A Study of Relationship and Trust Building Practices in Schools and Classrooms

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Dedication

To my children and their growing families
Chris, Rose, Enzo, and Baby Sister due in August
Elise, Justin, and Piglet due in May
Neil and Siena

Acknowledgements

My life was profoundly influenced growing up in a large Italian family that migrated from the old country in 1906 and grew to nine families living within blocks of one another in Buffalo, New York. It was with gratitude that I acknowledged and recognized my grandparents, my parents, and my aunts and uncles who played a significant role in my personal growth and development. The mindsets and practices for building relationships and trust in schools that emerged in this research study, reflected similar approaches to the ways we connected, related, and built trust in the family. The trust and unconditional love inherited from my elders provided a foundation that had stood the test of time.

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Finally, I wanted to acknowledge the role my three children played in making it that much easier for me to complete ten consecutive years of higher education studies. They participated in interviews and surveys, got involved in projects, kept me current technically, supported me creatively, and Neil even bailed me out of failing an algebra class as an undergraduate. Additionally, each of them had a hand in keeping me honest and humble about my views while simultaneously supporting them. The role they played made the learning experience less daunting, more meaningful, and a bit more fun. Thank you Christopher, Elise, and Neil for your love, loyalty, and support, and for believing in yourselves and me.

Abstract

The public education system in the United States was hampered by chronic conditions, challenges, and consequences. These problems created a negative impact on learning and some students and teachers became disconnected and isolated. Conversely, certain education for sustainability theories and practices, 21st century approaches to learning, and relationship trust building practices for schools and classrooms created a common understanding that connecting and relating was a way to transcend the problems. The action research study conducted to inform this dissertation was designed to investigate how educators connected and related with one another and their students. Through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a survey the data collected produced evidence of the value and benefits of building relationships and trust. Through the analysis and synthesis of the data collected there was a discovery of what relationships meant to learning, and what it meant to commit, invest, and support relationship and trust building practices. The research study presented findings that supported education for sustainability theories and practices and 21st century approaches to learning. The study concluded that a close examination of relationship building practices led to increased interest, awareness, readiness, support, and investment to build relationships in schools and classrooms. The recommendations made for future research and practice were to partner with a public school district, continue to collect relevant data from educators, and provide opportunities for educators to learn together, how to intentionally build relationships and trust in schools and classrooms.

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The primary focus of all these efforts, however, regardless of the context, is on enhancing the lives of students. Mills (2014)

Chapter I - Introduction to the Study

This dissertation and report on a qualitative action research study was a product of time and deep inquiry. It involved ten consecutive years of higher education studies, culminating in the completion of a Sustainability Education Ph.D. program dedicated to understanding the meaning of social and environmental justice. The Ph.D. program research and study resulted in a concentrated understanding of conditions, challenges, and consequences for students and teachers in U.S. public schools. It also resulted in a deep understanding of education for sustainability theories and practices and 21st century approaches to learning, grounded in science, traditional knowledge, history, and experiential learning perspectives.

Evidence from the scholarly research discussed in chapter two of the dissertation, and from the action research study discussed in chapter four, produced a common finding. A solution to public school conditions, challenges, and consequences was to connect and relate to achieve trust, engage students, and enhance learning. With teacher commitments, leadership support, and a long-term investment to intentionally build relationships between students and teachers to achieve trust, educators could produce relevant and sustainable mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors for the classroom that would positively impact student attendance and high school graduation rates.

This dissertation reflected what was learned from the study of theories and practices, academic research, and an action research study. The knowledge, information, and data collected were thoroughly discussed in five chapters. The discussions included an introduction to the study in chapter one, a review of literature in chapter two, a report on the methodology and methods

used to collect data in chapter three, a report on the study investigation and findings in chapter four, and a set of conclusions and recommendations in chapter five. The dissertation was organized into the five chapters with tables, graphs, charts, diagrams, appendices, and references to support comments and reporting.

Background and Rationale

In 2006 I co-founded a youth leadership nonprofit with a team of advisors and college interns. The focus was on bringing middle school, high school, and college age students together in the classroom to investigate leadership views from a generational perspective. The purpose of the organization was to understand the significance of what it meant to think like a leader, and to connect, inspire, and serve students through relevant and meaningful leadership projects. The learning environment was a critical component of the organization, and our classroom offered a space where students could safely share their voices, opinions, and ideas with peers. The focus of the program was to learn how to think like a leader, how to act like a leader, how to choose a leader, and how to support a leader. The goal was to co-design leadership projects that involved individual contributions from each student, demonstrating their strengths, insights, skills, and talents for leading. The nonprofit was dependent on donations, and in the 2008 banking crisis it became difficult to get private funding, consequently it was dissolved. The program however had a great appeal in the school district, and a positive impact on the minds of students, teachers, and parents.

The unfinished business left a longing to continue the work with students, and soon after the nonprofit was dissolved I chose to return to school and learn how academia viewed the concepts and ideas developed through the leadership nonprofit. The goal returning to school was to achieve a level of credibility through new information and knowledge and find new ways to

engage with students and teachers to continue the work. A decade later with a more informed view of student and teacher needs and expectations, and a greater appreciation for how educators might address the needs and expectations through relationships and trust, I conducted a relevant sustainability education research study. Through the study I learned from educators how they connected with and related to peers and students in their schools and classrooms. Subsequently, I identified ways to continue the work.

With a deeper understanding of education for sustainability theories and practices, the rationale for this study was grounded in the intention to learn how to build sustainable educational mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors to produce a more reliable and lasting impact on student learning. According to Nolet (2016), "In recent years, the term sustainability has typically referred to the idea of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (p. 42). Based on this perspective the rationale for the study was also grounded in an opportunity for teachers and school administrators to partner and intentionally invest in long-term relationship and trust building practices to offset student struggles and enhance learning. Behind the struggles with reading, assignments, grades, and attendance, was the reality that some students got too far behind and lacked the support they needed to catch up. To remedy this trend educators could create opportunities to reconnect struggling students through the relevant, relational, and sustainable approaches to education and learning discussed in the dissertation literature review and discovered in the action research study.

Scope of Study

Study focus. The action research study focused on documented problems in U.S. public schools, and how the problems were addressed and mitigated through selected 21st century

approaches to education influenced by relevant education for sustainability theories and practices. It was also focused on identifying the impact relationship building practices had on student learning, and how building trust in schools and classrooms was critical to transcending the problems in U. S. public schools. The study was focused on collecting data from teachers and school administrators to inform the study investigation, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Problem statement. In large part due to income inequalities, feckless reform, inadequate resources for teachers and students, and an outdated system of education for the 21st century, public school students across the U.S. have struggled academically, emotionally, and socially; especially students of color and students from low-income families. These conditions created challenges for some students early in their education that resulted in struggles keeping up with reading and studies, earning poor grades, and getting too far behind in schoolwork to catch up. Eventually the challenges led to the consequences of chronic absenteeism and students dropping out of high school early, having a negative impact on society at large.

Statement of intent. The intent of the doctoral dissertation was to bring attention to the conditions, challenges, and consequences that students and teachers faced in U.S. public schools, and demonstrate that there were proven approaches to education and learning that had the potential to address them. The goal was to learn specifically if intentionally building relationships and trust between students, teachers, and school administrators had the potential to transcend the conditions, challenges, and consequences. The outcome desired was to identify if there were opportunities to work with students, teachers, and administrators to build relationships and trust to specifically address the problems in schools and classrooms.

Purpose statement. The purpose of the action research study was to explore the perceptions of a group of teachers and school administrators. The idea was to learn about educator views on building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. It was also focused on learning about the needs, desires, issues, and individual challenges associated with building relationships. The outcome desired was to understand if intentionally building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms would have a positive impact on student struggles, student interests, student learning, student retention, and student growth and development.

Research significance. Modeling relationship-building practices in U.S. public schools and classrooms could have a significant impact on learning at all grade levels. The value and benefits of connecting and relating would lead to reducing the likelihood of students falling behind with studies, being chronically absent, and dropping out of school early. In theory intentionally connecting and relating in schools and classrooms would enhance learning for all students, and have a positive impact on society at large.

Research questions. (1) How did teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? (2) What were teachers and school administrators doing in their schools and classrooms to build relationships and trust specifically through curriculum, instruction, and/or informal means? (3) What were teachers and school administrators doing in their schools and classrooms to measure the success of building relationships and trust through curriculum, instruction, and/or informal means? (4) What were some of the practices, habits, behaviors, and attributes manifested in a school or classroom when an educator intentionally reached out to connect, understand, and relate to a colleague or student?

Study hypotheses. (1) Building relationships and trust with students was relevant, meaningful, sustainable, and contextual, and clearly demonstrated that it had a positive impact on engagement and learning. (2) Building relationships and establishing trust created a safe learning environment that opened the door to implementing proven and effective 21st century approaches to learning. (3) Teachers and school administrators would unanimously embrace the opportunity, if they were provided leadership support, to intentionally invest in relationship and trust building practices at the beginning of the school year.

Key terminology. Some terms can be nebulous and a brief working definition of their use was provided to understand how they were discussed in this dissertation, and what they meant in context to the views and opinions expressed. According to Nolet (2014) as an example, "We live today in an age of s*ustainababble*, a cacophonous profusion of uses of the word sustainable to mean anything from environmentally better to cool" (p. 3). The term sustainable, and the concepts sustainability, and sustainability education were discussed to clarify their meaning, and in this publication were informed by a social, environmental, and economic justice lens. Additionally, with a discordant possibility of use, the terms mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors were discussed in accordance to what they meant in relation to the study.

Sustainable. According to Smith and Williams (1999), the term sustainability is derived from sustain which means "to support, bear weight of, hold up, enable to last out, and give strength to endure without giving way" (p. 1). In this dissertation the use of the word sustainable implied a fresh, organic, relevant, meaningful, and contextual opportunity for working together, short-term and long-term, on agreed upon mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors. To put it in perspective the meaning of sustainable would need to be determined by understanding: who was involved, why they were involved, what they wanted to happen, how they wanted it to happen,

where it would happen, and when. With this evidence a unique group of educators and students would determine whether or not a practice, habit, or behavior was sustainable in context.

Sustainability. According to Nolet (2016), "Sustainability is an ancient concept that involves a concern for the long-term availability of those things most important for the preservation of life" (p. 41). Sustainability was used to express the concept that "it is popular [in education] because the goal of *achieving* sustainability is the defining idea of our era, while the consequences of *not achieving* sustainability are unthinkable" (p. 3). In context to this dissertation, "At its heart, sustainability is about the relationships between human beings and the world; it is about morality" (Smith & Williams, 1999, p. 1).

Sustainability Education. According to Nolet (2016), "There is a broad agreement among educators around the world that education for sustainability is a desirable pursuit, but there is not wide agreement about what exactly it is or how we should do it" (p. 41). In the context of this dissertation study, sustainability education was a concrete foundation of knowledge gained from the deep study of 28 separate theories and practices. These theories and practices presented insights on systems thinking, ways of knowing, social and economic justice, transformational learning, and more. Nolet stated that education for sustainability "responds to values, cultures, priorities, and interpretations in widely diverse contexts" (p. 41).

Mindsets. In this publication, mindsets were an equivalent to standards for learning together. They reflected the attitudes, views, and beliefs that a group of willing educators might agree on, and standards that might guide educational practices in their local learning environments. To intentionally invest in building relationships at the beginning of a school year as an example, was the equivalent of agreeing to a common standard that could be embraced by a community of like-minded educators.

Practices. In this publication, practices were the equivalent of approaches, curriculum development, instruction, and other proposed actions in schools and classrooms aligned with a set of standards or mindsets. As an example, if a community of educators were to embrace the mindset to intentionally invest in building relationships in their schools and classrooms at the beginning of the school year, then practices such as setting aside time to do it and finding ways to consistently model it would be in line with that mindset.

Habits and behaviors. In this publication, habits and behaviors were the day-to-day actions, reactions, and attitudes that reflected the mindsets and practices a community of educators agreed to honor and promote. As an example, to support a practice such as setting aside time to build relationships, the habit of consistently making honest connections and consistently being open to those connections could be a part of the daily routine for a community of educators and students.

Organization of Dissertation

The organization of the dissertation was a product of my professional experience as a trainer, coach and teacher; ten consecutive years of higher education research and study; and the results from the research study investigation. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "the organization of a dissertation is a brief concluding explanation [that] delineates the contents of the remaining chapters in the dissertation so that the reader has an idea of what to expect" (p. 11). An overview of each of the five chapters of the dissertation was presented in the following discussions providing a continuous thread of information demonstrating the connections between my experience, the literature, and the action research study conducted.

Chapter one of the dissertation, Introduction to the Study, discussed the background and rationale of the study, the scope of the study, the organization of the dissertation, an overview of

the research design, and the roles of the researcher and committee members. It identified the problems that drove the study, why the research study was focused on the problems, and the potential solutions that emerged to effectively address the problems from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Chapter two of the dissertation, Selected Review of the Literature, provided academic research that informed the action research study and confirmed the findings from the research investigation. The chapter was organized into four bodies of literature that presented a perceived problem in public education, a relevant theoretical perspective, a meaningful practical perspective, and a strategy for addressing the problem. The four bodies of literature discussed public school conditions, challenges, and consequences; education for sustainability theories and practices; 21st century approaches to learning; and relationship and trust building practices.

Chapter three of the dissertation, Methodologies and Methods, discussed the qualitative action research methodology that guided the research study and a review of the methods used for collecting the data. The chapter was organized into five sections: research methodology, research study design, qualitative action research study, research study context and setting, and data collection methods.

Chapter four of the dissertation, Data Investigation and Findings, discussed how the collected data moved from one stage of the analysis to the next with the intent to accurately interpret the comments, stories, and declarations made by study participants. The chapter was ordered into three sections: transcribed and coded data; organization, analysis, and synthesis of coded data; and reported major findings.

Chapter five of the dissertation, Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations, discussed the five major findings from the study in relation to what they meant, and how they

informed the study conclusions and recommendations. The chapter was organized into seven sections that molded and transformed the data into a reflection of the relevant and meaningful declarations, comments, and stories shared by the action research participants. The information included the interpretation and discussion of the findings, the conclusions and implications, and the recommendations, applications, and practices. It also included specific recommendations for conducting a district-wide action research study, a school-wide relationship building intervention, a district-wide relationship building intervention, and a pilot course for teachers in training.

Overview of Research Design

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the design overview outlined the research approach, including an introduction to the methodology, research setting, study population, instrumentation, methods for collecting data, and a review of the analysis. This research approach reflected a culture of inquiry. The following guidelines presented by Bentz and Shapiro (1998) provided a relevant understanding of how to approach a research study and dissertation.

> Inquiry and research always take place within a historical and social context, not merely in an intellectual context, such as the postmodern situation in the human and social sciences, but in the wider context of social, political, economic, cultural, technological, and environmental trends of which that intellectual situation is a part. (p. 16)

The ideas for the design of this study were significantly impacted by current social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics that affected public education.

According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998) in choosing a methodology the researcher was charged with finding methods that are appropriate for asking specific questions. The choices they noted were to either use research techniques to ask questions and capture data in a quantitative

study, or gather material from or about human beings in a qualitative study. The research was conducted in online and face-to-face discussions in schools and classrooms. It was aimed at collecting data from teachers and school administrators through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and surveys. It included a plan to transcribe data manually and organize it through codes and factors that informed the analysis.

The study was designed to learn from teachers and school administrators at every grade level in any geographical location, and there were no restrictions on experience. The interviews and anecdote circle discussions were scheduled for one hour and they were conducted predominantly through Zoom videoconference calls. The survey was conducted through email. There were 17 interviews conducted, three anecdote circle discussions involving 10 participants, and a survey involving 15 participants.

Role of Researcher

Researcher positionality. My worldview was a product of the experiences I had growing up in a large Italian-American family where I was never special but also never overlooked, a combination of practices that created a sense of fairness and equality. From my recollection as a child, life was a continuous celebration of significant events, and these experiences brought a huge community of extended family members together on a regular basis to connect, relate, and learn. My worldview was also grounded in the experiences I had traveling around the world for extended periods of time connecting and relating with individuals from very different cultures and backgrounds. Additionally, my positionality was a product of the many backpacking trips into the wilderness that connected me with the old growth trees and surrounding forests; instilling in me a deep relationship with the earth. Most significantly, my education in this last decade not only impacted my worldview with new information and knowledge it produced a

greater understanding of what I thought I knew about my ontological and epistemological renderings expanding my mind in ways I could not have imagined.

Researcher responsibility. The study was designed to contrast my experience, the knowledge I gained in ten years of higher education studies, and my beliefs and values about relationships and trust with the views and beliefs of other educators. It was an ideal time for me to learn how teachers and school administrators viewed the significance of building relationships in their schools and classrooms, and to weave what I learned into a more informed perspective. My role was to conduct relevant and meaningful interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and surveys to uncover the voices of the educators who participated in the study. My position was to conduct a thorough study, and to make an exemplary attempt mandated by Yin (2018) who cautioned researchers for over 25 years to thoroughly analyze the data collected, interpret its meaning, and make conclusions and recommendations based on study the findings in line with the research questions asked.

Researcher assumptions. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) developed a premise they credited to Marshall and Rossman (2016). There were three critical concerns that were elemental to the dissertation process: do-ability, should-do-ability, and want-to-do-ability. Bloomberg and Volpe asserted that these three concerns about conducting research with live participants needed to be identified before the research was undertaken. (1) Was the study doable; was it feasible, clear, credible, and achievable? (2) Was the study worthy; did public school conditions, challenges, and consequences matter and what was the significance? (3) Did the researcher want to do the study; could I manage the workload and stay focused, and was I ready, capable, and willing to conduct the proposed research (pp. 72-73)?

Do-ability. A reasonable timeline for this research study was in place stretching from the beginning of the spring 2019 term and culminating at the completion of the spring 2020 term. The dissertation proposal completed in the spring 2019 term was the most clarifying stretch of research and study to that point in my journey to complete a dissertation. It clarified that the proposed research was relevant, meaningful, and doable. The charge to complete a dissertation proposal prepared me to conduct a feasible, credible, and achievable action research study to inform this dissertation.

Should-do-ability. Struggles for students in public schools were well documented. The books, studies, journal articles, reports, and critiques consumed over a decade of higher education studies discussed in chapter two of the dissertation verified the struggles. The news about conditions, challenges, and the consequences for students had been relatively steady for a decade. Income inequality in the United States had been on a steady rise for 30 years (Thorson & Gearhart, 2018), and the gap in income opportunities was at a near record high. The gap, a lack of resources for students and teachers, and archaic approaches to learning were conditions that reflected the challenges and consequences for public schools.

The problem was not going away and became an affront to fairness and social justice (McLoyd, 2019). The conditions in schools created hurdles for students of color and students from low-income families, "to access quality preschools, childcare choices, healthcare choices, school conditions, and enrichment activities" (Catone, et al., 2017, p. 1). If this research study could expose income inequality as an example, and demonstrate that there were approaches to learning that had the capacity to transcend the limitations of income inequality, then I believe it served a purpose. If through the findings, conclusions, and recommendations there was an opportunity to create awareness and understanding, and a chance to practice intentionally

building relationships this study needed to be done. There was little doubt that this study and research was warranted, that it had merit, and that there was good reason to look closer at continuing to study the problems and potential solutions.

Want-to-do-ability. I built relationships and trust in workshops, on playing fields, and in schools and classrooms for 30 years, and I studied the merits of being connected, relating and learning with others at a doctoral level. I believed I was in an ideal position to undertake this study, and in the process of conducting the research proved that I was capable, willing, and ready to complete it. I needed and wanted to conduct a study that highlighted education for sustainability theories and practices, 21st century approaches to learning, and relationship trust building practices for schools and classrooms. I hoped to demonstrate that they had the capacity to transcend the conditions, challenges, and consequences that students, teachers and school administrators faced every day in their schools and classrooms.

Role of PhD Committee Members

In every dimension of the work to complete the dissertation and action research study it was important to understand the significance of modeling relationship strategies and practices. In consideration of this, I was charged with identifying four committee members to help me complete an action research study and produce a presentation of a dissertation. There was one set of important questions to be answered in the initial search: how well did I know this person, did I trust this person, and did they trust me? In this way I was able to assemble a team of individuals that understood my passion and desire, and also understood the role they would play to support my work and achieve my goals.

Dr. Lynne McMahan. Lynne was an Associate Faculty member and School Counseling Program Coordinator in the Education Department at Prescott College. She was my committee

chairperson and core faculty advisor in this Ph.D. program. She was also an Associate Faculty member and the Masters of Education Program Coordinator in the Education Department at Marylhurst University where I completed my undergraduate studies. Lynne had a strong background in building community. Her work with schools to become Tribes Learning Communities (Gibbs, 2014) influenced my understanding of how relationship building was contained and prioritized in proven approaches to learning, and she shared my passion for building relationships in schools. Lynne was highly organized and effective in her role as the chair of my committee, she was always available, and always generous with her time. Lynne's extensive experience and understanding working with public schools influenced the research design and implementation providing me with sound advice on how to approach educators and proceed with my research.

Dr. Emily Affolter. Emily was the Director of the Ph.D. in Sustainability Education Program at Prescott College, and she was a member of the faculty. I had the good fortune to complete two courses in this program with Emily at the helm. The finalization of my dissertation institutional review board (IRB) application under her watch became one of the most significant documents I completed to inform my dissertation work, and her guidance and expertise made the difference. Emily was a critical thinker, professional researcher, and master teacher, and she was a great partner/mentor during this journey. She steered me in the right direction when I needed her feedback, she provided high-energy support that was engaging and stimulating, and she was totally encouraging every step of the way in her suggestions and advice. Emily brought a strong feminist perspective and younger generation viewpoint to the mix of my committee members. As a professional in the field of research I learned from her expertise in research methodologies and

methods. Emily's dissertation, Staying Woke, was a trusted resource that provided me with direction, insights, modeling, and creative ideas for completing this work.

Dr. Dale Rooklyn. Dale and I have been friends and colleagues for 25 years. Together we managed and participated in dozens of activities and events to build community in Ashland, Oregon. As the principal of Ashland Middle School, Dale hosted several significant school projects that involved our combined skills and talents. Together we teamed up to bring science, leadership, and community building to the students in our school district establishing a solid working relationship. Dale has been a trusted resource throughout my return to higher education. During the application process for this program Dale was a "go-to" resource for questions, and he wrote letters of recommendation for both my masters program and the doctorate program. Our familiarity and friendship provided a stable foundation of support during this program. Dale's experience as an administrator and consultant in the public school system was invaluable. His suggestions and advice were consistently grounded in calmness and pragmatism bringing a lens that I seriously needed to consider to negotiate my way through this dissertation.

Dr. Rick Medrick. Rick was the first person I connected with at Prescott College and we worked in close contact throughout my time in the program. He assisted me through a one-year application process, helped to orient my entire cohort through the first stages of the program, and took part in each of the colloquiums and symposiums I participated in with great support and encouragement. Rick was the instructor of my first term sustainability leadership course, and a part of every decision I made moving through this program over four years. He provided a philosophical benchmark for me to weigh in on, was diligent in his effort to remind me not to be too sure about anything, and cautioned me to act with humility as I grew and developed in the program. He helped me to stay focused on my purpose and passion, and simultaneously

presented a number of challenges to keep me grounded in an even larger view. Rick was a co-founder of the doctorate program at Prescott College and his knowledge of the program was well noted. He was an invaluable resource as I negotiated my way to the completion of the program, and he was a trusted friend indeed.

It was very fortunate to have these four committee members in my corner as I completed the action research study and dissertation. They provided continued support and encouragement, and especially helped me to keep my passion in check while I stayed focused on completing the task at hand. With their support I was able to make a significant shift in my research focus at a critical juncture, in time to adjust my plans and still conduct a reliable action research study. Their consideration and willingness to assist me in this process was a testament to the power and significance of the relationships we established and the level of trust we had for one another. Their guidance and direction was unquestionable and kept me on track to complete the work.

