized student comfort and happiness with the sincerest look in their eyes. They joked about sharing stories of "having this kid," but the bottom line was working together for the love of kids. Despite the school vision to raise academic achievement scores, participants believed student growth indicated real student success. They sensed an "unrealistic battle" in raising student scores influencing accountability measures. Shelby did not understand the expectation "to perform miracles." However, participants believed, with a "blessed assurance," accountability should be based on a student growth score.

A final tradition included the importance of mentoring new team members with personal success stories. In meeting with a new teacher, Wendy told her, "I did it this way and this really worked." Sophia shared, "Maybe you could do X, Y, and Z." Being new to the grade level, Ruth explained how her partner teacher helped her with lesson planning, because she "felt like a fish out of water." The bond among team members was

strengthened by a shared devotion and compassion for students. Most participants agreed the family atmosphere persuaded them to remain at the research site.

Self-Managed Teams. Researchers described self-managing teams as an interdependent group with collective authority and responsibility of managing tasks (Dee, 2002; Stoker, 2008). Members in self-managing teams uniquely characterized with an organic, bottom up structure, typically perform better than traditional top-down control (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Dee, 2002). Teachers on teams at the research site did not have collective discretion to select content, schedule classes, group students, or choose assessments. However, participants perceived control to make decisions pertaining to grade level teams including classroom goal setting, role specialization, and discipline to complete tasks.

Though the principal selected specialized roles, teachers perceived managing themselves in their team teaching, or grade level, group. These groups consisted of two or three teachers. Administrators assigned specific days of the week for meetings using protocols to encourage participation. However, team teachers also met, informally after school, because "planning time is filled" with formal meetings. In these groups, "there is no boss." Instead, teachers perceived it to be an independent responsibility to organize and provide content-specific instruction and divide tasks among the group pertaining to parent involvement. It was during these informal meetings where teachers revealed needs and group members "stepped up" with helpful suggestions or gestures.

RQ2: Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, at which maturity level do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceive their empowerment in relation to organizational structure?

Participants at the low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school perceived there were various levels of maturity. Participants individually rated their perceived level of empowerment through a survey given prior to interviews, which was used for the selection of participants. The purpose of the survey was to obtain the essence of the levels of empowerment to select a representative population. Participants also used the team sports analogy to provide additional insight into empowerment in relation to organizational structure during interviews. Each source of data placed empowerment on the Maturity Continuum from dependent (low) to interdependent (high). Independence, the second level of maturity, may be considered an efficient level of empowerment. Independent thinking is a level of personal accomplishments required for interdependent circumstances (Covey, 2004). Effectiveness, rather than efficiency, is the ultimate goal for organizational success and is often obtained through high levels of empowerment characterized by interdependent thinking (Covey, 2004; Daft, 2003; Green, 2000; Randeree, 2006).

Interdependent. Kate and Shelby perceived the highest level of maturity, interdependence, in both survey and interview data. They described the highest level of maturity as feeling empowered through meaningful interactions with team members in a harmonious effort to increase capacity of student performance. Kate explored the feeling through experiences with her students. She described learning as an adventure, learning about things you want to learn about with others. Shelby described interdependence as working together to make the end goal happen. Kate and Shelby described structural conditions facilitating teamwork such as division of teachers into teams and times set aside to work collaboratively (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Administrator authority over

school-based decisions did not impede their perceptions of interdependence. Kate and Shelby identified the struggles of teaching as an interdependent solution through collective effort. Shelby stated, "You want to struggle, that is how you learn." Participants solved problems by communicating with other teachers. Overall, they perceived some influence in decision-making through membership roles on committees. Shared decision-making would be an indicator of an empowering structural design if teachers made decisions that greatly affected the nature of their work (Covey, 1996; Daft, 2013; Short, 1994). After viewing the results, I found teachers did not have the power to make decisions based on the structural arrangement.

The interesting speculation of Shelby's story was that she perceived empowerment though data appeared to align with a lower level of maturity. An empowering attitude is related to greater job satisfaction (Griffith, 2004). She described some discontentment with the then current conditions, including asking permission from administrators to change her schedule and collecting overwhelming amounts of data. She described the emphasis on assessment as inhibiting her ability to focus on teaching. The reason she appeared to show a lower level of maturity was also in her description of decision-making. She described a hierarchy where teachers come to her with a problem that she then took to administrators during BST meetings. All participants shared the same story. Shelby's version differed in that she added, "They are supposed to come to me. But, if it is a major something, they can go to administration on their own."

Independent. The majority of participants perceived their level of empowerment as independent, the second level of maturity. Sophia and Wendy perceived independent in both survey and interview data. Neither described a desire for a greater voice in

decisions, accepting authority from leaders while pursuing individual goals within the walls of their classroom.

Ruth, though initially dependent, perceived independence through the sports analogy. This could be explained by her new teaching role. She left her previous teaching position of 14 years and began her first year of teaching a new grade level during the time of this study. She perceived herself as dependent on others to support her during the change. She demonstrated her perception of independence in comparing individual and team empowerment. She exhibited dependency in her role as teacher but independence in grade level teams. She perceived structural conditions allowing for shared decision-making among team members. Like other participants, perceptions of shared decision-making were more a communication strategy for input than power to make meaningful decisions. She described top-down distribution of power regarding school-wide goals, revealing a dependent level of maturity pertaining to team power. Yet, she believed team members had a voice in decisions and worked together to solve problems, increasing her perceived level of empowerment. The perceptions of both dependent and independent may suggest discrepancies of individual and team empowerment.