Summary

The introduction was designed to briefly explore the elements of this dissertation. The overview provided an understanding of the dissertation backdrop, and a look at the study focus, problem, intent, purpose, significance, questions, hypotheses, and terminology. The introduction also provided a review of the five chapters, details of the design of the study, and a discussion about the roles of the researcher and the dissertation committee members.

In a breakout session during my Ph.D. orientation in the fall of 2016, Dr. Mary Poole, a Prescott College Faculty member and Director of the Kenya Dopoi Center, discussed the nature of inquiry. She introduced the significance of research, the knowledge it brought, and the power it had; a three-pronged investigation and inquiry into the responsibility undertaken by a researcher. In her estimation it was important to understand that research needed to be produced,

vetted, published, and verified to avoid presenting a colonialized view of material at the expense of research participants and what mattered to them. The power of research from her point of view, working with indigenous populations, was thought to be significant in its capacity to influence, shift, create change, and find ways to empower others. I can only hope that my research meant Mary's standards, and that through this study and dissertation there was an opportunity to produce new knowledge that can shift the power in public education toward students and teachers.

Chapter II - Selected Review of the Literature

The primary focus of this literature review reflected a decade of research on conditions in U.S. public schools, the challenges those conditions created, and the consequences for students, teachers, education, and society. The *intent* of the action research study was to demonstrate that the educational system was overwhelmed by an unequal distribution of funding, decades of feckless reform, limited resources for students and teachers, and an archaic approach to education grounded in standards, proficiency, testing, and grading. These problems created challenges for teachers and students, fueled student absenteeism and dropout rates, and impacted teacher burnout rates.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), in 2017 there were 50.6 million students enrolled in U.S. public schools with approximately 15 million enrolled in high school. Based on a 10-year trend, high school dropout rates averaged 20% nationally. If an estimated 3.75 million high school seniors did not graduate in 2017, where did 750,000 young people go, if they dropped out of high school without a fair and decent education, and without the proper tools and skillsets to negotiate the 21st century? This review of the literature addressed these critical conditions, challenges, and consequences.

The secondary focus of this literature review reflected a set of theories, practices, and approaches to education and learning. Elements of education for sustainability theories and practices, 21st century approaches to learning, and relationship trust building practices produced a foundation of literature that informed this dissertation and an action research study. The *purpose* of the study was to identify how teachers approached building relationships in their schools and classrooms, and if the data supported or contradicted that intentionally building relationships was a relevant educational practice.

The study was grounded in sustainable theories from a scientific, traditional, historical, and learning perspective. It was grounded in approaches to learning that provided evidence of benefits that connecting and relating in schools and classrooms was generally positive and enhanced learning. It was also grounded in the study of relationship and trust building practices that supported the study hypothesis, suggesting that connecting and relating was a relevant and meaningful educational practice.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), a literature review was logically presented by providing a statement of purpose, identifying bodies of literature and the rationale for the topics selected, a review of the process and each topic, a theoretical or conceptual framework, and a summary (p. 176). This selected review of the literature covered all of the criteria outlined by Bloomberg and Volpe through discussions regarding: (1) conditions, challenges, and consequences in U.S. public schools, (2) education for sustainability theories and practices, (3) 21st century approaches to learning, and (4) relationship trust building practices. This selected review of the literature was informed by the research question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students?

The four bodies of literature discussed were deliberately presented in a sequential order. The research problem was featured, discussed, and understood, and subsequently a set of educational theories, practices, and approaches were framed, discussed, and understood. The investigation of sustainability education theories and practices produced evidence of *sustainable mindsets* or standards to guide an approach to solving problems in U.S. public schools. The 21st century approaches to learning produced evidence of *sustainable practices* providing relevant and meaningful opportunities for directly addressing the problems. The investigation of relationship trust building practices produced evidence of *sustainable habits and behaviors* that could be practiced in schools and classrooms to keep students engaged and in school. The four bodies of literature presented in Figure 2.1, "Solving the Problems," reflected the relationship between the research study problems and sustainable mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors that had the capacity to transcend the problems.

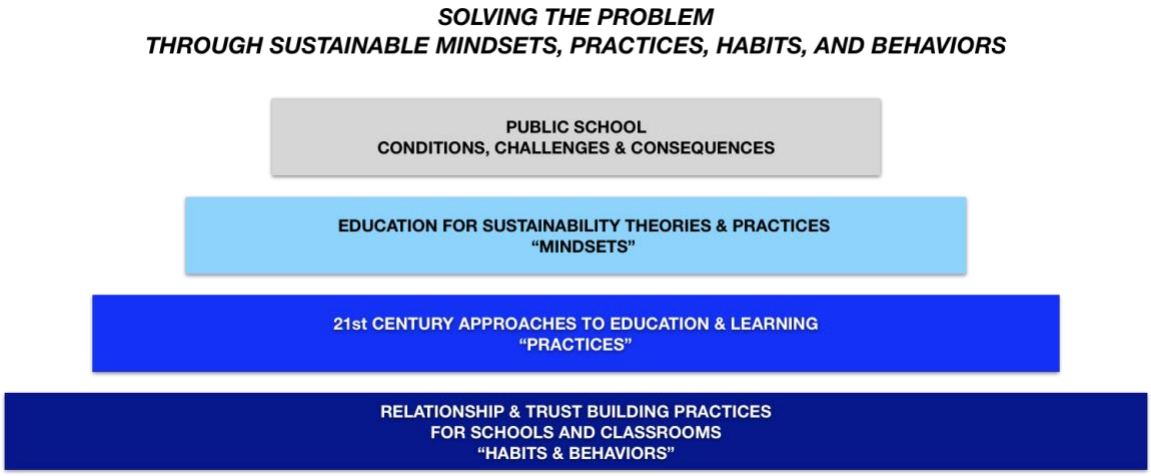


Figure 2.1

Setting Up the Research Problem

According to Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008), "Everyday research usually begins not with dreaming up a topic to think about but with a practical problem that, if you ignore it, means trouble" (p. 52). The problem addressed in this dissertation study had been troublesome

for teachers and students for ten years. "A *practical problem* [say the authors] is caused by some condition in the world that makes us unhappy" (p.53) and can be solved by doing something. The practical problem considered in this study made many people unhappy, and the educational community was completely aware of the unhappiness and failures, yet the problem continued, even with options for solving it. The authors added a second dimension to problem solving by asserting that while identifying a practical problem is essential to the study, it is a *conceptual problem* that drives research, "one that arises when we simply do not *understand* something about the world as well as we would like" (p. 53). A conceptual problem can be solved by actually not doing something, and rather by finding answers to research questions framed to better understand the problem.

According to Robbins (2020), "Many Americans are not aware of how bleak the education landscape in this country has become" (p. 2). Robbins reported on current conditions in a March 20th, 2020 article in the New York Times. Her report was staggering but not surprising. The issues covered in the article were well documented over the last decade and Robbins painted a familiar picture regarding unacceptable teacher pay, unrealistic individual teacher expectations, and the psychological impact of teacher stress and burnout.

The report demonstrated that teachers and their students are under siege with distractions. In one view a school librarian offered a sobering perspective, indicating that conditions may have worsened under this latest administration and Department of Education Leadership, claiming, “Teachers feel more voiceless than ever," and "There’s a lack of community support and understanding of how difficult it can be to serve children’s educational, emotional and psychological needs” (Robbins, 2020, p. 2).

Educators were *missing an opportunity* to connect with students through relevant and meaningful learning that could keep them engaged in student life and interested in school. Judging from the research on school conditions, and the research on 21st century learning opportunities, the suggestion that educators were missing an opportunity was well founded in the theories, practices, and approaches to learning discussed in this literature review. Educators understood that the path and trajectory toward dropping out of high school began early. They knew when and how it started in elementary school. They knew what it meant for *any* student to get behind and then try to catch up. They knew how hard it would be for those students out in the world with fewer tools and options, and yet the problem persisted. From all indications *the opportunity was there* to address this persistent problem, and it may be that the educational community was just missing it.

The practical problem identified in this research was the incident of high school dropout rates that were fueled by persistent conditions, and the challenges for students who got too far behind in their studies to catch up. The conceptual problem was trying to understand why educators consistently missed the opportunity to effectively intervene with relevant strategies. The approach was to ask questions that might make sense of the conditions, challenges, and consequences that created the problem, and to help better understand why something had not been done. The intention of the selected review of the literature was to expose the practical and conceptual elements of the research problem, and introduce theoretical and practical solutions to address the problem.

Sustainability Education Integration

According to Nolet (2016), sustainability education "responds to values, cultures, priorities, and interpretations in widely diverse contexts" (p. 41). Therefore, from a sustainability

education point of view, sustainable theories and practices were woven into every element of the dissertation, the action research study conducted, and the production of this literature review. The literature review offered a closer examination of topics such as systems theory and thinking, other ways of knowing, social and environmental justice, and transformational learning. These sustainable theories and practices in particular presented evidence that connecting with one another and "mother earth," and doing it in a fair and equitable manner, could be a formula for building a sustainable learning community.

According to Phillips (2012), sustainability literacy implied having knowledge and a deep understanding of sustainability, that incorporated as an example, considering the matters of education from an economic, environmental, and societal point of view. Phillips pointed out that it was not an easy task to incorporate this thinking and, "To be fair, none of us is certain what a sustainable society will look like" (p. 211). Therefore this selected review of the literature presented an opportunity to discuss what a sustainable school or classroom might look like. What might curriculum or instruction look like influenced by sustainable theories and practices, and how might that influence a potentially sustainable society?

According to Phillips (2012), "The educational system, of course, is at the heart of our current unsustainable society, being both its product and its creator" (p. 209). His discussion bordered on what might happen if we were held accountable by sustainable mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors, and he advocated for "an education system where *process* is paramount and itself becomes the change that will take us through sustainability literacy towards sustainability" (p. 209). This review was focused on uncovering the benefits of understanding the economic, environmental, and social aspects of change when factoring in sustainable literacy, sustainable education, and a sustainable society. Figure 2.2, "Sustainability Education

Integration," presented a view of the integration between sustainable mindsets, practices, habits and behaviors and how they incorporated elements of the literature review into a strategy for conducting a sustainable shift in education.

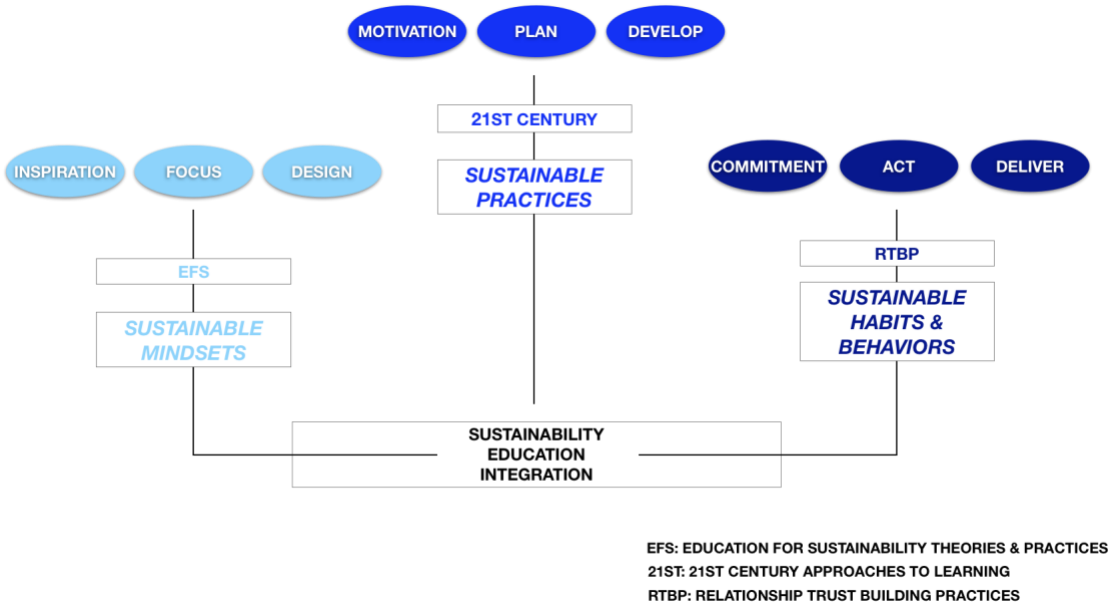


Figure 2.2

Conditions, Challenges, and Consequences in U.S. Public Schools

The understanding of public school conditions, the challenges that developed because of those conditions, and the ultimate consequences for students and teachers evolved over a decade of higher education research and study. Reports on the trends of students falling behind in their studies, chronic absenteeism, and high school dropout rates have not differed much in the last decade. In large part due to income inequities, feckless reform, lacking resources, and an outdated system of education for the 21st century, research showed that public school students across the United States struggled academically, emotionally, and socially; especially students of color and students from low-income families.

Conditions. Thorson and Gearhart (2018) reported that, "One of the most important economic trends of the past 30 years has been the escalating levels of within-country income

inequality" (p. 287), and the United States is one of the hardest hit countries. "Research has demonstrated the substantial negative impacts that economic inequality has on society" (p. 287), and the authors argued that the problems with inequality created a difficult matter that presented an important challenge facing the world today. According to the Joint Economic Committee Congress of the United States, "income inequality in the United States has been growing for more than three decades and is now near a record high" ("Income Inequality in the U.S.", 2014, p. 1).

According to McLoyd (2019), the degree of income inequality for many Americans across the board "has risen to such a degree that it is deemed an unambiguous affront to principles of fairness and social justice" (pp. 592-593). In a study conducted with teacher advocates striving for educational equity and social justice, and reporting on the association between family wealth and educational outcomes, Catone, Saunders, Perez, Harris, and Miller-Gootnick (2017) discussed the lack of access to a range of opportunities (p. 20). In the report teachers claimed that growing income inequality hampered access to quality preschools, childcare choices, healthcare choices, school conditions, and enrichment activities (Catone et al., 2017, p. 1).

According to Ackerman and Mackenzie (2007) there was evidence to suggest that leadership in U.S. public schools was hampered by “a shortage of principals with the qualities to help develop a sustainability transformation” (p. 96). This was not as much a criticism of the unpreparedness of principals as it was an indicator of a structural limitation noted by Schmoker (1999). He claimed that public school leadership was undermined by ineffective educational reform and short-term plans and decisions rarely based in sustainable thinking. According to Schmoker, "There are simple, proven, affordable structures that exist right now and could have a

dramatic, widespread impact on schools and achievement - in virtually any school" (p. 1). Schmoker pointed to the benefits of educators functioning as a professional learning community as one of those structures. He asserted, however, that this type of proven and affordable reform has been "supplanted and obscured by hugely popular, but patently discredited, reform and improvement models" (Schmoker, 1999, p. 1).

According to Goldstein (2019, December 5th) in a recent New York Times podcast and transcript, "For decades, the U.S. has spent billions of dollars trying to close its education gap with the rest of the world. New data shows that all that money made no difference" (p. 1). Goldstein discussed that in the 1990's the consensus was to involve Washington in the role of educational reform, and that brought big private money to the table. The question asked at the top of the podcast was, "How have decades of attempted reform, and billions of dollars, failed to improve students' performance across the country" (p. 1).

Goldstein (2019, December 5th) discussed the more recent failures of the No Child Left Behind Act that came out of the Bush administration, and Common Core Standards and A Race to the Top reform that came out of the Obama administration. A common understanding was that these attempts and previous attempts to reform education cost billions of dollars, and resulted in stressed out teachers with a narrow opportunity to teach outside of tests and standards. A closing question in the podcast was asked about the seriousness of this report and if it was really a crisis. Goldstein responded,

> I think it is. I mean, how can you feel pride when you think about that 15-year-old who can't read as well as a 10-year-old should? With those types of literacy skills, they're not going to be suited for work that's going to pay a living wage in this economy that we're living in. (16:22)

In the forward to *The Flat World and Education* by Darling-Hammond (2010), James A. Banks wrote that, "Darling-Hammond presents indisputable and chilling statistics that document the extent to which the United States faces a national crisis" (ix). Banks noted that the crisis was exemplified by how U.S. students are being outperformed in science and math compared to other nations around the world. Banks made a second striking point in the forward of the book:

> One of the most painful and disturbing findings that Darling-Hammond reveals is how high rates of incarceration in the United States are tied to under-education, race, and unemployment. The United States has 5 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of its prison inmates. Most U.S prison inmates are high school dropouts, and many are functionally illiterate and have learning disabilities. (x)

Darling-Hammond (2010) reported on a story about a particular California elementary school that demonstrated specifically how a lack of resources impacted teachers and students. She reported that conditions in this school precipitated a 2002 lawsuit filed on behalf of students of color and students from low-income families across the state of California. This particular school had no air conditioning in classrooms that could get up to 90 degrees in the summer; no heating, requiring students to wear coats in the winter; no computers and only outdated encyclopedias available for reference; overcrowded classrooms with students sitting on heaters as desks; limited locked bathroom facilities creating havoc for young children; and a lack of cleanliness throughout the school. This short list was only part of a much longer list of unacceptable conditions (p. 7). This was an extreme snapshot of the conditions in one inner city school two decades ago, but what did this picture say about the commitment to kids in any neighborhood or school, anytime and anywhere in this country? Sadly, Darling-Hammond reported on other schools that reflected similar conditions at the time of her research.

Challenges. There was evidence from a decade of research that students in U.S. public schools were not engaged in their studies and fell behind with reading, literacy, assignments, and grades. Additionally, evidence showed that these students did not have a support system to help them navigate their school experience, and that this was a significant factor in their tendency to fall behind. Wise (2008) addressed some of the challenges this produced and claimed that only 30% of high school freshman read at grade level, that 1.2 million students dropped out of high school every year, and that 20-42% of incoming freshman college students required remedial reading, writing, and/or math before they could register for college level courses. The problem Wise posed has not gone away in over ten years and was discussed further in this section of the literature review to emphasize these critical factors.

According to McLoyd (2019), "By middle childhood, children show surprisingly keen awareness and sensitivity to group-level exclusion, inequality of opportunity, and broader society-level patterns of economic inequality" (p. 593). Falling behind in reading, literacy, and studies was accelerated in circumstances where there was a lack of educator support and encouragement. According to Ratcliff, Carroll, and Hunt (2017), "For decades, researchers have examined the impact of classroom management on teaching and learning" (p. 170). The authors claimed that the quality of classroom engagement was tied to behavior, and that student "time-on-task" was a significant factor associated with completing work. The authors discussed the impact on student accountability and staying current with their studies. In all likelihood teachers retreating from their duties and responsibilities significantly impacted student readiness to succeed, just when they needed the support and encouragement.

According to Heider (2005), schools are departmentalized and separated by grade levels and "ever-increasing duties leave little time for communication between teachers" (p. 3). She

claimed that the tendency for teachers was to figure out how to go it alone and "adopt a self-reliant philosophy" (p. 3). Heider discussed the possibility of telementoring, veteran teacher mentoring, novice teacher learning communities, and peer coaching as ways to alleviate the isolation. In her journal article Heider asserted that teacher attrition became a very serious problem, demonstrated in this quote from Ingersoll (2002), that concluded,

> Despite investing four, sometimes five years of their time and money in a college education, spending hundreds of hours observing teachers in the classroom, completing a semester as a student teacher, and obtaining a job in a very competitive field, forty-six percent of new teachers nationwide leave the profession within the first five years of service. (Ingersoll, 2002, as cited in Heider, 2005, p. 1)

According to Schlichte, Yssel, and Merbler (2010), teachers could easily be isolated in their work to meet common core standards, develop curricula, manage proficiencies, and prepare lesson plans for the classroom. The authors commented that, "The difficulties that teachers face are undeniable" (p. 35). According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Balfanz (2009), "Teachers and principals identified many reasons why students drop out, reflecting an understanding of the complexity of the problem. Most cite the lack of parental involvement and support as the core problem" (p. 22).

However, the research citing the incidence of students falling behind because of a lack of parental involvement was contrasted by differing reports. These reports showcased how the challenges of falling behind and a lack of support were mediated by educators taking the time to reach out to parents and caregivers. According to Wurm (2005), in a discussion about the Reggio Emilia system of early childhood development, “Family participation is seen as essential to both the families and to the school” (p. 125). Wurm discussed that it all started with building honest,

open, and loving relationships with students and families. From this perspective the claim that parents were responsible for students falling behind in school was somewhat tempered. The significance of modeling relevant, meaningful, contextual, and sustainable relationship building practices in schools and classrooms, as exemplified by the Reggio system, provided a place for parents to contribute. Complaining about a lack of parental involvement was futile by comparison.

Additionally, in an interview conducted with Dr. Timothy Baird (11.11.18), superintendent of the Encinitas Union School District, there was also evidence that in a system where parents had a place to get involved, the support was noticeable. In a system where the educators took the responsibility to secure parental involvement for students who fall behind, there were numerous opportunities for support. Baird reported that 50% of the parents in his district of 5,400 students volunteered regularly. Their support system resulted in the capacity to be able to identify ways to keep all students engaged and involved. Parents took on leadership roles to run existing projects with students, and in one instance parents created a nonprofit organization to sustain various green projects, waste management efforts, and learning gardens, to keep a 10 year commitment to a green school district alive and well.

Consequences. According to the report, *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools* (2016), produced by the U.S. Department of Education, the disparities between populations of students being absent from school were striking. As an example, Native American students were 50% more likely to miss three weeks of school than white students, and African American students were 40% more likely to be absent than white students (p. 2). The report claimed that chronic absenteeism (missing school 10% of the time or more) occurred at every grade level and rates were highest in high school. According to data in the 2015-16 Civil Rights Data Collection,

the report stated that, "Understanding when students are most at risk helps schools and advocates better target interventions to improve student outcomes" (p. 3). Children who were chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade were much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade. Students who could not read at grade level by the end of the third grade were four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school (*Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools,* 2016, p. 5).

In *A National Portrait of Chronic Absenteeism in the Early Grades* (2007) it was reported that, "Early absenteeism negatively impacts academic achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge in the early school years" (p. 3). Children "missing 10% or more of the school year scored five points less than did those who were absent up to 3% of the school year in kindergarten" (p. 3). "If children are not in school, the odds that they will succeed are lessened" (p. 4). These patterns supported the notion that conditions in U.S. public schools created challenges for students, and that the challenges, difficult to overcome, produced consequences for students, teachers, schools, and society at large.

According to Darling-Hammond (2010) there was a price to be paid for teacher turnover and the effects of a low quality education. She claimed that, "Furthermore, society bears the later costs of dropouts, incarceration, and low productivity in the workforce, currently amounting to nearly $300 billion annually, according to recent estimates" (p. 107). The lack of appropriate pay, resources, and support for teachers was evident in Darling-Hammonds report, but even more importantly she asserted that it was not just the money, "The question should not be whether money spent on education can make a difference, but *how* strategic educational investments can influence school outcomes" (p. 111).

The intent of this dissertation and the action research study was to expose the problems in U.S. public schools. They were presented in discussions about conditions, challenges, and consequences faced by students and teachers over two decades. From the perspective that conditions fueled challenges and challenges produced consequences, a logical and deeper understanding of public school problems was identified and acknowledged through the review of selected literature. Discussions about the theories, practices, and approaches to education and learning that follow were a direct result of understanding the solutions to public school problems in relation to the conditions, challenges, and consequences discussed.

Education for Sustainability Theories and Practices

An in-depth view of complex adaptive systems, Indigenous ways of knowing, ecopsychology, intersectionality, and transformational leadership and learning were presented in individual discussions in this review. From a scientific, traditional knowledge, historical, and transformational learning perspective a common theme emerged in this review that connecting with the earth and other human beings to form trusting relationships was a natural event. Through a complex adaptive systems lens all humans and other than human entities were connected. Through the lens of Indigenous studies the earth was sacred and the people were the stewards who cared for it. From an ecojustice lens there was a moral duty to stand with the environment. From a social justice lens there was an opportunity for humans to shift out of the need to oppress. From a transformational learning lens, if people connected around common ground to identify common interests, and tackled common problems or opportunities to learn, there was a good chance for positive and lasting change.

Complex adaptive systems. According to Wang, Han, and Yang (2015), "Complexity scholars have identified several key features of complex adaptive systems" (p. 382). The authors

claimed that a complex adaptive system was self-organized, adaptable, dynamic, and had the ability to co-evolve with other systems. Their study provided scientific proof of the nature and benefits of complex adaptive systems in a discussion about the importance of blended learning, an approach to education that blends online and face-face to instruction. The authors discussed what typifies blended learning, how their current study provided a deeper understanding of blended learning, and how the *subsystems* of blended learning impacted one another. The authors claimed that this dynamic created a healthier system that presented the natural benefits of a complex adaptive system.

According to Keshavarz, Nutbeam, Rowling, and Khavarpour (2010) "there are many different types of complex adaptive systems" (p. 1473). The authors categorized them into three broad groups: "as artificial (for example, computer based systems), natural (for example, immune systems and ant colonies), and social complex adaptive systems (comprising individuals and organisations)" (p. 1473). In this review schools looked very much like a social complex adaptive system with unimaginable possibilities for learning how to connect, relate, and thrive. A close investigation into systems thinking, and complex adaptive systems in particular, produced a greater understanding of why it made sense that everything was connected and related in some way to everything else. This knowledge provided a realization that while every student, teacher, administrator, classroom, school, and school district was individual in their singular existence, they were also connected to something much larger than themselves, supporting the notion that building relationships in classrooms and schools has merit.

In *How Ants Find Your Picnic Basket,* Adams (2013) explained that a single ant or ants in small numbers were completely unsophisticated and vulnerable to the world around them. Left alone they perished and died, but in large numbers they became a "super-organization." Alone or

in small numbers they were insignificant, but in large numbers they became a system that could locate a picnic basket, extract the food in the basket, and share it with their community. Research demonstrated that students perished from public high schools every day over the last two decades, and yet from a complex adaptive systems point of view, teachers and students could alter that reality by connecting and relating to help students locate picnic baskets of their own. According to Wheatley (2006), "If a system is in trouble, it can be restored to health by connecting it to more of itself. To make a system stronger, we need to create stronger relationships" (p. 145). Complex adaptive systems provided a foundation of knowledge for understanding how classrooms, schools, teachers, administrators, and all educational stakeholders benefit from being connected through stronger relationships.

Indigenous ways of knowing. How might Indigenous knowledge systems influence current educational mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors? In the study of Indigenous ways of knowing it was learned that honor and respect for all living things informed relationships, built trust, and sustained the earth. According to Absolon (2010), a Native American or Indigenous holistic approach to life prescribed to the belief that all humans, nonhumans, and life on earth were related.

> If leaders in our institutions understood that the air, water, sun, and earth are what connect us all, and that the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional realms are influenced by these connections, there would be many ways to bring about learning that favors working together and being accountable to one another. (Absolon, 2010, p. 76)

It appeared from this review that Indigenous People understood the nature of complex adaptive systems, as they seemed to weave systems thinking and traditional Indigenous mindsets and practices into an integrated view of a connected world.

In a video presentation Merculieff (2012), a Native American spokesman and local, national, and international leader painted a beautiful picture of the knowledge that drove practices in the Aleut Nation. There was a reverence associated with wings, fins, and roots, and in knowing to look to the mountain for a connection to the past, present, and future. Everything was connected in an intimate and profound way. In the Aleut Nation the first food in life was rice, the last food in life was rice, and this honored the person and the rice. The Aleuts picked every seventh flower and left berries on the bush as a practice during harvest, honoring the source and respecting the relationship.

The studies of Native American perspectives expressed long-standing traditions. These traditions influenced and guided members of Native American cultures in how to view an integrated and connected world. According to Absolon (2010), Indigenous holistic theory was a knowledge that drove practices which included,

> an intermixing and consideration of time and space: the past, present, future; directions and doorways of life; the ecology of creation such as earth, sun, water and air and all their occupants; and values that retain the balance and harmony of all of the above. (p. 75)

Traditions established by Indigenous cultures to respect and honor the balance and harmony of life provided evidence that connecting and relating as an example, to build trust in our public schools and classrooms could become a time honored practice.

Ecopsychology. According to Fisher (2012), "Ecologists study nature, while psychologists study human nature. Assuming these natures overlap, psychology already has obvious potential links to ecology. Indeed, before ecopsychology even became a word a small number of psychologists and ecologists were already crossing the boundaries" (p. 4). Fisher discussed the origin of ecopsychology, and how it combined psychology and ecology to open the doors to vast understandings about the relationship between nature and human beings. From a historical perspective, Fisher suggested that ecopsychologists were engaged in understanding the psychological, philosophical, practical, and critical tasks associated with understanding the significance of the relationships humans had with the natural world. Fisher claimed that "the four tasks weaved together to form the whole endeavor that I am calling the project of ecopsychology" (p. 6), a project designed to better understand the power of the connections between nature, human nature, ecology, and psychology.

Fisher (2012) explained that the nonhuman environment played a significant role in psychological life and health through the bonds of humans and the planet. "Such characterizations are appropriately in harmony with the root meanings of ecopsychology" (p. 4). "Psychology is the logos - the study, order, meaning, or speech - of the psyche or soul. Eco derives from the Greek oikos which means home" (p. 4). Fisher speculated that bringing psychology and ecology together opened up a great opportunity to blend psychology with nature. In regards to long-term school practices, through relationships with the earth, can understanding the importance of relating to one another and the planet provide a way to address public school conditions, challenges, and consequences?

In regards to the current environmental crisis facing human beings, Theodore Roszak, a cultural historian and founding practitioner in the study of ecopsychology, commented in the

video Echopsychology Part I (sic), "I take it [the environmental crisis] to be the greatest moral and political issue of our time" (Lourdes, 2011). Through the study of ecopsychology there was an understanding that our damaged relationship with the earth was the source of dysfunction in our society. According to Roszak, our mental health was shaped by what happened in our families, and in the psychological community folks took that for granted. He asserted that most of us understood the implications of a dysfunctional family, but that most of us did not understand the implications of our dysfunctional relationship with the earth. "The feelings of isolation and dysfunction that are so pervasive today have at their root a denial of our essential connections to nature and the non-human world. To heal, we must now find our way back home" (Lourdes, 2011).

Intersectionality. The theory of intersectionality was an equalizer that demanded attention. The essence of intersectionality confirmed the significance of the research problem that drove this study; that educators missed the opportunity to connect with students through relevant and meaningful learning that would keep them engaged in student life and interested in school. According to Simpson (2009), "When designing new programs or projects, the project design is very important. If organizations commit to applying an intersectional approach, the framework can be built into the overall design of the program or project" (p. 21). Simpson provided a diagram highlighting the unique circumstances of power, privilege, and identity in a visual titled, "Intersectionality Displayed in a Wheel Diagram" (p. 5). The wheel included some aspects of identity that created advantages and disadvantages, types of discriminations and attitudes that impacted identity, and "larger forces and structures that worked together to reinforce exclusion" (p. 5). The wheel provided a realistic view of why and how a dominant culture view of the world perpetuated social injustice.

In *The Urgency of Intersectionality*, Crenshaw (2016) exposed crimes against Black women, the lack of awareness regarding these crimes, and a simple but powerful social dynamic; we do not see the problem so we cannot fix it. She called attention to the phenomenon that without a frame of reference there was a lack of awareness. Through the intersectionality lens, Crenshaw framed a relevant view of oppression, advantage, disadvantage, prejudice, denial, and more. In Crenshaw's view the oppression of people was akin to the oppression of the planet from the view of Macy and Johnstone (2012) in their book *Active Hope*. Crenshaw discussed the oppression business as usual perspective just as Macy and Johnstone discussed the impact of the extraction industry. In addition, she discussed the importance of witnessing consequences for what they were, and for understanding yet the little things people can do to make a difference.

While Crenshaw's (2016) work was based on the struggles of Black women there was a much broader sense of intersectionality to consider according to Runyan (2018).

> Intersectional theory has also traveled across more identity borders. Although Crenshaw's early work centered on heterosexual immigrant women of color, intersectional theory is now applied to understanding how we all carry multiple, albeit constructed and provisional, identities (p. 1).

Oppression on the basis of race, gender identity, socioeconomic class, nation, sexuality, disability, religion, and age, each under various contextual and systemic circumstances, were forms of unique oppression identified in the study of intersectionality. Similar issues of exclusionary practices were presented in the sustained research conducted about conditions in U.S. public schools, where educators had the opportunity to dismiss the oppression, by intentionally connecting and relating to achieve trust in schools and classrooms.

Transformational leadership and learning. According to Wedell (2012), the ideals of

transformational leadership, as a leadership and learning strategy, embraced four qualities: an inspiring vision, authentic and honest leadership, a growth mindset, and being open to creativity and new ideas. Wedell suggested that the value of transformational leadership came from the goal to transform for the better, by cultivating opportunities for personal and professional growth and development. Most of Wedell's work appeared to be focused on leadership strategies for business and commerce, but the perspective on transformational leadership itself supported the ideals of trusting relationships and offered guidelines for transformational learning opportunities.

Raes, et al (2013) conducted research with 498 healthcare workers by facilitating team learning through transformational leadership. In their study the authors identified two approaches to leadership. They compared "laissez-faire leadership [that] avoids making decisions and using authority, often abdicating responsibility" (p. 291), and "transformational leadership [that] tries to empower the team members, and to move them beyond immediate self-interest" (p. 290). The authors confirmed the significance of building relationships to achieve trust through an explanation of their approach. "Our conception of team learning leads to a focus on conversational actions, enabling team members to become partners in the construction of shared knowledge and coordinated team activities" (p. 296).

According to Raes, et al (2013), the results of their research demonstrated that a transformational leadership approach to building teams led to team learning behaviors that served team members in their work; providing evidence that different leadership styles impact behavior. In contrast a laissez-faire leadership approach actually inhibited learning. In conclusion the authors stated that, "Our results show that transformational leadership facilitates team learning in a less direct and visible manner, developing or allowing team psychological safety in the social network, enabling further creativity and learning" (p. 299).

Poutiatine and Conners (2012) conducted a study in a simulated retreat environment. Participants came together to get reacquainted with their identity, and to find ways to better manifest that identity or to form a better understanding of their identity. The significance of their work was reflected in an understanding of their approach to go beyond the limits of traditional leadership and learning. "The formational approach of these retreats [explained the authors] is one of exploring the inner landscape of beliefs and values and connecting them with what we do as people" (p. 69). This was the kind of exploration needed to offer insights on ways to transcend the missed opportunity to connect with one another in schools and classrooms.

According to Poutiatine and Conners (2012), the retreat they conducted was more transformational rather than formational. "Rather than becoming more of themselves, these participants articulated an experience of becoming fundamentally different as a result of deep engagement with their own identity and integrity. From their perspective, a new person emerged" (p. 70). What the authors learned from the retreat experience was that, "Transformation, by contrast, is about changing the very form of the container, remaking it larger, more complex, more able to deal with multiple demands and uncertainties" (p. 72). The authors commented that a transformational experience formed and reformed one's identity, and "the process of teaching and leading for transformation must be an intentional one that is grounded in identity, both of the teacher or leader and the led" (p. 73), for both the student and the teacher.

Sustainability education theories and practices proved powerful sources of information for understanding the significance of connecting, relating and building trust. The theories and practices provided a broader and more expanded view of the problems in U.S. public schools and how to potentially solve them. Complex adaptive systems, Indigenous ways of knowing, ecopsychology, intersectionality, and transformational leadership and learning were integrated

into a relational view that supported this dissertation study with sustainable mindsets grounded in science, tradition, history, and learning.

21st Century Approaches to Learning

Research on 21st century experiential approaches to learning uncovered opportunities for overcoming public school conditions, challenges, and consequences. Included in this section of the selected review of the literature was specific research on community-based learning, connected learning, project-based learning, and team learning. A review of this body of literature significantly influenced the suggestion that educators were missing an opportunity to connect with students in their schools and classrooms to expand learning.

The approaches to learning discussed in this section encouraged connecting, relating, and building teams with students, teachers, school administrators, parents, and the community. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a group of major business and educational organizations, believed that the connection between learning and the real world was critical to student success. The Partnership defined literacy as “knowing how to use knowledge and skills in the context of modern life" (Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006, p. 1). The suggestion that the U.S. system of education was steeped in archaic practices focused on accomplishing standards, passing tests, and getting good grades was derived by understanding that there were more relevant proven methods for conducting learning in the 21st century.

According to Soule and Warrick (2015), "There is widespread consensus that our education system is failing to adequately prepare all students with the essential 21st century knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in school, career, life, and citizenship" (p. 179). In their estimation a framework for 21st century learning "encompasses the skills, knowledge, and expertise that students must master to succeed in work and life" (p. 180). Soule and Warrick

created a 21st century learning framework that focused on learning environments, professional development, curriculum and instruction, and standards and assessment. Inside this framework existed 21st century learning themes: core subjects, life and career, learning and innovation, and information media and technology (p. 181). The intent of a 21st century approach to education and learning was essentially the kind of perspective that was missing in U.S. public schools. In a closing argument, the authors commented that "Teaching and learning cannot be limited to the walls of the classroom and the responsibilities are far too great to be limited just to schools" (p. 185).

Community-based learning. Melaville, Berg, and Blank (2006), discussed a report on *Academically Based Community Service* courses that engaged students with opportunities to successfully develop citizenship. The courses connected local public schools to community organizations. Through a community improvement process, the authors reported on courses that "use hands on, real world problem solving to help students develop as participating citizens in a democratic society" (p. 47). Linking students to experiential and meaningful work in projects with local community organizations, businesses, and other community partners was what defined community-based learning. According to the authors, there were community schools involved that provided community-based learning opportunities for stakeholders from every sector of education. Individuals and organizations offered different services and provided support and opportunities for children, youth, families, and communities. "If all students are to succeed, we must pay much more attention to community-based learning as a strategy for engaging and motivating students and for strengthening the relationship between schools and communities" (Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006, iii).

In the video *Community-Based Learning: Connecting Students With Their World*, the staff at Montpelier High School (2015) pointed out that an important part of learning was to be curious. The staff discussed how community-based learning created interest in community opportunities that students might never otherwise have had. Staff and students explained that community-based learning was about meaningful experiences, relevant internships, and working with a mentor, and that learning was not confined to a classroom. The Montpelier High School learning expectations were focused on habits of learning, citizenship, problem solving, creativity, reading, writing, and communication. These were all areas of study that were fulfilled through community-based learning projects outside of the school. This example of a commitment to community-based learning in a school with 60-70 students, participating in various community projects, paid off. The school was ranked as the #2 high school in Vermont, it was designated as a *School of Success*, and since implementing the community-based learning program has secured a 94% graduation rate.

Connected learning. The connected learning theory and approach to education integrated personal interests, supportive relationships, and open opportunities into a network of learning. According to the Connected Learning Alliance (2018), "It is learning in an age of abundant access to information and social connection that embraces the diverse backgrounds and interests of all young people" ("What is Connected Learning"). The Alliance advocated for the design and development of curriculum to include educational and sustainable practices. Their approach was focused on interest driven learning, peer support throughout learning, a shared purpose for learning, academic focused instruction, project driven instruction, and an open network mentality.

The Connected Learning Alliance (2018) website highlighted interests, relationships, and opportunities on an opening page of information about connected learning. In reference to relationships the organization message was that, "Learners need support from peers and mentors to persist through setbacks and challenges," and the site claimed in subsequent comments that "A survey of 30,000 college graduates found that a strong connection to a faculty member doubled the positive life outcomes of graduates" ("What is Connected Learning"). The connected learning community believed that, "Learning is irresistible and life changing, when it connects personal interests to meaningful relationships and real-world opportunity" ("What is Connected Learning").

According to Maul, et al. (2016), the purpose of their study was to develop and accumulate aspects of youth experiences in conjunction with connected learning practices. In the study they discovered a host of benefits. Students commented that a peer-supported experience provided encouragement and support for engagement in different social worlds, "the experience is one in which interest catalyzes the search for knowledge," and students mentioned making new friends based on common interests and taking part in activities (p. 18). The elements of connected learning pointed to the value of an interest driven approach to learning and a peer support network that brought students together in relationship. Through connected learning, students identified with one another through common interests that brought them together, built relationships by finding common ground, and formed partnerships by establishing common goals.

Project-based learning. According to Bell (2010), project based learning occurred when students learned in a social environment, worked hand-in-hand with their teachers to discover ideas through careful scaffolding, documented their journey of learning, and finally

presented their learning through projects (p. 42). Bell explained that in project based learning environments, children constructed knowledge, built on their background knowledge, and retained more information (p. 42). The author reported that "Beginning this approach early leads to greater success, because it hones the essential skills necessary for the twenty-first century" (pp. 42-43). Bell commented that through project based learning, "Learners pursue knowledge by asking questions that have piqued their natural curiosity," and that project-based learning was grounded in inquiry (p. 39).

According to the Buck Institute for Education (2018), "too many students, especially those furthest from opportunity, are unprepared for the modern economy and the challenges of the 21st century" ("What is PBL"). The institute claimed that project based learning "prepares students for academic, personal, and career success, and readies young people to rise to the challenges of their lives and the world they will inherit" ("What is PBL"). As a result of project based learning the "students develop deep content knowledge as well as critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills in the context of doing an authentic, meaningful project" ("What is PBL"). Through project-based learning students had the opportunity to build strong relationships, find ways to show up to school, and ways to stay in school through project based learning instruction. The message on the website claimed that project based learning "unleashes a contagious, creative energy among students and teachers" ("Why PBL").

Team learning. Pearsall and Venkataramani (2015) conducted a team learning study, citing what they called *The Interactive Effects of Team Learning*. It involved team learning orientation, team identification, team goals and mental models, team planning processes, and team performance. To inform their findings, the authors used data "from long-term, real-life teams that engaged in a computer simulation designed to create both asymmetric goals and

representational gaps about those goals" (p. 735). The authors made contributions to the study of team learning by identifying the positive nature of learning when teams were in alignment and when they were not. The authors commented that, "a team's ability to overcome these conflicting goals [gap in alignment] and improve team performance requires high levels of both team learning orientation and team identification" (p. 736).

Senge (1990), quoted basketball great Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics to exemplify the nature of team learning, "[We] were a team of specialists, and like a team of specialists in any field, our performance depended both on individual excellence and on how well we worked together" (p. 233). Senge reported that Russell was clear to conclude that the relationships with the team made up the greatest moments in his long tenure of many notable triumphs. This implied a strong supportive message confirming the significance of relationship building even in a most advantageous environment like professional sports. According to Senge, "Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (p. 236).

Also according to Senge (1990), there were three critical dimensions to team learning. There was a need to "think insightfully about complex issues," incorporating many minds to solve problems. There was a need "for innovative, coordinated action," as in a winning professional sports franchise. Third, there was a need "for the role of team members on other teams," establishing that in an organization such as an elementary school, there were multiple teams working together for the betterment of the whole community (pp. 236-237). This strategy encouraged people on teams to stay focused, work together, and broaden the possibilities of learning. These insights provided an understanding that team learning had great merit and therefore that building relationships to build teams also had great merit.

Community-based learning, connected learning, project-based learning, and team learning practitioners intentionally built relationships with learners to forward their ideas and practices. Building a community with trusted individuals, and connecting with individuals through peer support and a shared purpose, required established relationships to get the work done. Completing a project with like-minded and accountable individuals, and building a winning team also required established relationships to get the ball rolling. Reported successes from these approaches to education and learning provided evidence that the educational community had the opportunity to practice and model any number of 21st century approaches to curriculum and instruction, to address public school conditions, challenges, and consequences.

Relationship Trust Building Practices

A primary finding that emerged from the investigations and research regarding relationships and trust demonstrated that there were consistently positive benefits associated with connecting to nature, with community, and in schools and classrooms. The overall evidence revealed that creating relationships with learners at every stage of development had a positive impact on learning. The discussions in this section demonstrated the benefits and the influence of building relationships and trust from an investigation of six random studies. The studies collectively yielded a substantial amount of evidence about the positive nature of connecting, relating, and building trust. The discussions provided evidence that building relationships between students, teachers, and administrators in various learning environments resulted in positive outcomes. The studies examined demonstrated that through the development of trusting relationships, students in particular were more likely to engage and discover, reflect and grow, and benefit from positive relationships that directly enhanced individual learning and created a culture of trust.

Building relationships with fifth graders. Miller, et al. (2017), discussed a study comparing the results of 368 fifth grade students who took part in a *Relationship Building Intervention* (RBI) and 259 fifth grade students who did not. The authors explained that the intervention "includes a series of teacher-facilitated, structured activities designed to promote positive peer relationships and inclusive classroom communities" (p. 76). The authors discussed the participants, procedures, methods, and analysis of the study. They examined pretest differences, the evaluation of outcome variables and implementation data, social behaviors, school connectedness, academic achievement, implementation data, limitations, and future directions.

According to Miller et al. (2017), "The RBI provides opportunities for children to learn key social and emotional skills," the authors focused on "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making" (p. 76). The report on student successes in this study was impressive:

> Findings revealed that students who participated in the RBI liked school more, felt a greater sense of classroom identification and inclusion, were perceived by teachers to be less aggressive, and performed better academically than students who were in control classrooms. Further, implementation data showed that students and teachers responded positively to the activities. These results suggest that the RBI is a promising approach for improving the social and learning environment in fifth-grade classrooms. (p. 75)

Building a culture of trust. In a study on the relationship between a "trust culture" and prejudice in schools, Erdogan (2016) examined the impact trust and prejudice had on school environments. It was determined through the data collected from teachers and principals that trust created a positive culture in schools, while prejudice interrupted the possibility for creating

a trust culture. The analysis by Erdogan provided evidence that open and positive relationships achieved trust and that partiality and bias did not. Therefore, the idea to achieve trust through relationship building practices based on this study, presented an additional benefit. The practice of building relationships in schools and classrooms could dispel prejudice, which could reduce student alienation, a factor that fueled student absenteeism and dropout rates in U.S. public schools over the last decade.

According to Erdogan (2016), "The concept of trust is both socially and organizationally crucial for enabling an organizational setting in which teachers, managers, students, and parents unite around common goals and values" (p. 154). The suggestion that the educational community in the U.S. was missing the opportunity to connect with teachers and students to address systemic problems was informed by this research. Erdogan claimed that, "The opinions of classroom teachers about trust culture in the relationships with students and parents were most positive" (p. 163). Identifying the significant impact on learning created through trust by comparing the impact of prejudice on learning was revealing and powerful. Trust and prejudice were polarizing approaches, practices, habits, and behaviors, and in a comparison demonstrated that connecting with and relating to other human beings had value whereas excluding other human beings did not.

Building trust with youth program leaders. According to Griffith, Larson, and Johnson (2018), "Trust is a critical ingredient to young people’s experience of effective learning relationships with adults. Adolescents’ experience of trusting, caring relationships with adults is one of the strongest predictors of learning outcomes" (p. 340). Evidence from the action research study conducted to inform this dissertation produced a similar finding that relationships were a key to learning. The authors of this study also claimed that findings across their sources were

consistent. "It is generally agreed that one person's trust in another person builds incrementally over time" (p. 341). Evidence from the study that informed this dissertation also concluded that, a closer examination of the benefits associated with building relationships and trust were better understood over time.