Naomi identified with both independence and interdependence. Naomi perceived interdependence on the survey but independence through the sports analogy. The results revealed an independent level of maturity. As an official teacher leader, Naomi exhibited independent behaviors (Spreitzer, 1995). Independent thinking also appeared in her belief teachers comply with administrative decisions despite having a desire for greater autonomy in making decisions. Naomi described an independent, personal attitude, such

as administrators delegating authority to her in her role as PBIS coach. She used the word "delegate" to define a high level of empowerment. Researchers pointed out a difference between delegation and empowerment. Empowerment refers to the power to make meaningful decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1992; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013). Delegation occurs when leaders assign tasks with specific requirements and deadlines for completion (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1991; Short, 1994). Empowerment requires thinking without fear of failure or rejection. As a result of the findings, the researcher believes "micromanaging' caused Naomi's independent level of thinking.

Nature of Independent Teamwork. Participants perceived collaboration as an independent agreement. Tasks were divided among the team, and teachers worked independently to complete their share until the work was completed (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Naomi described her role as team coach as making sure "everybody knows their part." Delegating was an informal norm of the organization; each person "had their role to help the school make the progress it needs." For Sophia, it was "easier" being the only ELA member of the team. Independence was perceived as a good point of their lived experience in that teachers could work on their own time in their own space. On the other hand, collaboration defined in research requires an interdependent agreement (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Covey, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Battersby and Verdi (2015) defined collaboration as thoughtful interaction among teachers and the collective wisdom "generated by working together" (p. 25). The researcher suggests teachers were not empowered to work interdependently because of the structural configuration of team teaching with no shared content and only two to three teachers per grade level. It

appeared communication (independent), rather than collaboration (interdependent), defined contributions to the group.

RQ3: Using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric, what perceptions do teachers at an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school have regarding the influence of the school's organizational structure and their ability to effectively work together?

To determine the influence of the school's organizational structure and teachers' ability to effectively work together, a structural model was determined using perceptions of the school's organizational structure. This arrangement was framed using the ideas of Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame and Covey's (2004) Maturity Continuum. The school's model resembled a simple hierarchy, a top-down chain of command consisting of three levels of power (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Participants described the organizational structure as a simple hierarchy, including vertical coordination of subordinates with district-level administration at the top, building-level administrators and instructional coach in the middle, teacher leaders below administrators, and grade level teams of teachers at the lowest level. All teachers served on one of the assigned teams. The researcher applied responsibility and authority, two major structural components, to identify teachers' perceptions of empowerment.

Responsibility. The keystone of organizational structure is the allocation of job roles, also known as responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Participants were dependent on administrators to allocate work and coordinate efforts among teams. In this low level of empowerment, administrators controlled the work of teachers through rules and policies, and planning and control systems (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Green, 2000).

Allocation of responsibilities in an empowering organizational structure is determined by organizational needs and expertise (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1992). Participants believed administrators allocated roles based on teacher effectiveness, measured through test scores. For example, Naomi shared, "After seeing my test scores, they asked me to go to a testing grade." In another version, Wendy explained her move, "One teacher wanted to go, but her scores were higher than my scores, per se, and she ended up staying." Participants shared the principal selected teaching and group member roles. Then, the principal negotiates participants' mutual satisfaction through the win-win strategy. The combination of prescribing responsibilities to individuals and groups using bargaining techniques for commitment revealed an independent level of empowerment.

Participants shared commitment in their responsibilities but lacked confidence related to imposed ideas on team goals. Administration used test scores for compliance. Participants called it "the push." Sophia shared, "I really, really need this kid to pass, because this is reflective of me as a teacher." Participants described, in great detail, the assessment processes for reading and math, which included three to five data points for each assessment. A particular test score motivated administrators, and teachers complied with this decision. Ruth stated, "We got the test and everything, we have to have those that makes it where we have a certain goal." Shelby stated her husband told her to protest about the high accountability. She responded, "They'll just replace me." Participants covertly shared a collective belief student growth was central to job satisfaction. They agreed, "Progress is what we should be focused on." This variance in measurable aspects of student outcomes may impede a high level of empowerment as administrators control goal setting and accountability measures. Participants shared a set of rules and

regulations that evoked fear. Shelby blatantly said, "I don't want to get fired." Teachers seemed to believe the push was the organizational force, the call to action for duties and responsibilities. The push was a strong break in the progression of empowerment. More than the administrator, the data were perceived to control decisions regarding team functions.

Authority. The second structural factor known to impact empowerment is power to make decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Lorinkova et al., 2013). Participants defined the organizational decision-making process as an alliance between leadership and teachers (Daft, 2013). This approach used centralized authority and processes to facilitate information sharing between administrators and teachers. As with role allocation, decisions were made using bargaining techniques when logical solutions to individual or team-based problems were communicated to leaders. For example, Sophia described an issue with students eating breakfast in her room. She did not like the idea, because students kept spilling milk while eating cereal. The assistant principal agreed to cereal bars, but the decision to continue eating breakfast stood firm.