In interviews with 108 students involved in youth development programs, grades six through 12, Griffith, Larson, and Johnson (2018) learned that trust for students was achieved with teacher leaders through three broad categories: trust was earned when leaders supported the work of students in the program, by leaders interacting with students outside of the program on a personal level, and by the actions of the leaders that students observed and evaluated from "a bird's-eye view." Findings from the study concluded that an increase in trust for adults grew through a set of distinct processes that proved to be authentic and were "used only to serve youth's best interests" (p. 355). This study demonstrated that trust was achieved over time through specific, relevant, and meaningful interactions that educators can practice in schools and classrooms to connect with students.

Building relationships with boys of color. Liang, et al. (2019), explored how boys of color experienced their relationships with teachers, and proposed specifically that implicit biases played a role in how those relationships developed. According to the authors, for boys of color, as an example, an important aspect of manhood was respect. If there were perceived biases in their communications with teachers, they were seen as acts of discrimination, and this hampered their ability to connect with and trust a teacher. This finding confirmed the significance of building relationships in schools and classrooms by learning about the culture, background, experience, gifts, and talents of every teacher and student to learn how to work with them. In this way educators may learn that not all boys of color have the same cultural relationships to

manhood, and even more importantly, every student in the classroom deserved to be treated without bias or partiality. The authors suggested that even though there were incidents of bias, "Students were not without hope, as they were able to identify factors that would facilitate success and shared ideas to improve their schooling experiences" (pp. 7-8).

Liang, et al. (2019), presented some of the same problems discussed in this literature review that informed the conditions, challenges, and consequences faced by public school students and teachers. Teachers did not have the resources they needed to intentionally invest in learning how to build relationships with peers and students, and it impacted teacher-student relationships. In the Liang study, while it was evident that bias impacted relationships the authors claimed that, "Although the participants experienced distrust, these findings indicate that students recognize the need for caring teachers to help them grow" (p. 8). I contend that with the support to intentionally invest in building individual relationships, teachers would have an opportunity to put aside all biases and see not a boy of color, but a boy with potential.

Building stakeholder trust. In a mixed methods study Poynton, Kirkland, and Makela (2018) examined the impact of five school district parent-training programs. The programs were designed to increase trust and engagement. The authors suggested that school administrators and board members were routinely faced with issues that were controversial and involved conflict. "Controversial issues like these can highlight differences in stakeholder values, activate parents and special interest groups, and create tension between a school district and its community" (p. 266). The authors claimed that building trust with community stakeholders minimized controversy and conflict. They noted that establishing public training programs provided opportunities for school superintendents to increase stakeholder trust. Additionally, it allowed for building capacity to improve community participation and minimized engagement gaps.

According to Poynton, Kirkland, and Makela (2018) with a close examination of the benefits associated with building public trust the public became more interested.

> The training program was publicized several ways across the five school districts. In some districts, principals of local schools made announcements at back-to-school-nights; recruitment was also publicized through district Facebook pages, and one district listed the training on a handout advertising several events and volunteer opportunities to parents. Word of mouth was the most effective recruitment method for all districts; consequently, each year the training programs were offered the number of participants increased. (p. 268)

In the action research study designed to inform this dissertation, a similar dynamic of increased interest and heightened awareness based on exploring a relevant and meaningful practice emerged. The educators who participated in the study gradually increased their awareness and interest in relationship and trust building practices with more exposure.

Building trust to support struggling students. According to Anyon, et al. (2019), "Promising new shifts have occurred as school districts begin moving away from exclusionary practices toward those focused on building relationships and treating discipline as an opportunity to support students' healthy social-emotional development" (p. 222). In a study to learn about a strategy to build relationships with students to prevent school disciplinary outcomes, the authors indicated that, "Although the topic was not specified in the interview or focus group protocols, staff at all participating schools identified relationship building as essential in their efforts to prevent out-of-school suspensions" (p. 224). The benefits of building relationships, claimed the authors, were shared by participants at all grade levels and especially by students of color. Additionally, administrators and school staff showed substantial support for the strategy.

Anyon, et al. (2019) claimed that there was a sentiment among educators that "it's all about the relationships" when preventing exclusionary discipline outcomes. Educators in the study reported strong student and staff relationships that created a foundation for dealing with conflicts. The study provided evidence that it is these students who needed the extra care and consideration to solve problems through connections and relationships with peers, faculty, and staff. The authors commented that,

> Overwhelmingly, school leaders noted that strong relationships played a key role not only in the general climate of their building, but also in their school's lower suspension rates. Participants acknowledged the importance of knowing about students' lives and understanding their triggers to pinpoint underlying explanations for behavior. (p. 227)

The relationship and trust building studies discussed provided evidence that building relationships in diverse communities for various reasons had a consistent and positive impact on participants. The ability for organizations and schools to grow and thrive, for the individuals in those organizations to grow and thrive, and for the individuals served by those organizations to grow and thrive, seemed dependent on the quality of relationships and the level of trust achieved. These studies demonstrated that building relationships in schools and classrooms was relevant, meaningful, and purposeful in any context, in any school, and at any time.

Summary

According to Randolph (2009), "If one thing must be realized about conducting and reporting a literature review it is that the stages for conducting and reporting a literature review parallel the process for conducting primary research" (p. 4). The authors asserted that identifying a rationale for the review, establishing a research question or hypothesis to guide the review, and creating plans for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data constituted the stages of a literature

review. This literature review identified the impact that public school conditions, challenges, and consequences had on students and teachers as a rationale for the review. The research study questions guided the investigation of education for sustainability theories and practices, the specific 21st century approaches to learning, and the relationship and trust studies. The literature review was a collection of relevant and meaningful research that was analyzed and presented in this selected review of the literature.

Public school problems demonstrated that students were disconnected from their learning experience and teachers were isolated in their teaching role. This indicated a need for regulating those conditions by identifying ways to mediate the ramifications of feeling disconnected and isolated. Through the study of education for sustainability theories and practices, there was value in the intention to connect, relate, and build trust to forward knowledge and gain a greater understanding of the world. Through a scientific, traditional knowledge, historical, and leadership lens there was evidence of ways to consider how to address conditions in public schools such as inequitable funding for schools, feckless reform, lacking resources for students and teachers, and the issues associated with an archaic approach to education.

The study of 21st century approaches to education produced proven methods of curriculum design and instruction that had the capacity to minimize the challenges students encountered when they lacked support and encouragement. In community-based learning or project-based learning classrooms as an example, students had a role in their own learning and this kept them from falling behind in reading and studies, getting behind with assignments and grades, and losing interest in school. It was discovered in the study of relationships and trust that positive and thriving relationships had the capacity to mediate the consequences of students missing school and losing interest in studies, by taking the time to understand student needs and

desires. The review of the literature demonstrated that intentionally building relationships to achieve trust had the capacity to keep students engaged in learning and committed to staying in school.

The diagram in figure 2.3, "Circle of Relations," provided a view of the literature from the outer gray circle representing the public school problems discussed in this review. It also provided a view of the solutions to public school problems in the three outer blue circles. The light blue circle of theories and practices were representative of the grounded research that informed the study solutions. The blue circle highlighting approaches to learning were representative of solutions that had the capacity to transcend the public school problems. The dark blue inner circle represented the significant finding that building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms was a relevant and meaningful approach to addressing public school conditions, challenges, and consequences.

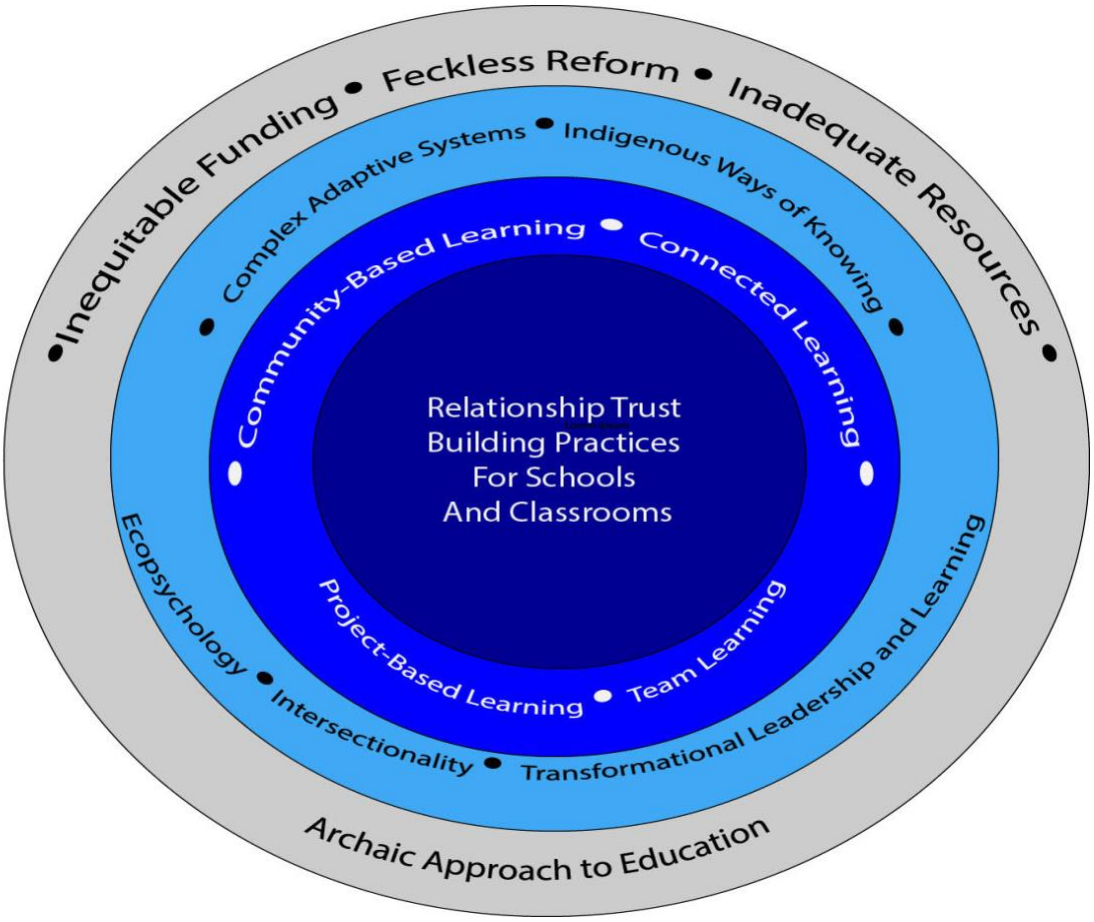


Figure 2.3

Chapter III - Methodology and Methods

Two significant factors influenced the decision to conduct a qualitative action research study. The central idea was to connect with educators, and it was critical to capture their voices and report on what was learned. These factors signified that the research would involve living participants and the methods for gathering information would involve some form of action research. As a student-researcher, observer, partner, and participant my role was to identify willing participants and conduct relevant and meaningful research. The most appropriate options for pursuing answers to the research questions asked were interviews, anecdote circle discussions, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and/or surveys. This combination of factors played into my strengths as a researcher. There were 100's of educators that I had built

relationships with over 30 years, and I had no setbacks identifying willing participants. Additionally, I conducted six previous action research studies through various masters and doctoral projects, and was familiar with the audience and the methods for collecting data. The qualitative action research study conducted to inform this dissertation involved collecting data from educators through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a survey to learn about their views and perspectives on building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms.

This chapter focused on understanding the decisions for conducting a qualitative action research study and the methods used to collect data. The discussions in the chapter were presented in six deliberations regarding the attributes of (1) the research rationale, (2) research settings, participants, and context, (3) the research study design, (4) a qualitative research study, (5) an action research study, and (6) the data collection methods. The discussions investigated why the research data was collected, how the data was collected, who participated in the research study, where the data collection took place, and when the interviews, anecdote circles, and surveys were conducted. The study was guided by the research question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students?

Research Rationale

The intent of the dissertation and qualitative action research study was to expose problems in U.S. public schools, and correspondingly produce proven theories, practices, and approaches to education that had the capacity to address the problems. The purpose of the dissertation and study was to investigate educator views on relationship and trust building mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors in schools and classrooms. The rationale was that in theory, building relationships as a standard practice at the beginning of the school year before

teaching content in K-12 public schools, had the potential to reduce student struggles, enhance learning, keep more students in school, and have a positive impact on society at large.

According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998), "being a researcher means far more than mastering research methods and techniques" (p. 15). Part of the responsibility of a researcher, claimed the authors, was to abide by traditions and historical situations, particularly in social science and human science research. The authors stressed the need for researchers to identify a postmodern relationship with the research and to find an individual reality or truth in the study. They suggested that, "the only way to do so is through centering your research in yourself, through what we call *mindful inquiry*" (p. 4).

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) asserted that, "becoming a researcher is about becoming a producer of legitimate and valid knowledge" (p. 2). Based on that premise the nature of the conditions, challenges, and consequences in U.S. public schools warranted a legitimate rationale for further exploring this societal problem. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) the rationale for a study was grounded in a logical argument that produced a suitable approach to research addressing the research questions and citing appropriate methodological literature (p. 13). This chapter provided a bridge between the literature review and the action research study. The theories, practices, and approaches to education, and the methodology and methods used to conduct the research were grounded in a logical and rational argument.

According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998), "our whole conception of mindful inquiry is based on the idea that your research is - or should be - intimately linked with your awareness of yourself and your world" (p. 5). Three key achievements led to the presentation of this dissertation and provided an opportunity to identify a sound rationale for conducting the action research study. After the completion of a practicum course where the methods for collecting data

were initially tested, the protocols for conducting the study were well in place. The Prescott College Institutional Review Board application process prepared me to conduct and ethical and open research study, and to develop tools and systems for engaging with live participants. The dissertation proposal and the presentation to the Prescott College community legitimized the research, and the study came into focus. Options emerged to center myself in the work, and it became clear that my link to the research was to utilize my contacts, skills, and experience to investigate relationship and trust building practices in schools and classrooms.

The rationale for the action research study was concerned with conditions, challenges, and consequences that students and teachers faced in U.S. public schools. The knowledge of funding inequities, feckless reform, inadequate resources, and an archaic approach to 21st century education pointed to a set of conditions that were partially responsible for the challenges and consequences. In my estimation these oversights were responsible for overlooking the basic needs of all students, especially students of color and students from low-income families. The lack of equitable funding and resources, archaic reform measures, and the shortcomings in the approach to learning were documented in chapter two of this dissertation. In contrast, building relationships in schools could lead to reducing the likelihood of students being absent, falling behind with studies, and dropping out of school early. In theory the practice could lead to enhanced learning for all students and have a positive impact on society at large.

Research Settings, Participants, and Context

The action research study was conducted through one-hour interviews and anecdote circle discussions with teachers and school administrators from public, charter, and private schools. Interviews were conducted with 17 educators, three anecdote circle discussions were conducted with 10 educators, and 15 educators responded to a post-interview or post-anecdote

circle survey. The data collected reflected how educators approached building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. It also reflected how educators perceived the benefits of connecting and relating with peers and students, and their ability to incorporate practices for building relationships into their curriculum, instruction, and daily routine.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), it was the responsibility of the researcher to identify and describe in detail how the participants of a study were selected. The authors asserted that to present a qualitative research study that aligns with a noted research question it was critical to consider contextual, demographic, and perceptual information regarding the "research sample" also known as the participants of the study (p. 186). To put the action research study into perspective, teachers and school administrators were selected to share their thoughts and views about building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms. The intent was to learn if educators saw the benefits and significance of intentionally investing in relationships and trust with their peers and students to enhance teacher practices and student learning. The following considerations provided context for the study, reported on a demographic survey conducted with participants in the study, and discussed educator perceptions regarding the study and the questions posed.

Context. The decision to conduct research with teachers and school administrators at any grade level was directed by the research study question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? The data collection took place in face-to-face discussions, in online videoconference calls, and in an online exchange of survey questions and responses. Teachers and school administrators took part in their homes, schools, or classrooms. The time for face-to-face discussions and online videoconference calls were

scheduled to meet the needs of each individual participant who engaged in an interview or anecdote circle discussion.

Demographics. Relevant demographic information was collected to inform the interview and anecdote circle discoveries. Educators who took part in an interview and/or an anecdote circle discussion answered questions posed in a brief one-on-one or group discussion. Individual information was collected at the beginning of each interview and anecdote circle discussion. The information collected from educators was used to learn about and better understand each participant. The strategy was to develop a connection with participants to create a comfort zone for conducting interviews and discussions. There were 18 points of interest noted in six sets of questions regarding: roles, experience, personal choices, place of origin, location, and population.

Of the 23 participants who took part in the research study 15 of the educators were considered colleagues. According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998), the potential for researcher bias was a natural element of research. They asserted that in a qualitative research study where the researcher was engaged with live participants, the research questions and the meaning and interpretations of data could be influenced by any number of experiences and beliefs. In this study in particular the influence of established relationships with participants played a significant role in how the research was scheduled, organized, and conducted.

Of the 23 educators who took part in the research study through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a research study survey, 17 of them were involved in a one-on-one interview, 10 were involved in an anecdote circle discussion, and 15 completed the research study survey. Of the 23 participants, 17 were teachers: with four identified as preschool teachers, four as elementary school teachers, one as a middle school teacher, seven as high

school teachers, and one as a higher education teacher. Additionally, there were six school administrators: with two identified as maintaining kindergarten through 12th grade responsibilities, two with elementary school responsibilities, one as maintaining preschool through middle school responsibilities, and one with higher education responsibilities. The educational experience of the 23 study participants broke down as follows: five educators had 25-31 years of experience in schools and classrooms, 11 had 13-21 years of experience, and seven had two to eight years of experience. The study drew from a total of 346 years of experience with the average length of time in schools and classrooms at15 years.

The participants were asked six questions regarding personal and place of origin demographic information. They were asked about gender identity, sexual identity, age, race, ethnicity, and culture. Of the 23 educators who participated in the research study there were 17 female and six male educators while 20 of the educators identified as Caucasian and three as a Person of Color. The personal and place of origin demographic information collected served a purpose in the strategy to learn about and connect with participants, but unlike roles and experience, the distinctions between individuals had no significant impact on participant attitudes, communication, and the ideas shared. The identified demographic make-up of each individual who participated in the study helped to build trust. Learning about the unique aspects of each research participant opened the doors to a better understanding between the student-researcher and the participants, and it provided a safe and trusting environment where participants could openly share their voices.

The study was not limited by any geographical parameter, and therefore of the 23 participants, 10 of the educators worked in the state of Oregon, three were from Arizona, two from Colorado, two from California, and one each from Maryland, New Mexico, Tennessee,

Texas, and Washington with one working temporarily in South America. Of the 23 educators, 11 worked in public schools, three in charter schools, and nine in private schools. Additionally, 12 of the educators worked in a suburban school district, six in an urban school district, and five in a rural school district. Appendix 3.1, "Demographic Study Survey Questions," presented the list of the 18 questions participants were asked.

Perceptions. "Perceptual information refers to participant's perceptions related to the particular subject of your inquiry" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 188). The teachers and administrators who participated in the study had an opportunity to offer stories about how relationships were developed or not developed in their schools and classrooms between colleagues and with students. Their stories were influenced by personal experiences and perceptions, and grounded in beliefs and values that influenced their contributions to the study. Approaching busy teachers and school administrator's to participate in the study involved making individual appeals, ensuring a genuine interest and willingness, and taking the time to connect and relate on a more personal level. There was a sensitivity and understanding that most educators had little time in their day to take on more work, and this perception influenced the connections made with participants and the process.

According to Yin (2018), "no single composition may serve all audiences simultaneously" (p. 222). Yin pointed out that researchers needed to adequately identify audience members in order to deliver a final product that reflected their needs, and that knowing the audience provided an opportunity to clarify, focus, and tap into the greatest potential of a study. A noticeable perception about the topic of inquiry demonstrated that discussions about relationships and trust were relevant to educators and there was perceived value in discussing how they were managed in their schools and classrooms. Educators demonstrated that the topic

of the study was relevant, the plan to gather information went well, the questions had merit, the study had credibility, and it was worth the time to participate.

Research Study Design

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "A research design includes various interrelated elements that reflect its sequential nature" (p. 182). The authors asserted that the duty of a researcher was to demonstrate an "understanding of the methodological implications" and the connections that needed to be made between the purpose of the study, the research approach, the research methods, and the research questions (p. 182). The design of the action research study weaved the study purpose, approach, methods, and questions into an action plan that produced the relationship between conditions, challenges, and consequences in U.S. public schools and 21st century approaches to education and learning that had the capacity to transcend those conditions. The study was designed to identify if building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms had the capacity to address the needs of disconnected students and isolated teachers who struggled every day in U.S. public schools and classrooms.

According to Yin (2018) the study design was a blueprint for the actual research. It laid out the questions to be studied, the relevant data to pursue, what actually needed to be collected, and how it was analyzed. The blueprint was "a logical plan for getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the set of questions to be addressed and there is some set of conclusions about these questions" (p. 26). The research design according to Yin, involved five "especially important" components: study questions, study propositions, the case, linking data to propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings (pp. 27-34). The first three components impacted the data collected. The last two informed the study analysis and what was done with the collected data.

Yin (2018), asserted that with a grasp of the components of a study, the researcher was in a position to construct "some preliminary theory or theoretical propositions" (p. 34). From his perspective the development of theories or propositions could be "plain and simple," they did not need to be a "grand social science theory" (p. 34). Yin stated that the researcher was not "being asked to be a masterful theoretician. Rather [he says] the simple goal is to have a sufficient blueprint for your study" (p. 35). He pointed out that theoretical propositions reflected literature related to what the researcher studied, representing practical matters that led to a complete design providing explicit ideas for what kind of data to collect.

The Prescott College Institutional Review Board (IRB) application process provided a road map to identify the ideas for what data to collect. The questions posed regarding how to be accountable for the design, development, implementation, and completion of a study were instrumental in learning how to conduct research. With the stamp of approval the IRB represented an understanding of how to uphold ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and study limitations and challenges. The IRB process outlined the significance and obligation to understand research participant's needs when working with live participants, and to secure their willingness and consent to participate in the study.

The research design was informed by the responsibilities and expectations outlined in the IRB. Among the expectations was adhering to a level of confidentiality, incorporating a pseudonym for each participant, and citing in-text comments from participants by maintaining anonymity and crediting quotes to an alias and the date of the interview. The task of identifying, explaining, and clarifying each aspect of the research plan, provided the due diligence to establish relative and realistic parameters for the study. The IRB proposal approved by committee members adhered to the obligations, responsibilities, and process as outlined. In

essence, the questions posed in the IRB and the responsibility to learn about researcher obligations, provided a basis for a realistic study that considered the needs of the participants at every stage. Appendix 3.2, "Action Research Study Protocols" provided the list of protocols that guided the study in accordance with Prescott College IRB standards.

Qualitative Research Study

According to Bogdan & Bilken (2007), "Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simple outcomes" (p. 2). The authors stressed that particularly with educational research a qualitative study produced relative outcomes but that the process determined the opportunity. They claimed that, "Qualitative researchers want to know where, when, how and under what circumstances behavior comes into being" (p. 1). The primary research question asked in this research study was; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? This question was searching for the where, when, how, and under what circumstances relationships are built or not built in schools and classrooms.

Bogdan and Bilken (2007) asserted that qualitative research theory was grounded in the data, and that, "The theory emerges as a piece of art that is yet to be created, rather than a puzzle where the image is already known" (p. 2). According to the authors there were various features of qualitative research to consider in determining what kind of art to produce: the naturalistic feature, being on site with tools in hand; the descriptive-data feature, gathering comments, quotes, and stories; the concern with process feature, clarifying a self-fulfilling desire; and the inductive feature, the pursuit of answers from "the bottom up" rather than the "top down (p. 2). This study identified with the descriptive-data feature gathering information from educators

through interviews and discussions that produced art in the form of participant findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998), choosing to conduct a qualitative research study required identifying data collection methods that were appropriate for asking specific questions. Based on the guiding research question and additional study questions, gathering information from teachers and school administrators about how they managed relationships in their schools and classrooms was most appropriately managed through interviews and discussions. Choosing a qualitative research study, a relevant methodology, and the appropriate methods used to collect data was a product of evaluating the many options available for conducting a relevant and thorough study.

An in-depth examination of research methodologies produced an understanding of how to best approach the investigation of relationship and trust building practices in schools and classrooms. There were numerous resources consider. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) provided a foundational perspective, Repko (2008) unraveled the art of crafting research, Yin (2018) produced the blueprint for completing an exemplary research study, Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) presented research reflections and expressions for framing the study, and Mills (2014) provided the foundation for completing an action research study to inform a shift in educational practices in schools and classrooms.

Additionally, the opportunity to discuss the nature and views of qualitative research, in great detail with members of my cohort, commanded another level of understanding that reassured the decision. According to McClelland, "Qualitative methods that place researcher and participant together in the same space, engaged in a process of asking one person to share and another listen, can often tap deep wells of emotion in researchers as well participants" (p. 348).

Through the passion and consideration of my own worldview, the qualitative action research study resulted in adhering to my personal timetable, interests, skillsets, and experience, and provided an opportunity to produce a sustainable product with overarching possibilities based on the contributions from study participants

Action Research Study

According to Berg (2007), "Action research is a collaborative approach to research that provides people with the means to take systematic action in an effort to resolve specific problems" (p. 197). The systematic action taken in this research study involved collecting data that informed the possibility, that building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms at the beginning of the school year was an investment that would pay off. Berg explained that qualitative action research "encourages people to formulate accounts and explanations of their situation and to develop plans that may resolve these problems" (p. 197). In my masters program, members of my cohort who were working in the classroom chose an action research project that addressed a particular classroom practice with the intent to improve that practice. In contrast my focus was on educational system mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors as a general consideration, with the intent to improve the way learning is conducted in U.S. public schools. The doctoral action research study was an extension of that effort. Through questions and prompts from interviews and discussions the participants were able to formulate accounts and explanations of their situations, providing evidence that common relational mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors had a place in schools and classrooms.

According to Mills (2014), "Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach,

and how well their students learn" (p. 8). Mills asserted that action research was designed to assist stakeholders to concentrate on an area of focus, gain insight, embrace a reflective practice, impact positive change, and improve student outcomes. The action research study conducted focused on relationships, there were shared insights for the student-researcher and the participants, and upon reflection connecting and relating in schools and classrooms increased student engagement and enhanced learning.

According to Foreman-Peck and Heilbronn (2018), "action research has great potential to contribute to practitioner knowledge and understanding and can be transformative on practice" (p. 127). The authors claimed that action research enabled teachers to pause and think about the tensions and difficulties of their profession and to find new ways to approach their instructional practices. They asserted that school and classroom cultures were dominated by performance and oversight, and that teachers were not provided enough opportunity to discuss daily issues and practices. This action research study offered an opportunity for teachers and administrators to pause and think, to consider the notion of intentionally building trust in the classroom, and to discuss relevant questions and the implications of their views.

According to Vaughan, Boerum, and Whitehead (2019), "In order to situate [a] study, it is necessary to consider key ideas from within the methodology of action research that create the conceptual framework we draw from" (p. 1). The authors claimed that action research was a vehicle for change and a tool to advocate for improvement, grounded in action that can transform teaching and learning. The idea of action research claimed Mills (2014) was to enhance the lives of students through partnerships with other stakeholders. In the research study, learning about and understanding how building relationships and trust was perceived and facilitated proved to

be transformative, and the evidence of the research conducted and findings reported proved to enhance the lives of students, teachers, and school administrator's.

Data Collection Methods

The primary method utilized to collect data in the action research study was one-on-one interviews. Anecdote circles and surveys were conducted to triangulate, and reinforce or dispute the data from interviews. The triangulation of data in this study referred to the use of multiple methods of data collection to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena investigated (Patton, 2014). Triangulation was primarily used to validate the convergence of data collected from different sources. This discussion on methods covered what data was collected, why it was collected, and how it was collected in 17 individual recorded interviews, three recorded anecdote circle discussions with 10 participants, and a research study survey conducted with 15 participants. It also covered information about who participated in the research study, where the data collection took place, and when the interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and survey were conducted. Figure 3.1, "Qualitative Action Research Study" provided a brief view of the scope of the data collection.

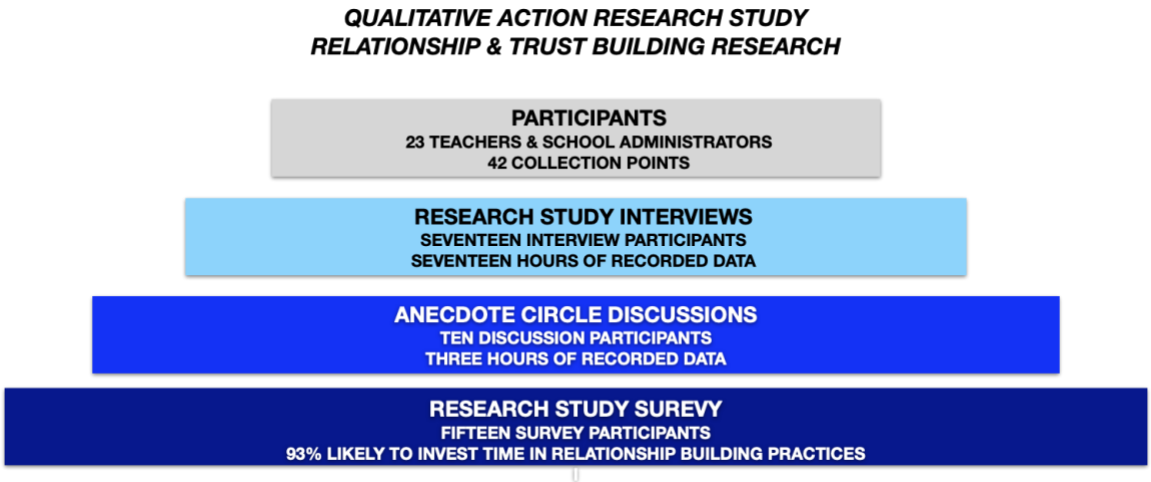


Figure 3.1

The methods used to collect data were informed by the research question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? The process of preparing participants for their role in the research study was initiated by a set of individual emails exchanged prior to an interview or anecdote circle discussion. This was an element of the process designed to personally connect with each participant in advance of collecting data. The idea was to provide specific communications that were relevant and meaningful, and offered enough detail for educators to understand their role.

The initial correspondence was conducted through an individual "invitation email." It included an attachment of the study overview, which provided details of the research study (see appendix 3.3, "Research Study Background Information"). A second communication was conducted through a "consent to participate email," which included an attached "Research Study Consent Form" (appendix 3.4), the "Research Study Interview Questions" (appendix 3.5), and information about the schedule and details of the interview. This correspondence provided each participant an opportunity to review the study parameters influenced by an approved Prescott College Institutional Review Board application that discussed matters of confidentiality, the use of an alias in the report of findings and conclusions, and other relevant details. The final communication was a "follow-up reminder email" for the day of the interview or discussion and a videoconference invitation to participate.

By the time of the interview or anecdote circle discussion rapport had been established with each participant. This presented the opportunity for the educators to honestly and openly share their voices, their views, and their stories in a safe, comfortable, and trusting learning

environment. The experience resulted in genuine connections, assuring that each participant understood the significance of the study and was willing to take part.

Interviews. "Interviewing is one method by which qualitative data can be gathered. Although it may be less formal than some quantitative methodology, it is important to design a systematic interview technique as well as carefully analyze and validate interview data" (Griffee, 2005, p. 37). According to Griffee a semistructured interview was an event where the researcher proposed predetermined questions with the opportunity to ask for clarity. Griffee discussed several decisions that needed to be made for conducting interviews: deciding whom to interview, determining the length of an interview, identifying the number of interviews needed to collect relevant and adequate data, selecting a place for the interview, deciding on which questions to ask, and considering how to collect, store, and transcribe the data (p. 36). In support of these guidelines the Prescott College Institutional Review Board process provided a solid opportunity to uncover these details in conjunction with the study design.

In preparation for interviews a great deal of emphasis was placed on creating ideal open-ended, plural, and conditional questions to offer the best opportunity for an objective inquiry. An open-ended question primarily provided options for respondents to articulate their views without limiting parameters. The conditional element provided a clear understanding in context to the question asked, and a plural perspective provided for the possibility of multiple relevant and appropriate responses to the questions. In this experience, an even more important element was the use of sub questions and prompts that provided an opportunity for research participants to share their thoughts and ideas openly in relation to the study purpose and the research questions. The guiding questions, in conjunction with relevant and appropriate sub questions and prompts,

produced a fluid conversation in the interviews and allowed for a rich discussion with each participant.

There were 17 interviews conducted and recorded in three cycles over a 10-month period, and in each cycle the system for collecting information became more organized and steadfast. This approach offered time for reflection between the cycles. The questions, preparations, and my interview presence all naturally evolved into a slightly more sophisticated version of the previous system. The "Research Study Interview Questions" (see appendix 3.5), remained consistent in content throughout all three cycles. The purpose for facilitating three separate cycles was influenced by conditions that produced willing participants at different times during the study.

The first cycle of interviews were conducted with five participants in March and April 2019, the second cycle was conducted with eight participants in May and June 2019, and the third cycle was conducted with four participants between July and November 2019. An invitation to participate in an interview went out to 21 potential participants, all busy educators, and 17 agreed to take part reflecting an 81% response rate. This initial indicator confirmed the relevance of the study and the interest educators had to discuss the dynamics that surround building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms.

Anecdote circles. Anecdote circle discussions captured an exact and intimate expression of what happened when an educator intentionally connected with and related to a peer or student in the moment. In each case judging from the 10 stories educators shared an opportunity for a better and clearer exchange of information emerged. In chapters four and five of this dissertation there were stories from participants confirming these immediate benefits in school and classroom dynamics, when an intentional effort was made to positively connect with and relate to a peer or

student to manage an issue, an opportunity, or a complex matter. According to deChambeau and Ramlo (2017):

> Anecdote circles are lightly moderated group discussions intended to elicit examples of lived experiences. Anecdote circles differ from focus groups in that they are not intended to answer a specific question or test a hypothesis. Additionally, this method is not used to gather participants' thoughts and feelings. Instead, anecdote circles allow exploration of themes loosely directed through the use of question prompts delivered by a facilitator. (p. 5)

Additionally, deChambeau and Ramlo stated that, "While they are not structured to answer a specific question or test a hypothesis, anecdote circles do have a particular direction that is determined by the themes the study is intended to explore" (p. 5).

Scheduling an anecdote circle discussion with three to four busy teachers was a logistical task that required good communication, relevant and precise information, and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. These things were clear as I approached one discussion at a time and successfully conducted three discussions with ten participants total. Prior to scheduling a discussion connections were made with each participant face-to-face or in a telephone conversation to determine availability, what was expected, and the willingness to participate, and to identify common dates and times for discussions.

In the preparation for anecdote circle discussions, the primary emphasis was placed on connecting and relating to each individual participant to obtain agreement, schedule dates and times, and plan the discussions. There were surprisingly no glitches with the schedule, timing, or participation in any of the discussions conducted. Not a single change was recorded in any of the three plans, possibly another testament to the benefits of connecting and relating to conduct

research with willing participants that are prepared and in agreement. Three discussions were conducted and recorded. The first discussion was conducted with four participants on November 11, 2019, the second was conducted with three participants on November 17, 2019, and the third discussion was conducted with three participants on December 12, 2019.

The process for making an appeal to participants, following up, and conducting anecdote circle discussions unfolded in five steps. Step one involved making the appeal to individual teachers and administrators through a live conversation to discuss the research study and the focus of anecdote circle discussions. Step two involved sending an invitation email to each participant with attachments, the "Research Study Background Information" (see appendix 3.3), and the "Anecdote Circle Guidelines" (see appendix 3.6). They provided a brief look at the researcher, the research study, and the exercise. Step three involved sending a second email to each participant, with consent language asking for permission and securing consent, and an attached "Anecdote Circle Plan and Prompt" (see appendix 3.7) to assist participants in their roles and responsibilities in the discussion. Step four involved sending a third email with a scheduled time for the discussion and a videoconference invitation for the day and time scheduled. Step five involved a one-hour anecdote circle discussion conducted either face-to-face or on a video conference call. The discussion groups were assigned an alias and the discussion was recorded.

Survey. Preparation for the survey required an investigation into using a software-driven survey to collect participant responses, or to conduct a manual survey. In a hands approach, connecting with participants in a less systematic method with opportunities to customize the delivery produced a relevant exchange of questions and responses. According to Berends (2006) "The aim of survey research is to describe relevant characteristics of individuals, groups, or

organizations" (p. 623). Doing so manually played to my strengths as a researcher and provided an equal opportunity to be forthright, accurate, and relatively objective, with some caveats. To minimize the possibility for error or manipulation the surveys were returned in a PDF format and the calculations were systematic and reliable.

According to Berends (2006), "Important parts of the survey research process include formulating the theoretical or policy issue that one wants to examine, developing the key constructs to be measured with specific variables, and deriving the key hypotheses that can be examined with survey methods" (p. 626). This research study survey adhered to these components of conducting a survey. It investigated the likelihood of educators investing in relationship and trust building practices. It investigated the key constructs of time, funding, and training in relation to the likelihood of investing, and confirmed the findings and conclusions that emerged in interviews and anecdote circle discussions. Additionally, the survey confirmed a research hypothesis that teachers and school administrators would unanimously embrace the opportunity to build relationships and trust with colleagues and students, if they were provided support from school leadership, an allotment of time, relevant training, and adequate resources.

Twenty-three surveys were sent to educators who participated in an interview, anecdote circle discussion, or both. Fifteen surveys were returned, reflecting a 65% response rate. The process for making an appeal for participants, following up, and conducting a survey unfolded in three steps. Step one involved making the appeal to individual teachers and administrators through an email communication to discuss the research study survey purpose and value. Step two involved sending an invite email to each participant with an attached two-page survey (see appendix 3.8, the "Research Study Survey Guidelines and Questions"). Step three involved following up with participants to encourage their participation and collect responses.

Summary

According to Macy and Johnstone (2012), "Co-intelligence arises when we share ideas and visions we find inspiring, making room to hear what moves other people too. This is how visions catch on and spread through a culture with amazing speed" (p. 176). The design of this research study provided an opportunity to connect with teachers and administrators to discuss the important issues that came up in discussions about building relationships in their schools and classrooms. It presented an opportunity to model relationship building practices that informed an evolving set of relationship and trust building attributes that can be used in the classroom. Through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a research study survey there were connections made and relationships built with teachers and administrators who shared what moved them about the vision to connect and relate with colleagues and students to improve teaching practices, and enhance learning.

With a genuine, intentional, and contextual approach to conducting interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a survey a rich and detailed experience emerged. There was significant value in taking the time to connect personally with each participant through an initial telephone or face-to-face conversation securing interest and willingness, and then learning about their background, experience, educational roles, and school dynamics prior to conducting research. Experimenting with relationship building practices by modeling them in each research study stage provided another opportunity to observe the impact of connecting on a closer level, and the positive results that developed.

Chapter IV - Data Investigations and Findings

The data collected in the action research study through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a survey was organized and investigated in this chapter, and in the process

findings were identified and reported on. The discussion was focused on what was learned in each of the three stages of the investigation. In stage one the data was transcribed and coded; in stage two it was organized, analyzed, and synthesized; and stage three produced reported major findings. The discussion on transcribed and coded data focused on how the interview and anecdote circle discussion recordings and survey responses were simultaneously transcribed and coded. A discussion on the organization, analysis, and synthesis of the coded data provided evidence and examples of how the data transformed from codes, to factors, and to major factors. The final analysis produced the five major findings reported on in this chapter.

The five major findings were representative of what teachers most considered in their responses to how they approached building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. The transcription, coding, organizing, analysis, synthesis, and reporting were all influenced by the research study question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? The major findings were organized according to the five common themes that best represented what participants shared in stories, discussions, and responses from interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a survey.

The five major findings from the action research study were: (1) trusting relationships were a key to enhanced learning, (2) individual teachers had the capacity to produce relevant and meaningful learning opportunities through relationships and trust, (3) educators were willing to intentionally invest in learning more about building relationships and trust, (4) educators needed and wanted support from their schools and school districts to invest in relationships with students and peers, and (5) educators were interested in learning how to measure the positive impact social and emotional learning had on student growth and development.

Transcribed and Coded Data

The discussion on transcribed and coded data focused on how the interview and anecdote circle discussion recordings were transcribed, how the survey responses were transcribed, and how the data were coded. It discussed specifically why the interview and anecdote circle data was simultaneously transcribed and coded manually, and why the survey was conducted manually. It also discussed what that process entailed and how it impacted the investigation moving forward.

The transcription and coding of 20 one-hour interviews and anecdote circle discussions, and the responses from the survey, called for adopting a unique and relevant systems approach and strategy to manage the process. According to Richmond (1991), "Systems thinking, in practice, is a continuum of activities that range from the conceptual to the technical" (p. 1). The conceptual investigation system adopted for this study was designed to integrate comments from the interview and anecdote circle recordings and the responses from surveys, into relevant codes, titles, factors, and findings that would hold up in the organization, analysis, synthesis, and reporting of the data.

In an investigation of the options for transcribing data, the most common choices were transcribing recorded data using software, bringing in a third party resource, or transcribing data manually. The strategy that worked in this study was a hands-on approach to simultaneously transcribe and code the data into organized fields of information. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Although extremely tedious, transcribing the interviews yourself is one way of immersing yourself in your data and becoming more familiar with it" (p. 232).

Interview and anecdote circle discussion data. The interview recordings were transcribed into quotes, paraphrased comments, and short and precise comments, and

simultaneously coded for analysis. The anecdote circle discussions were transcribed into stories, points of discussion, and benefits, and simultaneously coded for analysis. In each case the transcription and coding took approximately one hour for every 15 minutes of recorded data. This process accumulated 60 pages of transcribed and coded data to analyze.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Bear in mind that you must know your data intimately" (p. 232). The strategy of budgeting four hours to transcribe a one-hour recorded interview and anecdote circle discussion provided the due diligence needed to become intimate with the data. This process offered a deeper look and a second chance to monitor, not only the words spoken by participants, but educator attitudes, expressions, and their tone and delivery. An additional benefit was the opportunity to transcribe and code simultaneously, saving a great deal of time by completing those two tasks in a single step. The depth of understanding provided by manually working with the data would have been missing if the transcriptions were completed by a software program or a third party resource.

The process of manually transcribing and coding the data simultaneously required listening to the recording of an interview or anecdote circle discussion in bits of time, transcribing direct quotes, and noting specific comments. The transcription and coding of the interviews was completed over a nine-month time period from March to November of 2019, in conjunction with the timing of the actual interviews. The transcription and coding of anecdote circle discussions was completed in November and December of 2019.

The idea to transcribe and code simultaneously by hand provided a sound strategy, and it provided an opportunity to learn about each research participant from a deeper and more meaningful review of their comments. While time-consuming, the work created a foundational system for further coding, organizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and reporting on the data. The

account of accuracy in the transcription of the recordings was difficult to measure without an audit of the work done. The recordings were stored for confidentiality and available for review, and the transcribed and coded data was held up to a PhD committee review of the investigation.

Research study survey data. The research study survey responses to 12 questions were transcribed and coded verbatim from the returned surveys that participants completed and saved to an individual PDF file. The survey results tracked participant feedback on opting to invest time, funding, and training to better learn how to build relationships and trust in schools and classrooms. The strategy for collecting survey responses was to check and recheck the PDF's against the transcriptions, enter the data into an excel spreadsheet, analyze the data in excel, and produce pie charts showing the results. Transcribing and coding the survey by hand presented the possibility of missing or misreading data, and there was no audit of the manual work, and therefore a lack of absolute accountability. However, the inaccurate movement of data from PDF files to an excel grid tallying survey responses, was minimal given the nature of the survey.

Demographics survey data. The survey results from the demographic study collected bits of information about each interview and anecdote circle participant. There were 18 questions asked; three questions each about their role in education, their experience in education, their personal identity, their place of origin, the location of their school, and the population demographics of their school. Specifically, the data was coded to identify (1) an active or retired teacher or school administrator and their grade level responsibilities; (2) the number of years in education, the number of years in their current role, and their educational background; (3) their gender identity and pronoun, sexual identity, and age; (4) race, ethnicity, and culture; (5) the city and state of their public, charter, or private school, and their rural, suburban, or urban school setting; and (6) school and classroom populations including student demographics.

The transcription and coding of the data manually created a deeper and more intimate relationship with the comments made by participants in this research study. This stage of the investigation produced coded data that was relevant, meaningful, and contextual. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "The data generated by qualitative methods are voluminous, and the sheer quantity of raw data can indeed be quite daunting" (P. 232). The authors asserted that if a massive amount of data is to be properly analyzed in must be well managed. The transcriptions of interview and anecdote circle discussion recordings produced well managed data that held up to the central themes of the action research study and the research questions.

Organization, Analysis, and Synthesis of Coded Data

The discussion on organization, analysis, and synthesis, focused on data collected from interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a research study survey. The data in this stage of the investigation process shifted from the codes that were produced in the transcription stage, to a condensed version of those codes, to relevant factors that participants considered in their approaches to building relationship and trust, and finally to the five major findings. The discussion specifically focused on how the data traveled from one examination of the recorded comments to the next. The discussion looked at the movement of the data, the organization of the data, and the naming of the data. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Once you are sure that your data are well organized, the analysis can begin in earnest" (232).

This stage of the investigation was designed to honor the comments and responses from educators and simultaneously balance researcher bias to conduct a thorough analysis of the data collected in the research study. According to Bentz and Shapiro (1998) it is a completely acceptable practice for a researcher "to figure out how to integrate your research with your underlying sense of who you are and what you want out of life" (xiii). Integrating my

positionality, an ontological understanding, and an epistemological awareness of the research process provided opportunities to find meaning in the work. In this discussion there was an investigation of how the data consistently shifted from the codes produced in the transcription and coding phase, to the factors identified in the analysis stage, and finally to the findings discovered in the synthesis and reporting stage. According to Yin (2018), "The best general advice is to set your sights high" (p. 218), to aim for an exemplary analysis. In this stage of the investigation the foundation of the data collected in the transcription and coding stage made it possible to conduct a thorough analysis that produced relevant insights.

Interview data analysis. The coded data from 17 one-hour interviews was transcribed into comments credited to an alias, and codes were created to contain the information. The comments were recorded, coded, condensed into fewer codes, titled, condensed into fewer titles, and synthesized into five major factors: (1) key to learning, (2) individual teacher impact, (3) willingness to invest (4) role of support, and (5) measuring the impact. These five major factors informed the five major findings of the study.

A unique and relevant systems approach and strategy for organizing data collected in this stage of the investigation provided guidelines. Participant comments were initially transcribed and organized into direct quotes, paraphrased comments, or short and precise comments. The quotes and comments were organized into nine codes, subsequently into seven codes, and permanently into five codes to prepare for the analysis. The quotes and comments were then assigned to one of 19 titles: factors recognized by educators that impacted their approach to building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. The 19 factors were subsequently condensed into 12 factors and then into five major factors.

Anecdote circle data analysis. The data from three one-hour anecdote circle discussion recordings were transcribed into comments credited to an alias discussion group, and codes were created to contain the information. This discussion was about the movement of the comments from one organized form to the next. The comments were recorded, coded, condensed into fewer codes, titled, condensed into fewer titles, and synthesized into two major factors; (1) key to learning, and (2) individual teacher impact. The two major factors informed the five major findings of the study.