Administrators, including authority over principals by system-level administrators, controlled complex decisions. Ruth responded, the principal makes "all the decisions for the schools," but "she also has to do what she's told from the [superintendent]." Participants agreed they shared input on decisions through standardized procedures in their assigned leadership teams. Wendy called it having a "say-so." She added, "Teachers, paraprofessional, and staff members may be afraid to go directly to the administration. Having a spokesperson to speak on their behalf gets the message out there." Teachers were "free to express their thoughts." This was a false

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sense of empowerment, as they did not perceive shared authority for school-based, "leadership decisions." At the team level, they accepted a dependent level, relying on administrators to tell them when and how to act on decisions. Compliance did not mean satisfaction. On one occasion, Naomi reflected, "The teachers were not so nice about a decision the PBIS team made." Teachers complied with administrator authority over decisions as a part of their ability to work effectively together. They "bring up concerns" to their BST representative. The BST "can discuss and make decisions." Ruth also shared sometimes the "decision is based on needs to be made between the principals and not using one person from each grade level." They perceived formal meetings as "something that we are supposed to be doing so many times a month." Kate was the only participant opposing this social norm. She exclaimed, "I have moved past that in my life now. I figured out over the years, they're not going to fire me." Empowering structures represent teachers' beliefs that administrators support them in their work (Gray et al., 2016). The results suggested that teachers supported administrators in their work.

Relationships. The degree to which teachers were empowered was influenced by observable structural considerations, such as responsibility and authority. A less measurable structural consideration pertained to relationships among teachers. Through centralized coordination of meetings, communication networks were established among teachers. Participants presented a line of information sharing starting at the top with administrators, to the BST representatives, to the grade levels, and then back up the ladder. With each level of communication, formal meetings were conducted to exchange ideas. These communication networks created social connections with access to collective knowledge, skill development, and ability (Pil & Leana, 2009). Participants

described a positive social context with frequent interactions influencing group performance. Participants revealed an independent level of empowerment at the individual level investing trust in fellow teachers to make them feel more powerful and able to take action on their own. A powerful, uncontrolled strategy created by team teachers was informal meetings after school that "glued things together" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 54). In this time and space, teachers established a "flow" through meeting about different things and creating a cohesive mindset. Naomi confirmed, "The EIP team here is fabulous, because we all think alike." Structural conditions supporting a common commitment to working relationships are a fundamental underpinning for facilitating high levels of empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The researcher suggests teachers pursued high levels of empowerment but faltered as the centralized components of organizational structure generated frustration.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section facilitates understanding of participants' experiences in a progression based on Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural framework. The purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which teachers were empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. Organizational structure, effective teamwork, and the Maturity Continuum are the major categories of this research study. The researcher suggests interplay of these concepts creates structural conditions for leaders to consider in regards to successful organizational performance.

Category 1: Organizational Structure

I applied Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame to collect evidence of factors contributing to teachers' ability to effectively work together. Structural conditions include allocating responsibilities to individuals and groups and authority, or power, to make decisions. The structural foundation either helps or hinders effectiveness (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Effective teams operate under less formal authority through conditions of empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1993; Rutherford, 2006). Participants agreed on the structural frame influencing daily operations of the school. They agreed on "chain of command" consisting of administrators, teacher leaders, and teachers. Naomi described the organizational structure stating, "You have the administrator, and then me, and then we have a team."

The participants in this study perceived a combination of centralized and decentralized authority in a hierarchal configuration. All participants reported administrators relied on formalized practices to govern tasks, including standardized rules, procedures, and written documentation (Daft, 2013). Four of the six participants noted frequent changes in administration since beginning their careers at the research site. Wendy disclosed, "We've gone through several administrators. Every time we get new administrators, their thinking or whatever changes, how the school is ran (sic)." Since 2014, teachers experienced three principals and two assistant principals. The instructional coach has been the constant authority figure in the building. This is the first year of principal number three. I suggest the new administrator may contribute to the current formalized responses to structural conditions. Existing literature indicated formalized processes are often favored when the organization requires regulation of

teacher behaviors to stabilize the work environment (Daft, 2013; Dickson et al., 2006; Miles et al., 2010). For example, Sine et al. (2006) discovered leaders using formalized practices to start an organization increased worker performance.

The influence of centralized authority counteracted positive effects of decentralization (Hempel et al., 2012). This imbalance of authority was evident in the organizational structure described by participants. Participants reported system-level personnel determined and organized content and school-level leaders coordinated work efforts assigning individual and team roles. Individual teachers were responsible for managing instruction. Teachers on teams had the authority to make decisions pertaining individual classrooms, but they did not share authority to make greater decisions affecting the nature of teamwork. Authority refers to the frequency of and access to meaningful information, resources, and authority (Green, 2000; Leana & Pil, 2006). Participants shared access to information and resources through regular meetings with BST representatives, or informers who shared administrative information and input. They experienced regular interaction with information "discussed in the meetings." Participants reported teachers served on a committee pertaining to assigned content and met a minimum of once, sometimes twice a week, to track and discuss data. Within groups, teachers experienced some independence from administrators to share and apply individual accountability to group performance. From their perspective, interactions with BST members contributed to feelings of empowerment. Administrators ultimately controlled authority to make decisions.

While centralized strategies promote efficiency, the flexibility and sense of empowerment created by decentralized strategies promote effectiveness (Bolman & Deal,

2013; Chance, 2009; Covey, 2004; Green, 2000; Leana & Pil, 2006). Since this study did not verify the leadership style of administrators, I could only speculate on the decision-making strategy using interview data and research. The principal's choice to centralize decision-making indicated a low level of empowerment (Daft, 2013; Somech, 2003). Teams were not yet trusted to exercise independent judgment in self-managing teams (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Short, 1994). Wendy stated, "Administrators decide whatever they decide." However, based on the research, it appeared the principal used win-win negotiations to establish criteria participants perceived to release inner potential (Covey, 2004). This can indicate teacher empowerment, but the talk of win-win with a win-lose award system aligned to test scores inhibited interdependent interaction (Covey, 2004).