Participant comments in this stage of the investigation were initially transcribed and organized into a description of the story, the recorded version of the story, points made in the discussion about the story, and recognized benefits from the actions taken in each brief anecdotal story. The stories, points, and benefits were organized into nine codes and permanently into four codes to prepare for the analysis. The stories, points, and benefits were then assigned to one of 13 titles taken from the group of 19 factors identified in the interview process. These titles represented factors recognized by educators that impacted their approach to building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. The 13 factors were subsequently condensed into seven factors and then into two of the five major factors.

Research study survey data analysis. The coded data from the research study survey involving fifteen participants transformed from an original set of three codes to three major factors. The relationship between the survey questions, the codes, and the factors provided the foundation for a simple analysis. The survey questions regarding time, funding, and training resources informed the codes and the codes informed three of the five major factors; (1) individual teacher impact, (2) role of support, and (3) willingness to invest. These three major factors informed the five major findings of the study.

Participant comments were initially transcribed and organized into the likelihood of investing time, funds, and training resources to better learn how to build relationships and trust. The time, funding, and training were organized into the exact three codes. The time, funding, and training responses were then assigned to one of eight titles, taken from the group of 19 factors identified in the interview process. These titles represented factors recognized by educators that impacted their approach to building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms.

Demographics survey data analysis. The demographics study provided an opportunity to connect and relate with each individual participant in a more informal and personal manner. The primary purpose of asking the questions was to learn about the background, experience, and culture of each participant in order to guide the questions appropriately, and to enhance the understanding of the data collected. The demographics study survey findings at the very least provided an inference that the roles, experience, identity, place of origin, school location, and school populations had a minimal impact on the distinctive forms of comments collected from educators at every level from preschool to higher education. There were however, distinctive differences noted in the analysis regarding school populations and the opportunity educators had to build relationships in smaller and more manageable learning environments.

The organization, analysis, and synthesis of the data from interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a research study survey was informed by a systematic approach to coding and naming the data at every stage of the investigation. The overall investigation was the equivalent of an organic event that unfolded one step at a time and produced relevant, meaningful, contextual, and sustainable results. The investigation also produced examples of educational mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors substantiated by the research discussed in chapter two of this dissertation.

Reported Major Findings

The discussion on reported major findings focused on the five major findings that were produced in relation to the research question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? The reported major findings were informed by the transcription and coding of the data collected, the organization of the codes, and the analysis and synthesis of stories, comments, codes, titles, and factors. The investigation pointed to five factors that had a significant impact on the discussion of how educators approach relationship building in their schools and classrooms: (1) key to learning, (2) individual teacher impact, (3) willingness to invest, (4) role of support, and (5) measuring the impact.

The interview and anecdote circle discussion findings demonstrated that at the very least, building relationships and trust was important to educators, they were interested in being better at it, and there was a need for support and investment. Even with the educators who did not seem as prepared or inclined to approach building relationships with colleagues and students there was evidence that they understood the basic inference. A majority of the participants shared how important relationships were to learning, that teachers made a difference, that support was essential, and that an investment was likely to pay off. Appendices 4.1 - 4.5, "Major Finding One Data Sheet" through "Major Finding Five Data Sheet," provided more detailed versions of the data collected.

The research study survey findings demonstrated that educators were open to allocating time, funding, and training resources, with leadership support, to build relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. There was a consensus, with 93% of the participants responding that they would be very likely or likely to invest in learning how to intentionally build

relationships with colleagues and students. The pie charts in Appendices 4.6 - 4.8, "Time Pie Chart," "Funding Pie Chart," and "Training Pie Chart" provided a snapshot of the responses specific to survey questions regarding time, funding, and training. Appendix 4.9, "Research Study Survey Data Sheet," provided a more detailed version of the data collected.

Participants of the action research study signed a consent form that provided an overview of the study, information about their role and responsibilities, and what to expect. There was an understanding in that agreement that their personal identity would be kept confidential, that their contributions would be coded to an alias, and that this pseudonym would be maintained throughout the research process. In the findings discussion the comments from participants were credited to an alias and the date of the interview or anecdote circle discussion.

Major finding one: trusting relationships were a key to enhanced learning. A majority of interview and anecdote circle participants shared views relating to the importance and significance of building relationships and trust with students to enhance learning. When asked to explore the role relationship building practices had on their approach to teaching, 15 of the 17 interview participants responded that their approach to building relationships was in some way based on an understanding that trust was a key ingredient. When asked to explore a time when connecting and relating made a difference in an encounter with a student or peer, six of the 10 anecdote circle participants shared stories demonstrating that the learning outcome was positively impacted by intentionally connecting and relating. This demonstrated the importance of trust to turn around an issue or enhance an experience in a school or classroom setting. In total 80% of the study participants were credited with sharing at some point in an interview or anecdote circle discussion that a factor in their approach to building relationships, whether they

modeled it or not, was knowing that building relationships presented greater opportunities for learning.

The importance placed on building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms to enhance learning was evidenced by comments from recordings initially transcribed and coded as "declarations." These declarations, in tone, in delivery, and in the words chosen expressed the passion and no nonsense understanding that relationships mattered in schools and classrooms. The following comments were credited to nine different participants and represented less than half of the declarations recorded.

- "It is the most important thing" (Pamela, 03.21.19).
- "I would say that it is the absolute most important thing - big time" (Phoebe, 03.25.19).
- "The relationship piece is very important to kids who have failed in traditional learning" (Todd, 03.27.19).
- "You have got to do big relationship building things at the beginning of the year and at the end" (Teach, 05.27.19).
- "It's my life, I'm a teacher, building relationships is what I do" (Sinola, 06.12.19).
- "I would say that relationships are the foundation to be able to make any transformational change in a school system" (Jane, 06.17.19).
- "I don't understand how teachers can actually teach if they don't have those relationships" (Jill, 06.19.19).
- "The people who are sticking around to teach are learning how important relationships and trust are" (Joe, 07.22.19).
- "I think anybody, most people in education, say that the relationship is central to everything you do" (Dee, 09.30.19).

Major Finding One

Trusting relationships were a key to enhanced learning

Major Factor One Key to Learning	Number of Comments Related to Major Factor	Sample Comments
Importance Seizing the opportunity to intentionally invest time to connect with and relate to students and peers	37 Comments From 27 participants	"For me relationship building is probably the most important part of teaching" (Steve) "It's everything... and I do not see anything more important" (Pamela)
Learning Noticing the positive impact on student engagement and learning when they are connected to aspects of their learning environment	25 Comments From 27 Participants	"Without relationships you cannot learn together" (Todd) "When you have a relationship with a student you understand them and know who they are and it is a whole lot easier to help them move forward" (Carmela)
Community Realizing that if building relationships is a key to learning then building community can be a key to building relationships	23 Comments From 27 Participants	"You don't just join a school when you come here - you join a school community" (Teach) "Kids need to be surrounded by people they love and trust, and that includes peers and adults" (Dee)
Communication Knowing the names of students and creating a learning environment that makes it safe and welcoming to freely communicate	16 Comments From 27 Participants	"I think we could probably help society if we allowed teachers and students to reflect more" (Joe) "Relationships are paramount and kids won't care what you know until they know that you care" (Carmela)

Figure 4.1

Finding that trusting relationships were a key component in the effort to conduct learning established a mindset and standard that educators could embrace in the classroom. This mindset

could lead to establishing relevant, relational, and sustainable practices, habits, and behaviors. The table in Figure 4.1, "Major Finding One" provided a snapshot of the data collected to inform this major finding. The significance of this finding resulted from identifying 83 comments coded under the heading of "declarations."

Major finding two: individual teachers had the capacity to produce relevant and meaningful learning opportunities through relationships and trust. When asked to explore the role relationship building practices had on their approach to teaching, 16 of the 17 interview participants demonstrated that they were either intentional in their approach to build relationships with peers and students, and/or had a natural tendency to prioritize building relationships and trust in their schools or classrooms. When asked to explore a time when connecting and relating made a difference in an encounter with a student or peer, eight of the 10 anecdote circle participants shared a story demonstrating that their actions were intentional and/or that they had a natural tendency to connect and relate. In total 89% of the study participants were credited with contributing that a major factor considered in their approach to building relationships was based on an innate capacity to make it a priority.

To demonstrate these findings more specifically, the following comments were transcribed as stories or anecdotes. They confirmed participant sentiment that in their approach to building relationships and trust, educators had the capacity to enhance learning. From a middle school teacher perspective, Carmela (04.01.19) claimed that, "My approach is to connect with students, to be vulnerable, and to let them in. I sit at the round tables with them, still play the role of the adult, and I practice learning with them versus direct instruction and a top down approach; it's their future."

Joe (07.22.19) provided a very specific story demonstrating the impact a teacher can have on a students' life by taking the time to understand and ask questions.

> I had a particular student with lots of transitioning and change going on in their life. They had personal struggles with community, teachers, and friends. They missed class often, walked out any number of times during class, and they were repeatedly disruptive. I did a one-on-one and the student shared what they were going through. I honestly felt like in the course of sharing I learned about a couple of things I could do to make their life better in my class. I recommended more relevant and inclusive reading and gave them permission to move around at will. The student went out of their way to acknowledge the difference it made for them, and their breakthrough had a domino effect for other students and positively impacted the class dynamics. (Joe)

Finding that individual educators had the capacity to produce meaningful learning opportunities demonstrated the significance associated with being intentional and having a natural tendency to connect and relate with colleagues and students. Nearly 80% of the educators who participated in the study had the attitude, intention, skillsets, and experience to connect and relate with students to enhance learning. The table in Figure 4.2, "Major Finding Two" provided a snapshot of this finding, and specifically the two major factors that informed the finding.

Major Finding Two

Individual teachers had the capacity to produce Relevant and meaningful learning opportunities through relationships and trust

Major Factor Two Individual Teacher Impact	Number of Comments Related to Major Factor	Sample Comments
Intentional Practice Some educators shared stories about times where their approach to build relationships and trust was to intentionally create learning focused on connecting, relating, and building community	80 Comments From 27 Participants	"With a Hispanic community of schools we had a parent kid night once a month. We set up bilingual discussions, did some training with families, and provided childcare and food. The involvement was amazing and the whole family turned out" (Pamela) "We are intentional in establishing collaboration and communication rubrics right up front. It helps to identify roles and it plays to student strengths" (Carmela) "Totally on board to intentionally invest in building relationships at the beginning of the school year. Practically thinking it is the best time to invest" (Vicky)
Natural Tendency Some teachers have a tendency to connect with their students because they have an innate desire and interest, plus the communication skills and the interpersonal skills to naturally build relationships with their students	77 Comments From 27 Participants	"Get to know the kids well - their academic challenges, their strengths, and their home life" (Todd) "I want them to find their own authentic voice in a safe and wonderful environment" (Sinola) "My why is really ensuring that there is an opportunity for students to succeed" (Jane)

Figure 4.2

Major finding three: educators were willing to intentionally invest in learning more about building relationships and trust. When asked about the likelihood to invest in building

relationships, 15 of the 15 participants demonstrated that they were likely or very likely inclined to invest time, funding, and training resources to learn with peers and students how to collectively build relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. All 15 participants were credited with the idea that a major factor in their approach to building relationships was based on weighing needed support and investment. The results provided an overwhelming consensus, with 62% of the responses indicating that participants were very likely to invest and 31% likely to invest. Of the 180 total responses to the questions there were only 13 responses that resulted in unsure, unlikely, or very unlikely.

The significance of making an investment to connect and relate was demonstrated in the following comments that were initially transcribed as stories or anecdotes. They confirmed interview and anecdote circle participant sentiment that educators are interested in intentionally investing in building relationships in their schools and classrooms. According to Jean (11.13.19), a seasoned high school teacher,

> My philosophy is that teaching cannot occur without first establishing a relationship, so the first two weeks of school for me are really about establishing rapport and getting to know my students, their backgrounds, and how they identify. No content should be delivered during those first two weeks. I am definitely for making an investment in time, resources, and training to intentionally learn how to build relationships and trust. What I see in our building is that the people who spend the time investing in relationships, they are the teachers who have less behavioral management issues.

From a second seasoned high school teacher perspective, Steve (05.11.19) shared his thoughts on the importance of investing time in the classroom to connect and relate on a personal level to build trust.

> For me, at this point relationship building is probably the most important part of teaching. I have come to understand that the better relationships I have with students the better they perform, and treating them like people and giving them the respect they deserve is a key to their learning. I absolutely think that if schools would spend more time on building relationships, the changes in attitude and behaviors are there.

Joan (10.18.19) is a science teacher that demonstrated a no nonsense approach to building relationships. "We could say if it was found to be true, that spending time with relationships increases efficiency overall to the point where you could, and this could be something to measure, you could potentially gain time."

Finding that educators were willing to intentionally invest in learning more about building relationships and trust presented an exciting development. This evidence led to an understanding that through a greater commitment to connect and relate, educators had an opportunity to transcend conditions, challenges, and consequences in U.S. public schools. The research study responses signified a major commitment to invest in learning how to build relationships together if conditions were favorable. The pie chart in Figure 4.3, "Major Finding Three" provided a view of how participants responded to all 12 questions in the research study survey.

Major Finding Three

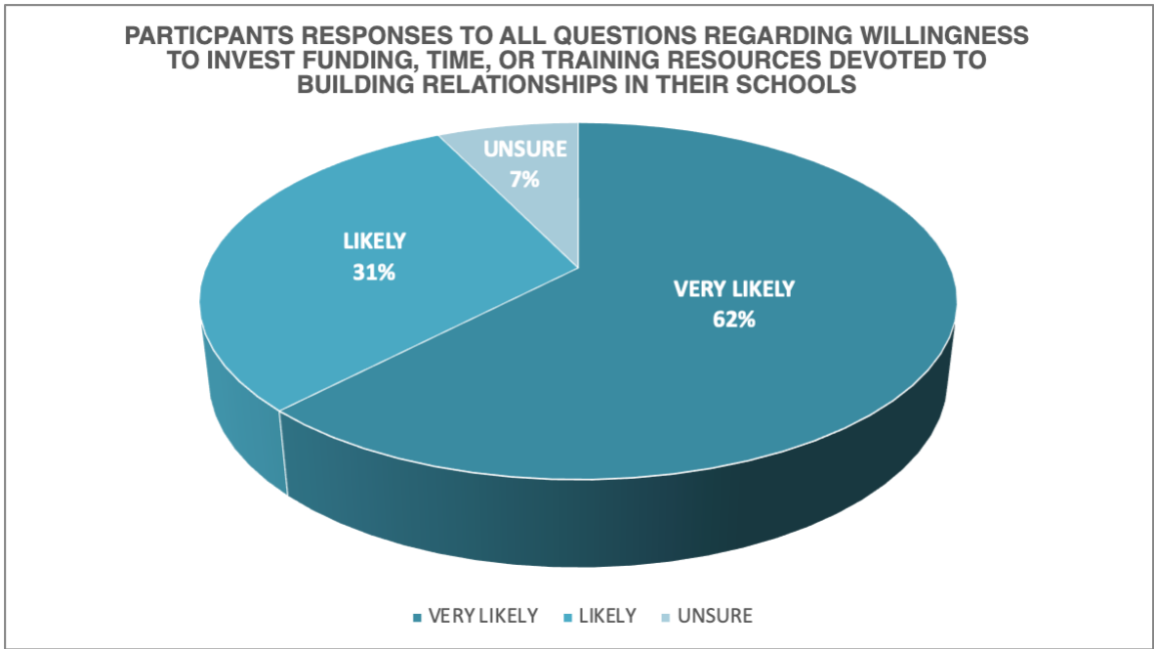


Figure 4.3

Major finding four: educators needed and wanted support from their schools and school districts to invest in relationships with students and peers. When asked to explore the role relationship building practices had on their approach to teaching, 17 of the 17 participants, or 100% of the interview participants shared that their approach to building relationships was dependent on the fact that they either had support or lacked support. Additionally, 16 of the 17 interview participants, or 94% of the participants shared that they wanted or needed support to either continue to build relationships or learn how to build relationships. In total a 97% indication that support is a critical factor when it comes to the approach educators take to build relationships.

The following comments were transcribed as stories or anecdotes. They confirmed participant sentiment that educators either thrived or struggled to build relationships, depending on support. Teach (05.27.19) was an administrator who embedded support into her daily routine. She claimed that, "In the first 10-15 minutes every day, students share thoughts and support one

another if support is needed for them, their family, or someone they know. Jill (06.19.19) discussed the support she received from classroom leadership,

> In my department we produce integrated questions to get kids engaged in our lecture time environment. The science department lead teacher and I have embraced this, a third teacher has embraced this, and maybe the other two will as well at some point. The administrator is super-supportive and we are able to connect and meet academic obligations simultaneously. We are encouraged to try different things and to make the kids happy; I am lucky to have the support I have.

Jean (11.13.19) was a special education high school teacher who discussed the support she received from school leadership. Her comments were particularly important, as they demonstrated not just the individual benefit produced by support, but the collective opportunity for support to impact an entire student body.

> On a larger scale school-wide basis we focus on how we care, how we act, and how we treat one another. At our school we call this strong (striving to be thoughtful, responsible, organized, neighborly, and generous). What I do in the classroom, and what my peers do, is that we try to reinforce this in the smaller communities in hopes that this is what we will see in the larger community, and we each have to do our part for this to work.

Finding that some educators had support and some did not, and finding that most educators needed and wanted support from their schools and school districts to build relationships with students, demonstrated the significance of support. A particular significance of this finding was learning about the enormous difference support made. Support played a critical role in producing opportunities for educators to take the time to connect and relate. Figure 4.4, "Major Finding Four" demonstrated some of the nuisances of the support factor.

Major Finding Four

Educators needed and wanted support from their schools and school districts To invest in relationships with students and peers

Major Factor Four Role of Support	Number of Comments Related to Factor	Sample Comments
Have Support Comments about having support to build relationships from professional learning communities, teacher department teams, school leadership, and school district leadership	95 Comments From 17 Participants	"The amount of community support we have here is profound" - "Students at my school get what they need" (Dee) "We create a culture of care and the families say that they feel that" (Teach) "Colleagues are given enough time to form relationships with one another" (Carmela)
Lack Support Comments about having a desire to build relationships but not having the support, and reporting a lack of awareness and interest in relation to other demands	21 Comments From 17 Participants	"I have a hearing issue so connecting with teachers in loud environments where we plan is difficult - I need more time one-on-one" (Hazen) "No nothing formal related to communication or relationship building" (Vicky)
Want Support Direct comments about wanting to do something, to do more, and/or to increase the intentional investment to connect and relate with peers and students	40 Comments From 17 Participants	"In certain classes with the amount of AP coursework it is a constant struggle to connect students - the climate does not lend itself" (Joe) "I missed the teacher orientation at the beginning of the year and did not get the time to connect with other primary and secondary teachers" (Joan)
Need Support Comments that say there is an opportunity in a school or classroom for a teacher or an administrator to get some support to learn how to build relationships and trust	26 Comments From 17 Participants	"Getting them to interact face-to-face is like pulling teeth, they hate it - they hate group projects" (Phoebe) "I have students who come to class but never turn in assignments or do homework, I think they may be coming for a social thing" (Bill)

Figure 4.4

Major finding five: educators were interested in learning how to measure the positive impact social and emotional learning had on student growth and development. When asked to explore the role relationship building practices had on their approach to teaching, 10 of the 17 interview participants, or 59% of the participants shared an interest in measuring the positive outcomes associated with building relationships and trust. Participants discussed the critical nature of having the ability to measure the positive results associated with connecting and relating. Participants asserted that achieving a system for measuring the positive results of relationship building on social and emotional learning, for personal growth and development, was a crucial factor in finding support and investment.

The following comments were transcribed as stories or anecdotes and demonstrated more specifically the critical nature of social and emotional assessment to measure student success in the classroom. The comments confirmed participant sentiment that educators were limited by the lack of evidence to officially measure the impact of building relationships in their learning environments. Jane (06.17.19) was a school administrator with a vision to include social and emotional learning in the way educators measure overall student success.

> One thing I haven't done yet but it has been a dream of mine. We talk a lot about learning objectives and it is the craze to post the objectives, to write them in a particular way (I can statements), and to review them back to lessons. I'd like to get to a point where we have social and emotional objectives posted and we review them on a regular basis. All lessons would have built-in social and emotional objectives. If we are really going to place an emphasis on social and emotional learning then [relevant] objectives should be just as important as academic objectives.

Amy (06.05.19) is another school administrator with a particular perspective on the impact of measuring social and emotional learning in a higher education environment.

> As we move into a technology based society we communicate with each other through a few words in texts as an example, and more and more people do online learning. I think we are creating learning opportunities that don't offer what we need, and so what are we going to lose? It will be very interesting to see how we do, because right now I would say we are going to lose a lot if we discount relationship building face to face, and how do we measure that loss?

Additionally, Todd (03.27.19) expressed his view from a complex adaptive systems thinking point of view.

> In traditional lecture style delivery where relationship building is not such a priority, the dynamic is the teacher connecting exclusively with each individual student. With this approach from a systems thinking perspective, if you take away the teacher the learning stops, which is not a very robust system or resilient learning environment. I start to visualize it like an ecosystem generating as many connections as possible, creating a robust network. The teacher is not as central. They provide a framework for assignments and projects but they let the students be the agents. The balance is learning to build on what skills the students have, not too opened that you lose them, and not too constrained where there is no voice or choice.

Educators showed significant interest in learning how to measure the positive impact social and emotional learning had on student growth and development. The value of this finding was clear that measuring the impact of connecting and relating was relevant and had the capacity to verify the value and benefits of building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms.

Major Finding Five

Educators were interested in learning how to measure the positive impact Social and emotional learning had on student growth and development

Major Factor Five Measuring the Impact	Number of Comments Related to Factor	Sample Comments
Measurement Factors Comments about the opportunity to measure the positive outcomes that educators know and understand to be beneficial to students, their capacity to learn, and their growth and development	21 Comments From 17 Participants	"With another teacher we were successful in building trust but it did not translate to academic success" (Todd) "I have a handle on the success of my approach but no official measurement system or tool and no idea how others measure - this is regrettable" (Carmela) "I think we can demonstrate and measure with rubrics and such - we could measure engagement - we could measure growth - we could measure participation" (Jane)
Measurement Systems Factors Comments about direct evidence of the positive outcomes that educators know and understand to be beneficial to students, their capacity to learn, and their growth and development	24 Comments From 17 Participants	"At the beginning of the year we deliver messages about safety and respect, during the year we remind students about that, and at the end of the year kids use the same messages to remind other kids" (Vicky) "Connecting with students produces a high level of growth - this year with another teacher we focused on relationships in the classroom and saw a three point growth in the science work, this school has not seen growth in six years" (Jill)

Figure 4.5

The table in Figure 4.5, "Major Finding Five" provided a glimpse of what the participants in this study understood about measuring the impact of social and emotional learning in general.

Demographics survey findings. The mix of educational backgrounds, gender, race, ethnicity, and culture provided enough data to help determine that the approach to relationship building was transparent in regards to these distinctions. While the study participants identified as 20 Caucasian and three Persons of Color, with the compounded distinction of different heritages and cultural orientations provided, these unique individual distinctions yielded little difference in the overall approaches shared by the participants. The graph in Figure 4.6, "Race and Gender of Research Study Participants" provided a snapshot of the race and gender information collected.

The study captured input from educators with a single year of experience in education to an educator with 31 years of experience. While there was only one educator from the middle school system, there were multiple participants from all other grade levels. The declarations, comments, and stories that emerged in the analysis showed no real significant difference in the basic approach educators took to build trust in their distinct learning environments, other than grade level appropriate methods for connecting. Evidence in the major findings showed that the study was relevant to all levels of education and learning, and there was no indication that tenure or grade level had a particular impact on educator feedback, about the importance of relationships and the need for support and investment to build relationships in their schools and classrooms. The graph in Figure 4.7, "Education Experience of Research Study Participants" provided a snapshot of the experience, role, and grade level of participants.