Category 2: The Nature of Teamwork

The nature of teamwork was examined to determine if and to what degree teachers were influenced by the organizational structure to effectively work together. The participants acknowledged working in groups to resolve the issue of low academic achievement in reading and math. Leadership, including the instructional coach, developed a shared sense of direction and commitment (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Chen et al. (2007) discovered empowered teams perceive autonomy in decision-making to perform meaningful tasks. Participants shared perceptions of empowerment, using formal protocols to shape informal social norms. They described lesson planning and data protocols, which prescribed information sharing among the group. Then, teachers "communicate collaboratively after the meetings." Formal meetings included mandated procedures for discussing lesson plans and data. Participants complied with these rules through an alliance with administration. For example, Naomi shared the assistant

principal made a data-tracking sheet for teachers. She reflected, "What's really good about this graph is it gives you the Milestones bar of if they're inching towards the goal that shows good progress." In the same conversation, she described, "I have my benchmarks and then a graph to kind of show that growth." Covey (1996) suggested some leaders "think of empowerment as delegating decision making to the lowest level possible" (p.1). Naomi's statement that administrators "delegate very well" may suggest a false sense of empowerment based on a similar interpretation.

The difference between perceived and observed empowerment described what was really happening in the relationships between individuals and teams. Participants claimed they "work well together as a team." This work involved sharing lesson plans and data during grade level or content meetings. Self-contained teachers collaborated on lesson plans and newsletters. Shelby revealed, "I think all teaching the same thing and working together with the same lesson plan tends to help us stay united as a team." Team teachers contributed to the team by sharing information pertaining to their content and maintaining communication to BST members. On the other hand, team teachers experienced isolation in their roles but revealed job satisfaction in being independent. Wendy shared, "I just have to focus on that one main thing. So, it works well for me. I like it."

Participants regarded dispersing tasks evenly among the group to achieve success as meaningful, interdependent practices. Participants possessed an independent attitude in that they appreciated "doing their own thing" putting in individual effort so tasks do not fall on one person. This reflects a skewed perception compared to research on empowerment practices. Participants acknowledged feeling motivated in their role as the

content expert for their teams. Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013) agreed empowerment is a motivational construct. However, the meaning of teacher empowerment is understood to be a "powerful dynamic between context and person" (Lightfoot, 2016). McDermott et al. (1996) described an empowering attitude as "sharing power with others" to expand one's own power. Covey (2004) described the difference between choosing action (independent) and being acted upon (dependent). In the context of this site, formal authority with protocols to monitor, evaluate, and reward teachers pulls teachers into the process, molding individual choices and actions into a shared commitment.

Social networks connect individual skill, ability, and knowledge among members in a team (Leana & Pil, 2006). Lines of communication provide information into levels of empowerment. The information flowing through the communication channel connected participants to power. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested, "Information is necessary but not sufficient to fully engage employees." Along with information, teachers need opportunities for autonomy, influence, and intrinsic rewards (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013). Participants reported regular meetings kept everyone informed and updated on progress of school goals. Wendy shared, "They always get back to us whether It is via email or they'll address it in the next faculty meeting." Shelby was content with meetings stating, "It's all for good. At least I know everything." Teachers perceived administrators trusted teachers with information. This process may have been formed to facilitate relationships and the growth of shared commitment (Leana & Pil, 2006). Administrators facilitated an independent level of empowerment by sharing information with teachers. However, administration kept

teachers at the lowest level of empowerment as teachers relied on administrators for decision-making governing their work (Covey, 2004). The perception promoted collective effort through perceived, meaningful interactions as teachers "voice their opinion." The hierarchal model of communication gave a false sense of empowerment as participants perceived knowledge sharing as having influence to make decisions.

Category 3: Perceptions of Empowerment

This study measured the level of empowerment using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. Covey's (2004) model moved empowerment in a linear progression from dependent, independent, to interdependent. Each state of action described the degree of authority possessed by individuals and teams responsible for the work (Green, 2000). To determine the level of maturity, the researcher analyzed responses pertaining to structural factors only, including responsibility, authority, and nature of teamwork. The psychological component of empowerment known as job satisfaction, commitment, and well-being were also observed but not highlighted in the purpose of this study.

One structural factor of empowerment involves the arrangement of roles in the organization. Cleary defined roles are a necessary structural condition of both centralized and decentralized designs (Bolman & Deal, 2013). However, leaders implementing a decentralized structure encourage flexibility and collaboration in defining job responsibilities (Burns & Stalker, 1994; Green, 2000). Schulz and Auld (2009) collected perceptions of responsibility within a decentralized structure. They connected lowered role ambiguity to shared participation of deciding responsibilities (Schulz & Auld, 2009). Though the principal established job responsibilities, participants did not share

perceptions of role ambiguity. Participants clearly shared job descriptions based on content and grade level responsibilities.

Researchers supported centralized practices for the allocation of roles to create uniform expectations and consistency among the group (Chen & Rainey, 2014; Daft, 2013; Dickson et al., 2006; Sine et al., 2006). Along with teaching content, participants also described competency in their roles as members of grade level and content teams. Participants described a daily routine including teaching and assessing content, sharing information in teams, and contributing ideas for student growth. This finding suggested teachers experience an independent level of maturity as they take action based on individual responsibility (Covey, 2004). Interdependent responsibility would be observed if teachers strengthened the potential of others (Covey, 2004; Harris, 2014). Teachers perceived personal empowerment within the boundaries of assigned roles, gaining access to control when shared goals required personal commitment. Teachers are the only ones responsible for the content in their grade levels, creating a natural separation among team members. Participants reported only within the boundary of their job roles. They frequently excused themselves with, "I can't speak for the other ones" or "I don't know about the other grade levels." I suggest a reconfiguration of positions may result in "new relationships and increased involvement in decision making" (Dee et al., 2002).

Another structural condition influencing empowerment was the authority to make meaningful decisions. Empowering organizational structures facilitate networks with multiple connections among team members (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Participants described a dependent structure consisting of a hierarchal network in which information

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flowed sequentially from principal to team leaders to teachers. Referring to leadership

opportunities, Naomi confessed, "There is a handful of teachers in the building who are

allowed to be leaders." Though teachers sensed a level of influence, the principal made

meaningful decisions. Ruth emphasized, "The principal, her being the principal, would

be the person who would make all the decisions for the school."

Participants perceived an independent level of maturity as an individual. They

described taking action using data as a reward and consequence in terms of student

growth. For example, Shelby exhibited pride when her students showed gains in reading

but expressed concern over administrators discounting the victory. She said, "They still

are not going to pass the Milestones, but look at the growth they made. It does not seem

like the county even looks at that." Participants determined administrators view success

by "everybody on grade level." They did not agree with this notion but accepted it as a

goal. Teachers received rewards for good test scores, as in Naomi's case, when

administration applauded her success and then used this to negotiate her move her to

another grade level. Teachers also received punishment based on test scores, as in

Wendy's case, when she was moved to another grade level based on perceived lower test

scores. Likewise, Shelby stated central office and building-level administrators,

including the instructional coach, used "STAR data and DIBELS data" to determine

success.

At the team level, participants perceived power to make decisions.

Administrators used access to information to convey a message of empowerment. Sophia

and Wendy perceived having "a voice" in decisions. The voice "suggestions or

concerns," was not the level of interaction required for meaningful decision-making.

Though teachers perceived influence in authority to make decisions, the extent of collective power was limited by administrative action. All of the participants named the principal as the decision-maker. They would suggest ideas, but administrators controlled the choice. Naomi described bringing decisions back to teachers after they were made by administrators to "collect feedback." Teams were at the independent level working in silos to "come together" and acquire goals. Sophia described the nature of teamwork with her team teacher. They "collaborated" on Google Drive each week to communicate weekly newsletters and homework to parents. She explained, "I can put all the reading stuff in, and then she just adds all the math stuff." Participants shared other examples of independent work throughout the interviews. Another example came from Shelby when she stated, "I know we are trying to increase our reading goal, our reading scores. And then math too, I think." Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested interdependent "teams cannot function as a collection of individual teams" (p. 105). From the results, the researcher suggested teams worked at a dependent level, a characteristic of a traditional structural level.

A causal factor of the observed lack of empowerment involved centralized structural conditions (Daft, 2012). The hierarchy, "chain of command", included a line of authority with a high frequency of access to information. Access to information was the extent of empowering structural conditions. The hierarchy did not create a helpful system for conditions of empowerment to influence group performance (Covey, 1992). An empowering structure contributes to effective behaviors capitalizing on human potential (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1992, 2004; Lorinkova et al., 2013; McDermott et al., 1996). Chen et al. (2007) conducted a study at both individual and team levels of

empowerment. They found team-based empowerment increased performance more than individual empowerment. Team interdependence may serve as a boundary for the teachers' ability to effectively work together. With little connection among teams, the characteristics of the simple hierarchy impede empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

The difference between perceptions and observations explained what actually happened at the research site. Teachers accepted power in giving an opinion to administrators, but this contradicted with authentic empowerment practices. For example, Sophia described having a voice in sharing suggestions. She was "very oppositional" to eating breakfast in the classroom. She accepted a compromise in the decision to each cereal bars instead of cereal and milk. However, she also voiced her opinion regarding scheduling recess in the morning for her students, especially when "it is nice and cold." She did not possess the authority to negotiate her schedule. There was also a difference in how participants perceived the level of maturity and observed behaviors. For example, Naomi and Wendy shared high personal levels of empowerment including an interdependent score on the survey. They equated frequency of and access to information from the principal and privilege of sharing the information with colleagues as perceptions of empowerment. Empowerment is a process whereby individuals and groups participate in decisions that mobilize collective effort in pursuit of common goals (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013). I did not observe interdependent, empowering behaviors in the readings of interviews and observations with teachers.

Implications

The findings of this study may inform national policy makers, federal and state departments of education, university and college teacher preparation programs, and regional and local education units on how to better structure schools allowing teachers in low-performing Title I schools to more effectively work together. Researchers agreed rules and policies governing low-performing schools were not improving academic achievement (Nelson &Guerra, 2014; Rogers-Chapman, 2013; Waddell, 2011). Some evidence suggested taking a structural approach of reform, redefining the school's organizational framework with empowering conditions supporting effective teamwork (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Leana & Pil, 2009; Penuel et al., 2012). Researchers suggested some cynicism of the effect of empowering teachers in the school organization (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Kanter, 1994; Short, 1994). The act of empowerment requires surrendering personal choice and control to an interpersonal faith in the potential of others. In fact, the leader could be causing the problem if possessing a personal low level of maturity (Covey, 1994). Nonetheless, results of this study supported an evaluation of teachers' maturity level before developing a plan of action for improvement.