Educators who participated in the study worked in suburban, urban, and rural districts, and in public, charter, and private schools. The contributions from public, charter, and private school educators produced similar evidence about how educators approach building relationships. Of the nine participants working for private schools seven had previous experience

in a public school setting. Figure 4.8, "Research Study Participants by School Location and Type" identified the two factors delineating school locations. Additionally, Appendix 4.10, "Demographic Survey Data Sheet" provided a more detailed version of the data collected in a demographic survey data sheet.

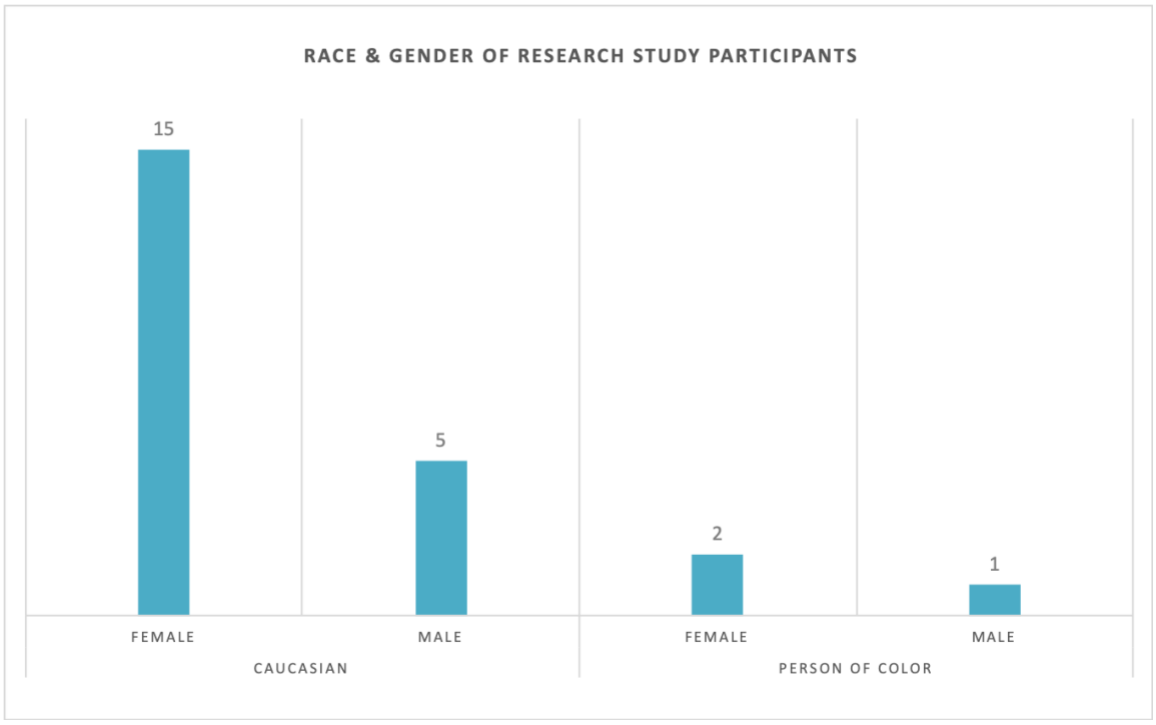


Figure 4.6

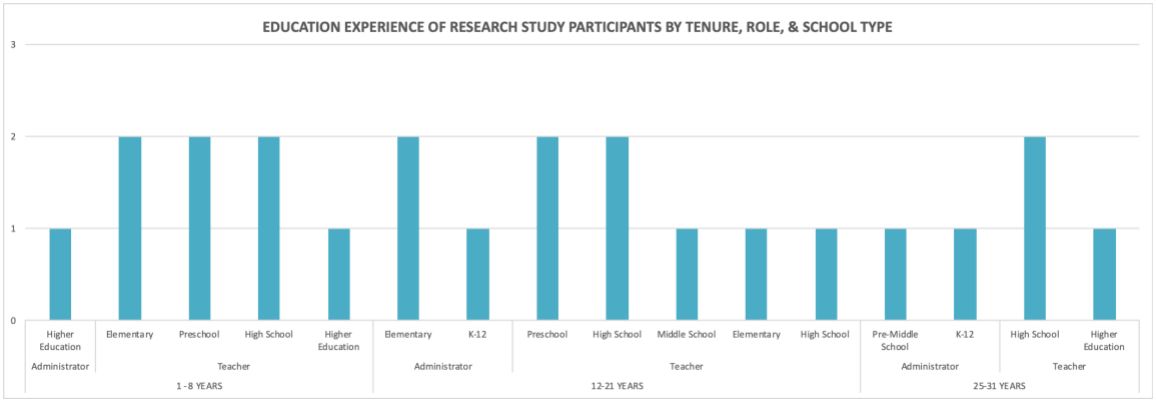


Figure 4.7

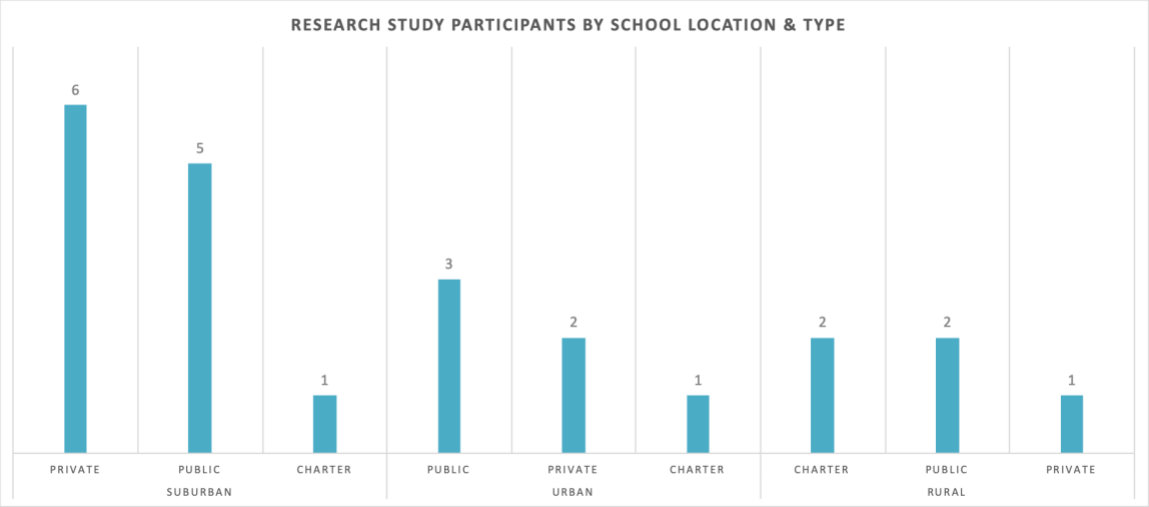


Figure 4.8

The five major findings were achieved with confidence and they produced accurate details of participant disclosures about how they approached building relationships with students and peers in schools and classrooms. The five major findings demonstrated that while building relationships was a key to learning, not all educators were equipped to connect and relate. Additionally, the findings provided evidence that with support and investment, intentionally building relationships in schools and classrooms, which was an idea that all 23 participants of the study embraced, would be more common. The survey findings, while insignificant in depth and stature to the interviews and anecdote circle discussions, were condensed in such a way to provide additional relevant evidence to support the five major findings.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss what was learned from the data collected through interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a post-interview and post-anecdote circle survey. It included a discussion about why and how the data from recordings and survey responses was simultaneously transcribed and coded manually, and the critical role organizing the transcribed data played to prepare for a proper and productive analysis and synthesis of the data. It included a discussion about the process used to organize, analyze and synthesize the data

toward common themes and stories, and it provided a look at what participants had to say about their understanding and approach to relationship and trust building practices in their schools and classrooms.

The manual transcriptions set the stage for a clean investigation, and the initial codes held up in every stage that followed. The organization of the recordings, the transcriptions, and other materials took several turns before identifying the most relevant codes, titles, factors, and findings to report on. The analysis and synthesis was methodical in nature and the results of the process were reliable. According to Mills (2014), "In everyday English, reliability means dependability and trustworthiness," and "Basically, reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures" (p. 119). In this action research study the movement of the collected data was consistently handled and measured against the research question; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? Consequently, the investigation produced dependable and trustworthy findings.

Chapter V - Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The interpretations and discussions, conclusions and implications, and recommendations and practices discussed in this chapter were influenced by three factors: the action research study findings, my experience as an educator, and the knowledge gained in a decade of higher education research and studies. The views included were a reflection of what was learned completing the dissertation research study, and specifically what was learned about how relationships were developed and managed in schools and classrooms. The views were also a reflection of what I personally experienced developing relationships with learners as a trainer, coach, and teacher for 30 years. Additionally, the views were informed by what was learned

about student and teacher struggles in U.S. public schools through 10 consecutive years of higher education studies and research, culminating in the completion of this doctoral dissertation.

The conditions discussed in chapter two of this dissertation referred to a struggling public education system in the U.S., suffering from inequitable funding, feckless reform, a lack of resources for schools and teachers, and an archaic approach to education and learning. These conditions created challenges and the challenges created consequences linked by a persistent issue; a shortfall of relevant and meaningful connections for students and teachers in U.S. public schools. This public education issue was not far removed from an issue that plagued U.S. society and in particular disrupted the work of the government to manage institutional obligations. According to McIntosh and Phipps (2014), the Republican Party adopted a strategy in the 1990's, "Apparently designed to actually create and maintain polarization" (p. 3). In Depolarizing the American Mind the authors suggest that, "For some, this strategy is justified by the conclusion that a polarized system works in favor of those who seek to reduce government effectiveness and maintain the status quo" (p. 3).

Maintaining the status quo of the current U.S. public education system would mean that inner city schools would continue to be underfunded. It would mean that needed resources would continue to come up short for students, teachers, and schools. It would mean that standards, testing, and grading would continue to be the primary form of measuring student achievement. It would mean that students in U.S. public schools who get lost in the system would continue to get lost; and continue to produce double-digit student dropout rates. In all likelihood it would mean a continuation of the polarization in U.S. politics and society.

In chapter four of this dissertation the five major findings reported on represented what was learned in the action research study through the collection of data from teachers and school

administrators who participated in interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a research study survey. The findings were a result of the research question that was designed to guide the collection of the data; how do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? The five major findings of the study reflected how educators managed relationships in their schools and classrooms. The declarations, comments, and stories collected resulted in learning that relationships were key to learning, individual teacher skills and abilities were responsible for student engagement and learning, and intentional investment and leadership support were critical to effectively building relationships. A final finding identified a need for educators to learn how to measure the significance of connecting and relating with students to secure support and investments.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Findings and interpretation together are the basis for drawing trustworthy conclusions" (p. 112). Therefore the interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations discussed in this chapter were directly related to the findings of the study. Essentially, the focus of this final chapter discussion was about how the findings were interpreted and how the findings and interpretations influenced the conclusions and recommendations.

Interpretation and Discussion of the Findings

Participants of the action research study from preschool through higher education shared their thoughts, ideas, and insights about how they built relationships or hoped to build relationships in their schools and classrooms. The interpretation of those thoughts, ideas, and insights were influenced by academic research on the topic of relationships and trust. As an example, according to Siegel (2017), a significant feature of the human mind was that it

connected us with everyone and everything in the world around us through relationships. Siegel claimed that,

> Another fundamental issue is that our relationships with others, the social environment in which we live, directly influence our mental life. And here, too, perhaps our relationships create our mental life, not only influence it, but also being one of the sources of its very origins, not just what shapes it, but what gives it rise. And so the mind in this way may also be seen as relational, as well as embodied. (p. 10)

The opportunity for students to learn how to connect and relate with the world around them, and develop their minds in relevant and meaningful ways was expressed in stories and comments shared by educators in the action research study. Insights from Siegel's research helped to clarify the critical nature of connecting and relating to expand a student's mind through relationships, and to produce relevant and meaningful opportunities for students to learn about the world around them.

The following interpretations were relevant to the study focus and research questions. They were an examination of the findings from an educator, student researcher, observer, and research participant perspective. The interpretations presented arguments about (1) what relationships meant to learning, (2) the perceived benefits of building relationships, (3) what it meant to make a commitment to building relationships, (4) what it meant to make an investment in building relationships, (5) and what it meant to have support for building relationships. The interpretations offered an understanding of what was learned about why and how relationships and trust enhance learning, and that if educators were committed, if investments were made, and if the support needed to build relationships and trust with students was in place; students were more likely to be engaged and more likely to succeed academically.

What relationships meant to learning. Each of the action research study participants indicated that trusting relationships were a key to enhanced learning. Nearly 80% of them made direct comments to indicate that their approach to building relationships and trust was influenced by how important it was to learning? Pamela (03.21.19) was a school district administrator who oversaw the development of professional learning communities in her district for 10 years. This was how she understood the critical connection between trusting relationships and student learning:

> Relationships are most important in terms of climate, student learning, teacher's sense of efficacy, and their ability to take on challenges. Building relationships is at the heart of everything. Without that you are just going through the motions. It has to be central, it has to be intentional, and it has to be ongoing. I do not see anything more important.

According to Absolon (2010), from an Indigenous wholistic theory perspective defined as whole, ecological, cyclical, and relational, "we are all related." The relationships between the air, water, sun, and earth were what connected us all, and the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional realms were influenced by these connections (p. 76). Consider the combined influence of Pamela's (03.21.19) seasoned view as a district administrator in a school district serving over 40,000 students, that relationships in schools were central and at the heart of everything educators do; and Absolon's viewpoint asserting that our world was influenced by the notion that all realms were connected; and consider the added dimension of what Siegel (2017) claimed, that the human mind was informed by the relationships with the world around us. Weaving these three worldviews into an integrated perspective produced a logical conclusion, that trusting relationships positively influenced how people lived and how they learned.

The perceived benefits of building relationships. The study findings indicated that educators needed to learn together with peers and students how to connect and relate in their schools and classrooms. Although the majority of the participants of the study understood and agreed that connecting and relating enhanced learning it did not mean they practiced habits and behaviors in accordance. Ecochallenge.org (2020) was a Pacific Northwest environmental and social justice nonprofit. At the heart of their work were six community goals for a world they wanted to see: sustainable living, healthy food systems, deep equity, living water, balanced climate, and mindful consumption. Their message for 27 years was to understand what they called "the say do gap," distinguishing the difference between wanting to do something and actually doing it. They promoted taking positive ecological action and exploring the impact by "connecting the dots between your intentions with the habits you make and the actions you take" (connecting the dots). For the educators in the action research study there was a gap between what they had the time and support to accomplish, and what they aspired to do, knowing the benefits of taking the time to build relationships and trust.

The action research study revealed that it took a commitment from educators, an investment of time and resources, and leadership support to build relationships with students. In a study committed to building relationships with adequate time, resources and support, Miller, et al (2017) presented the results of a relationship building intervention (RBI) with two groups of fifth grade students. "Findings revealed that students who participated in the RBI liked school more, felt a greater sense of classroom identification and inclusion, were perceived by teachers to be less aggressive, and performed better academically than students who were in control classrooms" (p. 75). What this meant was that making the commitment, investing time and resources, and finding support to build relationships had a positive impact on making students

feel connected, which improved academic performance. Therefore, the action research study suggestion to intentionally establish relevant and meaningful relationship building mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors, and learning how to measure the impact, had the potential to achieve the kinds of benefits revealed by the Miller study.

What it meant to make a commitment to build relationships. What does it mean to make a commitment? According to Affolter (2017) in a discussion about the readiness and receptivity of teachers to embrace new approaches to teaching such as culturally responsive teaching (CRT), she articulated a dynamic that wholly applies to this study.

> CRT readiness and receptivity are not the same. Readiness could imply having background knowledge, prior training in teacher preparation or professional development, and culturally responsive teaching experience. In contrast, receptivity is an attitudinal disposition; an openness to shifting one's practices and pedagogical philosophies towards culturally responsiveness; and a willingness to try different approaches to teaching. (p. 123)

The key consideration in the action research study was that having an interest in the idea of building relationships and trust versus making a commitment to intentionally invest to build relationships and trust signified an attitudinal disposition. It presented a shift toward closing the gap on the mindset that a key to learning was trust, and actually practicing habits and behaviors that produced trust. The mindset to intentionally invest time, money, and training resources opened the door to practices and pedagogical philosophies towards building a different, more committed approach to connecting and relating with peers and students.

Poutiatine and Conners (2012) presented a similar viewpoint. They reflected on the results of an academic retreat that produced an additional interpretation of what it meant to make

a commitment to building relationships and how that commitment paid off. The authors reported that the work completed in the retreat was more transformational rather than formational. "Rather than becoming more of themselves, these participants articulated an experience of becoming fundamentally different as a result of deep engagement with their own identity and integrity. From their perspective, a new person emerged" (p. 70).

What it meant to make an investment in building relationships. Discussions with participants focused on the benefits, values, challenges, and limitations of building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms. From the feedback, there appeared to be no downsides associated with building relationships in the classroom beyond the lack of time and support, but philosophically there were no doubters. Not one of the 23 participants who took part in the action research study even remotely discounted the value of building relationships and trust in their learning environments. It was not to say that the there was a 100% buy-in to invest and take action, but the consensus was clear, each of the 23 participants would take the time if they had it, to build relationships in their schools and classrooms.

The findings also produced evidence that a lack of practice was more linked to a lack of awareness, interest, understanding, and commitment, than not having the time to practice. There were five educators out of the 23 action research participants who expressed that they did not have the time, therefore it was not a priority to connect and relate. In reality the culprit was more about their lack of awareness regarding the benefits associated with investing time up front to gain time in the long run. Jean (11.13.19) was a dedicated school-wide special education teacher asserting that, "What I see in our building is that the people who spend the time investing in relationships, they are the teachers who have less behavioral management issues." Essentially taking the time to connect with students can actually save time for teachers and administrators.

The study demonstrated that an investment in the strategy to build relationships was a sustainable practice. This strategy would have the capacity to transcend the conditions, challenges, and consequences that existed in public schools, and possibly the polarization that existed in American institutions, politics, and society. It seemed that connecting, relating, and building trust was relevant, mindful, meaningful, contextual, and sustainable for a culturally diverse audience; including individual students, teachers, school administrators, district administrators, parents and caregivers, and school community stakeholders.

What it meant to have support for building relationships. Every teacher and school administrator who took part in the action research study projected a *mindset* that building relationships and trust in their classrooms was a key to student engagement, but every educator did not necessarily *practice* building relationships and trust with students in their classrooms. Of the 23 educators who took part in the study, 18 shared stories about how they effectively invested time and resources to practice building relationships and trust. This group demonstrated that they had the skills, experience, and natural tendency to connect and relate. They also reported that with support from other teachers and administrators, and support from district leadership, they witnessed huge student successes tied to connecting and relating in the classroom.

Dee (09.30.19), the principal of a public elementary school with 450 students demonstrated in her feedback an example of what administrative and leadership support produced. She reported that there was a 100% buy-in from teachers in her school to invest time and resources to connect, relate, and build community. She also reported getting a green light and complete support from district leadership to "keep up the good work." Her school community believed that relationships were the key to learning, and as Dee claimed, "Kids need

to be surrounded by people they love and trust, and that includes peers and adults. Students at my school get what they need." With teacher, principal, and district support Dee asserted that not only did kids get what they needed, her entire school community had an opportunity to thrive.

The five teachers in the study who were not as aware of the value associated with connecting and relating also felt that building relationships was important, but they did not have the skills, natural tendency, inclination, or experience to make relationship building a priority in their classrooms. They also seemed to lack an awareness of some of the benefits shared by the group of 18, and demonstrated a lack of interest to practice in accordance with the mindset that relationships were a key to learning. What did this mean? It indicated that not all teachers had the capacity and intuition to connect and relate, for those that had the capacity they produced relevant and meaningful learning opportunities with or without the support, and for those who did not have the ability they needed support to bridge the gap. I expected that this meant with intentional support and training all educators would learn to build relationships and trust in schools and classrooms, hopefully in a consistent and sustainable manner. With little doubt, all of the educators in the study wanted to make great things happen for their students, and to some degree each of them needed help and support to get that done.

Conclusions and Implications

The action research study was designed to investigate relationship and trust building practices in schools and classrooms. The conclusions and implications refocused on the five major findings from that investigation. This resulted in producing a bridge between the study findings and meaningful recommendations for continued research and practice. The discussion in this section focused on four distinct conclusions integrating the findings into a series of steps

aimed at increasing the opportunity to build relationships in schools and classrooms. It was completed with a reflection on potential limitations of the study.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Conclusions flow directly from your findings. In effect, the conclusions are assertions based on your findings and must therefore be warranted by the findings" (p. 315). The conclusions stated in this study were drawn from what was learned in my role as a student researcher, observer, and research participant in a two-year research study project. They also reflected my personal experience as a trainer, coach, and teacher, and what was learned in ten consecutive years of higher education study. Bloomberg and Volpe argued that, "conclusions are essentially conclusive statements of what you now know, having done the research, that you did not know before" (p. 315). The conclusions, implications, and limitations in this discussion were presented from a more informed viewpoint. They reflected new insights based on what was learned after collecting, transcribing, coding, organizing, analyzing, synthesizing, reporting on, and interpreting relevant and meaningful study data.

The four conclusions directed at increasing opportunities to build relationships were informed by the data and findings. They concluded that, (1) a close examination of relationship building practices heightened awareness and increased interest in relationship building mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors, (2) educator insights, skillsets, and natural abilities to connect impacted the approach and opportunity to build relationships with students and peers in schools and classrooms, (3) **s**upport from school district leadership and school administrators, for teachers to build relationships in their schools and classrooms, had a significant impact on teacher practices, and a positive impact on learning at all levels of education, (4) there was a need for educators to learn how to effectively measure and validate the benefits associated with

building relationships and trust to complement academic learning outcomes, and to learn how to secure investment and support. Figure 5.1 presented an action research cycle diagram of "The Four Conclusions" aimed at increasing opportunities to embrace relationship trust building practices.