One implication of the study was that leaders move beyond mechanical approaches for understanding school organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Hampton & Gruenert, 2008; Harris, 2013; Kanter, 1994; Pil & Leana, 2009). Strategies focused on rules, policies, procedures, systems, and hierarchies encourage standardized opportunities for change. The problem with this thinking is people, not policy, are responsible for doing the work. There is some evidence bureaucratic authority can be highly effective,

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especially when stability is a concern for the organization (Daft, 2012; Miles et al., 2010). On the other hand, present organizational theory research dismantled the traditional, bureaucratic structure and promoted a decentralized, informal organizational structure (Greenwood & Miller, 2010; Miles et al., 2010; Suddaby, Hardy, & Huy, 2011). Covey (1991) compared this as organic versus mechanical paradigms. The mechanical mindset views problems as a need to be "fixed" with replaceable parts. An organic mindset recognizes the system as a living thing requiring nurturing at all levels to cultivate success. I observed teachers were in a state of organizational control, rather than organization "in control" (Covey, 1992, p. 212).

Another implication of the study was that leaders facilitate two forms of empowerment, both individual and team conditions. At the individual level, leaders encourage empowerment through clearly defined roles and shared decision-making. Empowered teachers take action to acquire personal goals. Teachers do not wait to be acted upon by administrators (Covey, 2004). Informal, meaningful relationships between administrator and teacher were necessary to create a sense of shared participation (McDermott et al., 1996). Leaders acknowledge individual capacity to perform by relinquishing control of the work (Gilbert et al., 2010). Leadership practices empowering teams follow characteristics of self-managing work teams in which teams manage themselves organically through goal setting, responsibility, and decision-making. At both the individual and team levels, leaders may manage at various levels of empowerment based on the maturity level of their followers (Chen et al., 2007; Covey, 2004). Stoker (2008) suggested analyzing the maturity level of the team to provide direction for leadership behaviors. Adopting the participative leadership style, defined as

joint decision-making or shared influence, ensured the leader shared information and provided feedback to cultivate empowering behaviors (Lorinkova et al., 2013; Somech, 2005).

Participants in this study revealed a unique organizational structure limiting broad generalizability of findings. However, the process of using Covey's Maturity Continuum and Bolman and Deal's structural frame offered a school improvement strategy. The complexity of organizational performance required many studies to focus on measurable outcomes to determine success, such as teacher quality and reform efforts (Blank 2011; Wilson & Strassfeld, 2015). The uniqueness of this study was that I used Covey's Maturity Continuum to determine the degree to which teachers perceived their empowerment. Researchers suggested leaders design organizational structures to fit the readiness, competence, and maturity of the members of the organization (Sagie et al., 2002; Somech, 2005). Determining maturity in low-performing schools is a learning opportunity for leaders to use for planning a supportive and helpful structure (Covey, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 2013). Principals have the primary responsibility for creating empowering structures for teachers (Chen et al., 2007; Dee et al., 2003; Lorinkova, 2013). As a measurement of readiness and maturity, the Maturity Continuum provides insight principals can use to develop an empowering leadership climate. Additional research is needed on introducing the concept of maturity to principals and teachers in designing organization structure.

Limitations

Methodology

The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize results but to determine findings that are transferable. Case study research allowed for the opportunity to learn in order for the findings may not be transferable to other Georgia Title I schools. The current study took place at one identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary schools. Low-performing in this study meant a school identified as either a Priority or Focus School using the entrance criteria created by GADOE. Organizations are complex with varied, intricate processes making it impossible to duplicate. Using case study research for this study justified selection of one school. Due to the nature of case study research, findings were not generalizable.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to select the research site. At the time of selection, 121 elementary schools were identified as a low-performing school based on CCRPI Achievement Gap data. I used purposeful selection to identify one of these schools for research; narrowing the list by determining typical Title I schools based on demographics data. The selected site was representative of this criterion but was also unexpectedly accessible to the researcher.

Interviews

The primary source of data collection was interviews. One limitation included lack of researcher experience and confidence in conducting interviews. Memos following transcription of interview data revealed weaknesses in technique. I noted interruptions and missed options to follow up on what the participant said. I used these

memos to alter subsequent interviews. I took notes while conducting interviews to facilitate active listening. I caught myself overusing personal stories and lead-ins that may have distorted responses. Time was also an issue during interviews. On two occasions, the interviews were interrupted due to students returning to class. Triangulation of field notes and the ability to interview six participants over three visits enabled me to develop a full picture of participants' experiences.

Researcher Bias

In dealing with the emotional aspect of teacher perceptions, it was important to gather rigorous data. Through memos, I noticed bias in my mindset in attempting to prove the value of empowering structures. I struggled with my own "straw boss" for so long in my personal working experiences that I would often look for evidence to support the ineffectiveness of directive leadership. I battled this bias by reading and rereading interview transcripts and connecting to the literature to rival my explanation for what was happening and present credible findings. Participant approval of conclusions also confirmed findings.

<div align="center">

Recommendations

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The major aim of the study was to address lack of improvement in Georgia's Title I elementary schools based on levels of academic achievement as indicated by accountability measures. I believe this research was timely in empirical data providing evidence to suggest traditional organizational structures prevented teachers from effectively working together (Greenwood & Miller, 2010; Miles et al., 2010; Suddaby et al., 2011). The keen observation from Governor Nathan Deal that status quo hindered student success drove inquiry into what conditions, over time, will predict effectiveness.

The following recommendations for future research would be valuable to extend results and validate findings.

The first recommendation is to replicate this study in additional low-performing, as well as high-performing, Georgia Title I elementary schools. The data collected among the various settings may add credibility to this study. The solution to low-performing schools will not be a one size-fits-all approach. However, basic assumptions regarding structural options are described in the literature (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Replicating this study in a high-performing setting would be interesting to compare teachers' perceived level of empowerment. Adding additional case studies may create patterns validating the authenticity of teacher empowerment in Title I schools.

The second recommendation for future research includes interviewing administrators and their comparing perspectives to the perspectives of teachers. Analyzing both perceptions would add clarity to the purpose and selection of team configurations. In this study, teacher perceptions provided the structural model. It would be beneficial to know whether administrators described the same model. This information would link administrative strategy to partnership with teachers.

Another recommendation to consider involves the new wave of charter schooling. Charter schools, by their nature and structure, require empowerment for all stakeholders, including teachers. Studies that look at similarities and differences between charter schools and their counterparts may provide interesting and helpful findings.

The final recommendation is to entertain quantitative inquiry with the nature of this study. Empirical data is necessary in the field of education today to spark attention. A hybrid model for data collection where school test data are used to support qualitative

findings may provide stronger interpretations. Experience at this research site with the school-wide focus on data, revealed a need to use numbers as a tool to increase understanding of the lived experience.

In spite of limitations, this study contributed to the research about structural conditions empowering teachers to effectively work together. To my knowledge, there were no studies using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric to determine the degree to which teachers perceived empowerment. Determining the individual and team maturity may contribute to building interdependent behaviors among members of the organization. The progress builds such that leaders need awareness of the three levels to ensure intervention at the appropriate level. The recommendations for future research build on this theory to support inquiry pertaining to structural conditions facilitating teachers through the levels of maturity and towards full teacher empowerment.

Conclusion

Where the life of the organization is rooted, the branding that marks teachers' perceptions grows. Is this root found in the seed or the farmer (Covey, 1991)? A leader may cultivate the seed in three ways: organically through self-managed teams, mechanically through bureaucratic control, or differentially through individualized, suitable tools. The seed will grow organically or with controlled systems but the farmer, the seed's caretaker, is ultimately responsible for a weak or bountiful harvest. The seed is a thing, but the farmer is a person (Covey, 1992). As such, leaders focused on the results without investing in the people responsible for fixing and repairing the organization, will cultivate ineffective conditions of empowerment (Covey, 1996).

Participants perceived data as the foundational underpinning, the seed, of the organization. Authoritative decisions were made based on the reality of raising academic achievement due to the "red," or low-performing label. Administrators perceived decisions through a numerical lens not taking into account personal motives or social constructs. The data were "what drives it." Accountability for teachers was high as measured through TKES evaluation procedures and test scores (Daft 2012; Greenwood & Miller, 2010). The participants in the study all expressed discontent with the "data-driven culture." This level of intimidation frustrated participants and created some struggle for power over leaders to self-manage performance. This was evident in the collective belief student growth, more than mandated target scores on assessments, indicated effective teaching performance.

Power, the root cause of empowerment, is the essence of the conversation to dismantle traditional school structures (Greenwood & Miller, 2010; Kanter, 1993; Miles et al., 2010; Suddaby et al., 2011). Policy and "meeting, meeting, meeting" were used to correct conditions regarding low performance (King & Bouchard, 2011; Randeree, 2006). Existing literature indicated the centralized model does not produce necessary changes to improve academic achievement (Covey, 2004; Bolman & Deal, 2013; Leana & Pil, 2009; Penuel et al., 2012; Pil & Leana, 2009).

This low-performing elementary school received specialized attention through a political lens with a tight link between power and dependency (Bolman & Deal, 2013). State, local board, system-wide, and building-level political movements sent messages to teachers that important action had already transpired. The feeling of powerlessness was offensive, so teachers activated an independent level of power and created smaller

coalitions with team members. They found areas within prescribed boundaries and created multidirectional power relationships. Team teachers needed their partners to control outcomes pertaining to individual instructional content to make academic goals happen. This gave a sense of purpose and contentment as a fraction of their potential was used to attain personal objectives (Covey, 1996). Access to power at the top of the chain of command meant teachers were not empowered by structural conditions to effectively work together. However, conditions were favorable for efficiency. Standardized test scores revealed increases in academic achievement in reading and math. This validated teachers' perceptions of the significance of measuring success by student growth. Effectiveness, on the other hand, had yet to be achieved as the school continued to score below 60 on the CCRPI indicator.

Covey (1996) stated, "Empowerment comes as people contribute their full potential in attaining both personal and organizational objectives." In short, power makes things happen. Empowerment cannot be granted (Covey, 1996). Rather, leaders create conditions for empowerment by promoting interdependent behaviors. Researchers supported empowered individuals and teams perform better because leaders entrust decision-making in collective hands facilitating full potential of people (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Covey, 1996, 2004; Chen et al. 2007). Faith in people, not numbers, is the essence of school improvement.

The notion of maturity level and teacher empowerment may seem like grasping at straws in a world of data-driven, high accountability standards. To invest in the potential of others is a time consuming, selfless act of personal interdependence. If the leader exhibits a low level of maturity, how then can the organization rise to its full potential?

Other formats or initiatives of school improvement are not working. In one low-performing school where bureaucratic control and additional resources were pushed down, the summative review of CCRPI scores revealed school accountability measures missed the mark.

The structural configuration did not empower participants in the school organization; although, teachers perceived empowerment using a false frame of reference. Teachers created individual plans of action that included a growth, not "cut-score," mindset. This is important, because the growth score does not allow a perspective related to overall success, while a cut-score makes a comparison between the subject school and the rest of the state. With confidence, teachers saw opportunities for decision-making, control over classroom scheduling, and growth. However, the decision-making model established by the principal prohibited authority to make meaningful decisions. Power was absorbed in the line of communication between principal and teachers.

As I interact with the research questions, literature review, and findings, these are the other important take-a-ways from this study. The structure created by the administrators did not promote interdependency, the highest level of empowerment. The imposed structure included mandatory protocols, definitive decision-making, and absolute expectations, and lines of authority, which seemed not to have any effect on bottom-line measures of success. Even though teachers perceived themselves to have an independent level of maturity, I perceived them to be dependent because of the hierarchal structure and decision-making model created by authority figures. Perhaps there is a disconnect between teachers' definitions and understanding of empowerment and interdependence in this particular school which may apply to other schools as well.

Unfortunately even with all of the efforts, resources, strategies, and practices, whether old or new, it is the researcher's opinion that schools where structures impede interdependence there is a likelihood of continued low performance.

In every battle, a giant must fall. I exerted my own potential to examine a fresh perspective to win the battle of low-performance by reforming, transforming the person and the team. I saw the frustration in "being tired and overwhelmed." I comprehend and explain the research, but more importantly, I am rooted in this garden of education. Therefore, I live the experiences of the participants through my own lens and bear fruit based on the structure planted by my administrators. What I have learned is that teachers need harder working systems to grow them where they are planted.

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APPENDIX A:

Perceptions of Empowerment Self Inventory Survey

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled *"The Influence of Organizational Structure on Teacher Empowerment,"* which is being conducted by March Vining, a student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this study is to research the degree to which teachers are empowered by the school's organizational structure to effectively work together in an identified low-performing Georgia Title I elementary school using Covey's Maturity Continuum as the metric. The interviews will be audio taped in order to accurately capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the recordings have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your participation in the interview will serve as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Marci Vining at mbvining@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or **irb@valdosta.edu**.

Do Not write your name on this survey.

The following survey is an opportunity for you to evaluate several conditions of empowerment.

Your responses will not be revealed to others. Circle your response to the statements below.

Category 1: As I perceive it, the extent to which team members exhibit the following attributes is:

	Low				High
1. Reliance on leaders and administrators	1	2	3	4	5
2. Polite conversation	1	2	3	4	5
3. Conflict avoidance	1	2	3	4	5
4. Classification of others based on stereotypes	1	2	3	4	5
5. Formation of cliques	1	2	3	4	5
6. Strong need for group approval	1	2	3	4	5
7. Vague goals and objectives	1	2	3	4	5

Category 2: As I perceive it, the extent to which team members exhibit the following attributes is:

	Low				High
1. Second guessing leaders' decisions	1	2	3	4	5
2. Desire for greater voice in decisions	1	2	3	4	5
3. Dissatisfaction with the current system	1	2	3	4	5
4. Bids for power by individuals or cliques	1	2	3	4	5
5. Frequent "hidden agendas"	1	2	3	4	5
6. Wide range of participation by team members	1	2	3	4	5
7. Strong need for structure (clear goals, rules, division of labor)	1	2	3	4	5

Category 3: As I perceive it, the extent to which team members exhibit the following attributes is:

	Low				High
1. Empathic listening to understand other points of view	1	2	3	4	5

2. Opinions changes based on new facts	1	2	3	4	5
3. Disbanding of cliques	1	2	3	4	5
4. Development of goals and objectives owned by team members	1	2	3	4	5
5. Shared leadership	1	2	3	4	5
6. Enforcement of team norms	1	2	3	4	5
7. Difficult for new members to join	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B:

Interview Protocol

Interview 1: Educational History

1. Describe your educational history leading to working at this school.

2. Describe your educational history at this school.

3. Describe a typical day in the school.

Interview 2: Levels of Empowerment

1. What are the goals?

2. Who is in charge?

3. How do you determine success?

4. How are decisions made?

5. How are responsibilities allocated across different groups and roles?

6. How are work efforts coordinated?

Interview 3: Ability to Effectively Work Together

1. What is the nature and dealings among teachers?

2. How is the team configured? Where does authority reside?

3. How are efforts integrated?

4. Using the team sports metaphor, teachers will identify with baseball (lonely game), football (individual effort tightly synchronized), or basketball (flowing relationship among team members)? These align with Covey's dependent, independent, and interdependent levels of maturity.

APPENDIX C:

Institutional Review Board Approval/Exemption

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

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 03481-2017 **INVESTIGATOR:** Ms. Marci Vining

SUPERVISING FACULTY: Dr. William Truby

PROJECT TITLE: *Influence of Organizational Structure on Teacher 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:

- *Upon completion of this research study all data (transcripts, email & data lists, USB, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) for a minimum of 3 years.*

- *As part of the informed consent process, audiotaped interviews must include the Researcher reading aloud the consent statement to participants. Transcripts must document reading of the consent – as this will be the only proof that participants were informed.*

- *In order to maintain confidentiality participants should be reminded not to identify themselves, or others during the audio taped interviews, and not to write their name on the Perceptions of Empowerment Self-Inventory Survey.*

    ☒ *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.*