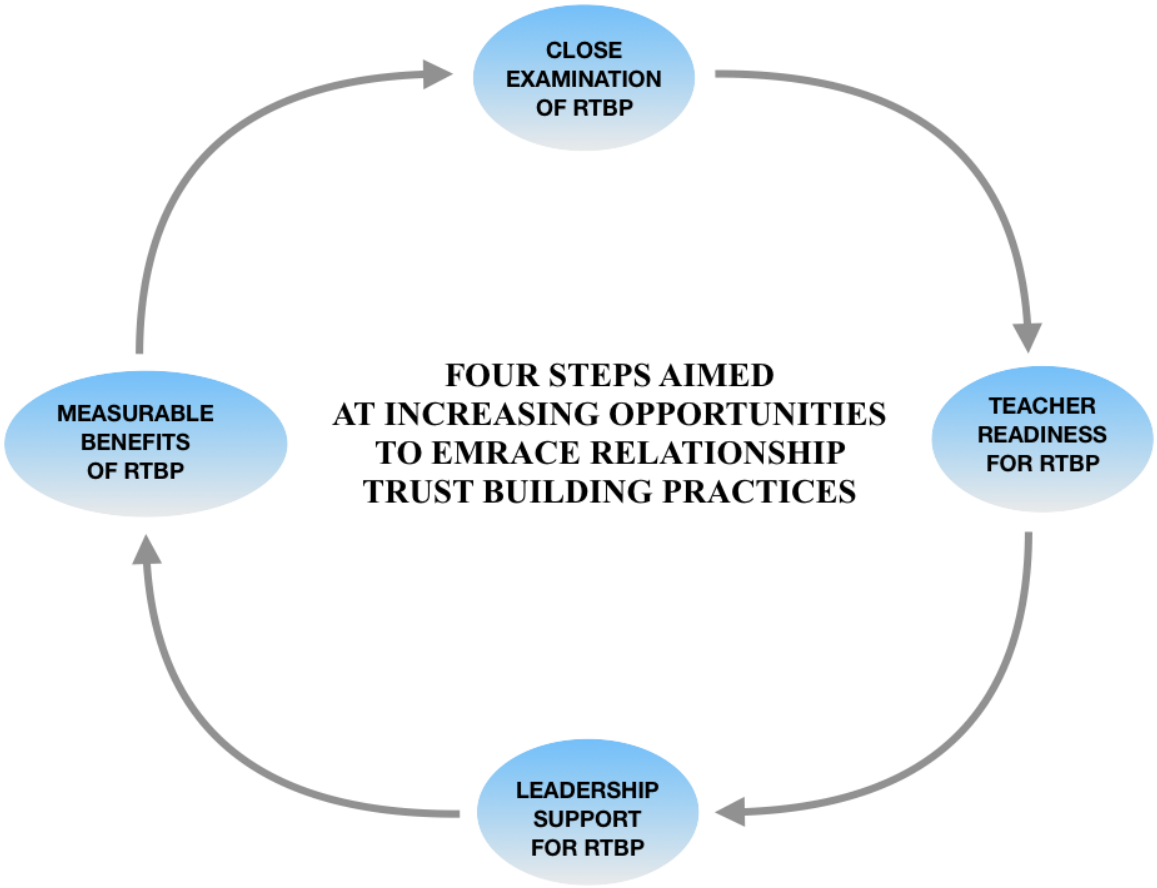


Figure 5.1

Close examination: a close examination of relationship building practices heightened awareness and increased interest in relationship building mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors. A common theme in the study pointed to increased interest in the discussion of relationships as interview and anecdote circle plans and discussions progressed. It was identified that educators had a leap of interest after the initial decision to participate in the study, and there was a noticeable jump in interest after participants reviewed the study overview and questions.

After completing the review of a study consent form and agreeing to a scheduled time, and after the initial conversation about their demographic make up, the level of interest and focus on relationships was measurably more significant. I concluded that moving from one planned stage to the next with the intent to genuinely connect and engage with participants, on a topic that had relevance and meaning for them, offered a level of common ground, consistency, and comfort that peaked interest.

The conclusion that awareness and interest was increased with a closer examination of relationships and trust was evident from the research study survey results. Of the 23 participants who took part in interview and anecdote circle discussions, 15 also took part in a post-interview or post-anecdote circle survey. The survey was designed to identify participant interest to invest time, funding, and training resources to build relationships in schools and classrooms. The survey asked 12 questions about the likelihood of investing, and 93% of the responses to the 12 questions by all 15 participants expressed that they were "likely" or "very likely," if given the opportunity, to invest time, funding, and training resources to learn in their community how to build relationships with students and peers.

One particular higher education teacher at the beginning of the interview demonstrated a certain lack of awareness associated with understanding the benefits of building relationships, and toward the end of the interview expressed a much different level of interest. "I have 20 kids and lose five every term. I suppose some of them might stay if a professor connected with them and I suppose we could lower those dropout numbers. I could even get better at that" (Bill, 05.13.19). At the end of the interview here is what he had to say with a newfound awareness and interest based on closer examination.

> There is a lot of potential here now that I am thinking about it for ways to incorporate relationship building into the subjects we teach. As an instructor it would be great to have some tools to do that and to learn how to do that. How can I build that into my course throughout the term? This would be very helpful to know because I have 20 topics to cover and 16 weeks. This is not a lot of time and I have to teach these topics. However there is so much value in building relationships I think we could do both at the same time if we got creative.

The topic of relationships was relevant and meaningful, and impacted the decisions extraordinarily busy educators made to take time for this study. There was conclusive evidence that the time to closely examine the topic was valuable to each participant. This sentiment was reflected in educator insights and from the appreciation expressed by all of the participants. As an example, Vicky (05.26.19) was a forest preschool teacher in a private suburban outdoor learning program. She was completely intentional about connecting and relating with students to gain their trust and create a safe learning environment, and upon reflection at the end of the interview commented that, "There are a lot of things that happen that I do not think about in terms of relationship building, but with this question I can see that there are things we [she and her colleagues] do that are intentional and a lot of it is relationship building."

Jean (11.13.19) was a special education teacher and student advocate resource in a large urban high school. In her role on campus she connected with and fed the students who needed the connections and needed the food. She commented that, "You really hit it with these questions, this is my passion and the area of learning that matters to me, so thank you" (Jean, 11.13.19). It was significant to consider the implication of these remarks as research pointed to the fact that teachers hardly had time to reflect and grow professionally in their busy days.

According to Heider (2005), schools were departmentalized and separated by grade levels and "ever-increasing duties left little time for communication between teachers" (p. 3). The tendency she asserted was for teachers to figure out how to go it alone and "adopt a self-reliant philosophy" (p. 3).

In the action research study educators found time to reflect on the topic of relationships, and after a closer examination appeared to be more aware and interested. This shift demonstrated a level of heightened awareness and a greater commitment to practice and investment in building relationships and trust. Figure 5.2 presented a diagram of an action research study, "ARS Cycle of Interest," that demonstrated the significance of this conclusion aimed at increasing opportunities to embrace relationship trust building practices.

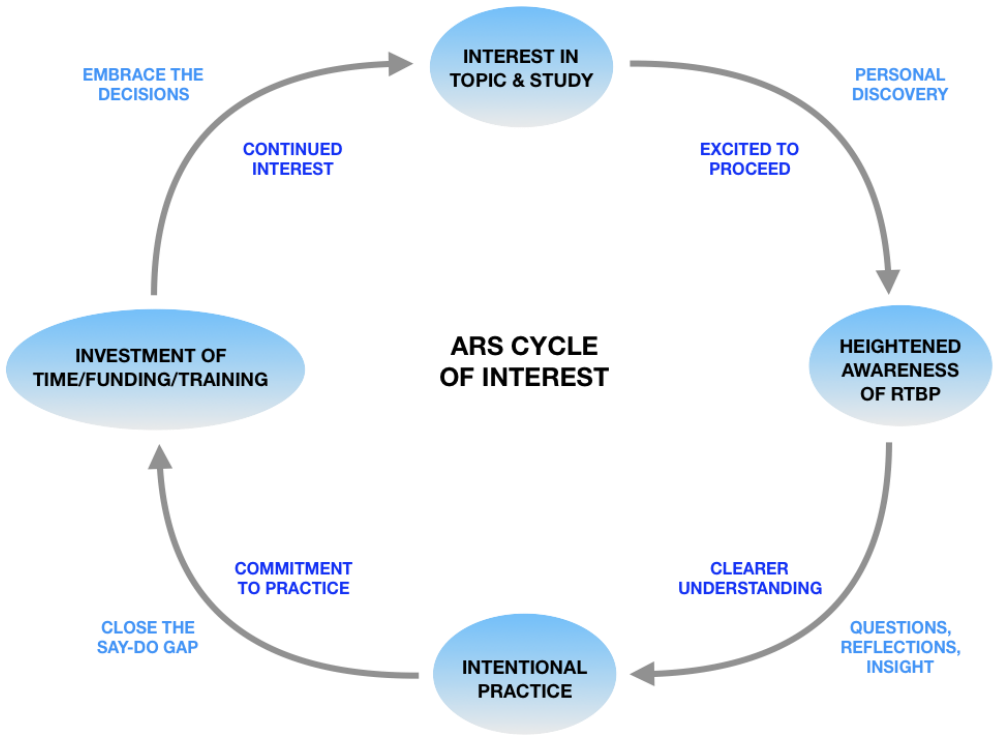


Figure 5.2

Teacher readiness: educator insights, skillsets, and natural abilities to connect impacted the approach and opportunity to build relationships with students and peers in schools and

classrooms. Building relationships in schools and classrooms required a level of readiness, and some teachers were prepared while others were not. The comments and stories from the study interviews and anecdote circle discussions resulted in understanding which educators were prepared to connect and relate, and which educators demonstrated that they were not ready.

Teach (05.27.19) is a K-8th grade principal and an educator who had a natural tendency to connect and relate. Her readiness factor displayed clear intentions, the willingness to invest, and a commitment at the beginning of every new school year to prepare students, teachers, and families to build relationships through a school-wide and community-wide approach.

> It is imperative before school starts to get the ball rolling on this. We send out a letter and we invite folks to gatherings. The one big event at the beginning of the year where everyone shows up, we plan special early assemblies. We intentionally create a sense of belonging and connection. The kids spend a whole day at the beginning of the first week of school getting to know one another. The remainder of the first two weeks is focused on norms and procedures, and building on the connections made in that first day. (Teach)

For the educators in the action research study who demonstrated that they were not naturally inclined to connect and relate, an understanding of what it meant to be ready was essential to the development of relationships, especially with students. In conclusion the cycle of readiness reflected the findings that it was relevant for educators to first identify an interest before being ready, being intentional, and making investments and commitments to build relationships. Figure 5.3 presented a diagram of an action research study, "ARS Cycle of Readiness," that demonstrated the significance of this conclusion.

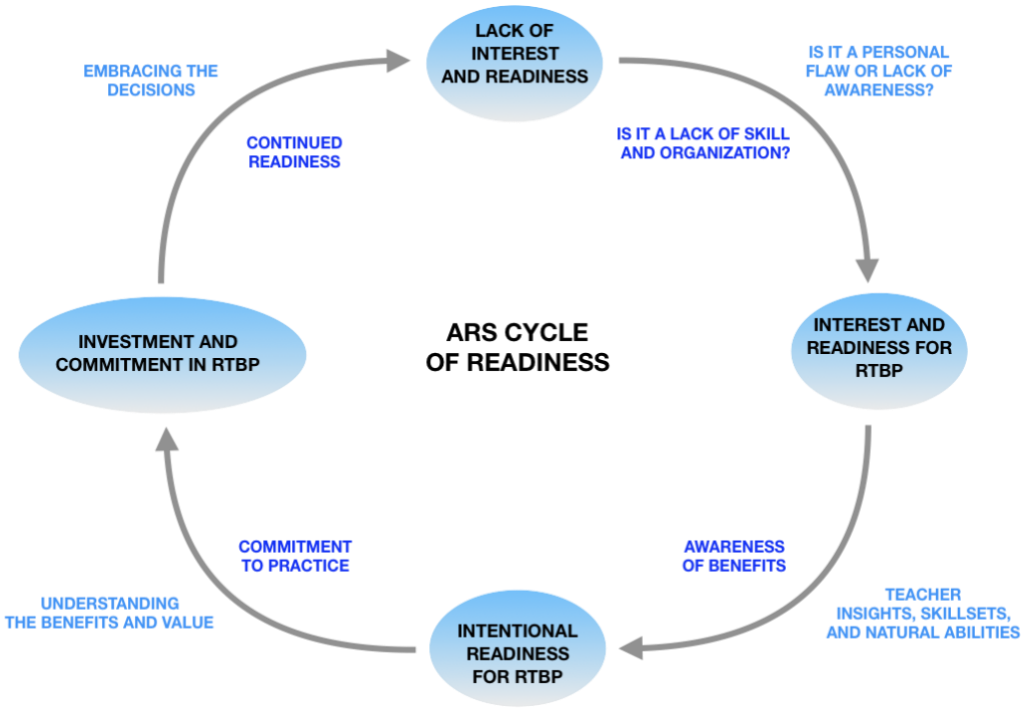


Figure 5.3

Leadership support: support from school district leadership and school administrators for teachers to build relationships in their schools and classrooms had a significant impact on teacher practices, and a positive impact on learning at all levels of education. Comments and stories from participants revealed that some of the educators who took part in the study had adequate support for taking the time to build relationships with students and peers, and some did not. There were four administrators in the study who were in a position to fully support efforts to build relationships in their schools through approaches like professional learning communities (Pamela, 03.21.19), tribes learning communities (Jane, 06.17.19), community based learning (Teach, 05.27.19), and MTSS (Dee, 09.30.19), a multi-tiered system of support. Their stories reflected the amazing accomplishments associated with having the support to see the needs of individual teachers and students, through these mindsets and practices.

For a highly trained principal of a thriving elementary school, Dee (09.30.19) reflected a commitment to support building relationships in her school in the following comments. "The

systems approach works because of trusting staff relationships developed through a multi-tiered system of support. Everybody in the school was onboard with what we were doing all of the time" Dee explained that in her school there were no barriers to access, and students got what they needed. These comments reinforced the conclusion that support had a significant impact on the ability for teachers to connect and relate in schools and classrooms. If educators learned how to intentionally build relationships and trust in their ranks, and got support and investment from school leadership, learning how to effectively build relationships and trust with students would be that much more relevant and meaningful, and therefore that much more successful and sustainable.

For the participants in the action research study who demonstrated in their comments and stories that they lacked support, needed support, or wanted support, the approach to build relationships fell on the shoulders of those individual teachers. Of this group there were four study participants in particular who reflected in their comments that they had no direct or indirect support to build relationships, and it impacted their lack of awareness and interest. Not surprisingly, these four participants were the only educators in the study who did not directly declare in any coded comments or stories that building relationships and trust was a key to learning. Figure 5.4 presented a diagram of an action research study, "ARS Cycle of Support," that demonstrated the significance of this conclusion.

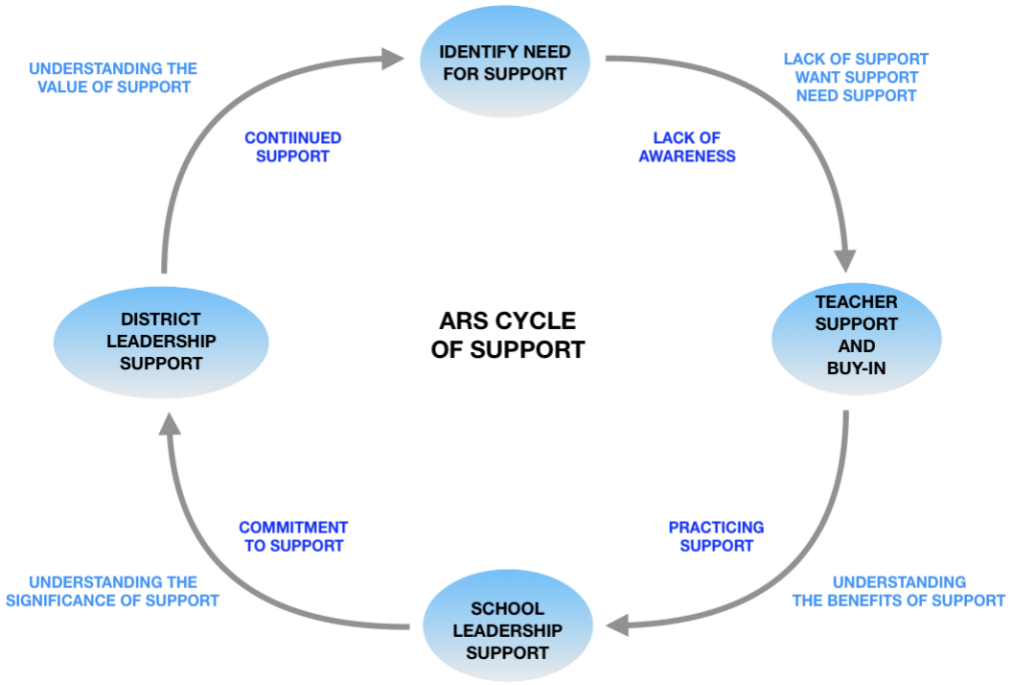


Figure 5.4

Measurable benefits: there was a need for educators to learn how to effectively measure and validate the benefits associated with building relationships and trust to complement academic learning outcomes, and to learn how to secure investment and support. Evidence from the study reflected that educators needed to learn how to measure the impact that building relationships had on learning. Every educator who took part in the action research study expressed a desire to connect and relate with peers and students for numerous perceived benefits. If it was true that there were numerous perceived benefits associated with the relation between connecting and learning what might be concluded? It seemed logical that if educators became committed and learned how to measure the impact of trust in their learning environments, alongside academic objectives for succeeding, that there would be an opportunity to intentionally invest in building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms to benefit students and teachers.

To fully practice relationship and trust building habits and behaviors, educators needed to learn how to integrate academic, social, and emotional learning objectives, standards, measurements, and outcomes. Can individual students achieve academic success without being connected on some relational level? In the competitive nature of the U.S. public school system for those who got the breaks and individual support from an advocate, the answer is yes. For those who did not receive support the answer is maybe. From the perspective of a principal in an upscale private high school, according to Jane (06.17.19) here is what educators were up against in order to secure that balance in measuring social, emotional, and academic learning.

> In my first year here we finalized our strategic plan, which included taking ownership over the welfare of self and others. This is intentional action, a great goal is in place, and we have a great plan. But we are challenged with shifting a culture of individualism and competition. This school community is very competitive serving high economic status kids with the latest of everything and we need to learn about niceness and kindness.

The implication was that this community of students would succeed in their individual endeavors without focusing on social and emotional learning. However, what Jane argued in her comments was that social and emotional learning adds value, and her school needed to work on better understanding how to factor that notion into the design and development of curriculum and instruction.

Study limitations. Numerous elements of this action research study required that significant considerations be made on how to design and conduct the study. Upon reflection the decisions made exposed my strengths and limitations as a researcher for the first time involved in a study of this caliber. The design of this action research study was one that could be improved upon in almost every area, and yet despite the limitations, it appeared the results of this study

produced findings that were relevant and meaningful, and had merit. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Limitations are external conditions that restrict or constrain the study's scope or may affect its outcome" (p. 13). From that disposition the following critical reflections discussed specific limitations that may have impacted the study. This disclosure presented a critical conclusion regarding the design and implementation of the study.

Personal Bias. The texts cited in this dissertation that discussed the elements of research and writing a dissertation, Bentz and Shapiro (1998); Bloomberg and Volpe (2019); Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008); Mills (2014); Repko (2008); and Yin (2018) are congruent in their understanding that while there were tips and suggestions that might apply, there were no steadfast templates for completing doctoral research, a research study, and a PhD dissertation. The understanding from scholars in the field consistently supported the notion that the research was a unique expression of the researcher, and that expression was a product of researcher positionality, ontology, and epistemological views and perspectives. Therefore this study was limited in some way by my personal view of relationships, how they impacted learning, and how they impacted the study findings.

Participant Relationships. Of the 23 study participants, 15 were colleagues and eight had no previous connection with the student researcher. It might be possible that the familiarity with more than half of the participants had an impact on certain elements of the research study. Most of the educators who participated in the study were excited to support a colleague, and while this connection most likely did not tarnish the results of the study, it is important to note. Through connections and familiarity with most of the educators, appealing to participants, scheduling time, and conducting the research and collection of data was relatively simple and precise. In this way the familiarity with more than half of the participants was extremely beneficial to

conducting a timely completion of the study. Most likely that was the greatest advantage associated with having an established relationship with participants. However, there was no guarantee that the study findings were not impacted by the relationships with colleagues.

Demographic Integrity. The study could have achieved greater balance in participant diversity. The mix of educator roles and responsibilities could have been more deliberate with equal numbers of participants from all grade levels. Additionally, there could have been more attention paid to race and gender balance, with only 13% of the participants identifying as a Person of Color, and no participants identifying as anything other than being heterosexual; missing an opportunity for more diverse perspectives.

Survey Shortcomings. A late decision in the design and implementation to conduct a post-interview survey and post-anecdote circle survey squandered an opportunity to conduct a pre-interview and pre-anecdote circle survey with participants to gauge their views prior to discussions about building relationships with students and peers. The opportunity to collect the views of educators ahead of time could have impacted the nature of any given educator's responses and therefore could have influenced their views and perspectives. Considering that the findings recorded educator awareness, interest, understanding, insights, approaches, and preferences when it came to the approach they took to build relationships, the interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and post discussion surveys might have produced alternative views if a pre-survey had been conducted.

Adequate Time. The timeframe for this research study was tight, and that was a reflection of the study design. In particular it might have been useful to extend the timing of the study to more thoroughly and consistently plan and collect data. It could have been beneficial to provide more time for vetting the interview and survey questions in additional critical friend field tests,

thus producing tighter and more relevant questions. It might also have been more effective to extend the timeframe for analysis and reporting. This might have allowed for a more meaningful review of the data, with time to allow insights and findings to emerge over a longer period of time in a deeper and more thorough investigation.

According to Mills (2014), action research reflects a specific effort and research efforts can evolve greatly. Mills explained that there were many possibilities for conducting and completing an action research study. With this in mind more comprehensive planning and more due diligence could have taken this study down many different paths, but in the final analysis the findings presented were relevant and meaningful, and they appeared to have merit and value.

From the research investigation dozens of relevant and meaningful approaches for building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms were noted, and each of them had merit. From what was learned, if educators took the time for a close examination of the art of building relationships and became aware of the benefits, they were one step away from support and investment. With support and investment a new level of relationship building opportunities emerged. Among them was the opportunity to measure the success of building relationships to demonstrate how it impacted student engagement and learning. It was concluded that every educator could find ways to connect with their students, and find ways to learn about what their students knew, what they needed, and what they wanted. According to Mills (2014) and I concurred, the greatest opportunity was to remember that, "The primary focus of all these efforts, however, regardless of the context, is on enhancing the lives of students" (p. 9).

Recommendations, Applications, and Practices

Recommendations were based on what was learned in this action research study, the meaning behind what was learned, the interpretations made, and the conclusions drawn. There

were four recommendations discussed in this section of the dissertation and a concluding statement offered a final reflection. The first three recommendations were envisioned by the possibility of partnering with a local school district to gradually increase interest, readiness, investment, and a commitment to intentionally build relationships and trust in schools and classrooms across the district. The first recommendation was to create an updated version of the action research study conducted to inform this dissertation, with a select group of educators in a *district-wide action research study*. A second recommendation was to conduct a *school-wide relationship building intervention* with a single school in the district. The third recommendation was to conduct a *district-wide relationship building intervention* with a team of educators in the district. A fourth and unrelated recommendation was to create a *pilot course for teachers in training*, for a university level licensing or certification program. Teachers in training would learn how to build relationships and trust as a cohort, and learn ways to build relationships and trust with colleagues, students, and families before ever entering the classroom.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) "Recommendations follow your findings and conclusions. They are the applications of those conclusions" (p. 112). In this final discussion there was an effort to consider recommendations that reflected the data collected in the action research study, the interpretations of that data, and the conclusions presented. Bloomberg and Volpe pointed out that, "The recommendations are the final stage of a logical thought process, providing your research findings a springboard for action" (p. 318). They asserted that recommendations could produce real change and impact the lives of others. The following recommendations were in line with what was considered in the design of the action research study, and they supported what was discovered from the study. The recommendations suggested provided an opportunity for a single school district to learn how to produce contextually

relational and sustainable mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors for schools and classrooms. With support, investment, and a commitment to intentionally build relationships and trust in schools and classrooms, educators would gradually increase their interest, awareness, and readiness to build relationships with colleagues, students, and families.

The idea to build relationships in schools and classrooms to address the troubling conditions in U.S. public schools, to mitigate student and teacher challenges, and to begin to reverse consequences was relevant. The idea had meaning and purpose, it was sustainable and contextual, and it did not discriminate. In order for the idea to grow it was necessary to identify relevant recommendations that would build on the research already conducted with teachers and school administrators further testing two hypotheses; that building relationships were relevant and sustainable, and that if given the opportunity and support all educators would embrace the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms.

The recommendations that followed provided an opportunity to demonstrate through a gradual progression that intentionally building relationships at the beginning of the school year in K-12 public schools and classrooms would increase support and encouragement, decrease early reading and learning struggles, and build trust, compassion, cooperation, and academic success for more students. According to Wheatley (2006). "We live in a society that believes it can define normal and then judge everything against this fictitious standard" (p. 100). Building relationships and trust between teachers and students could supplant the fictitious standards. The new norm for any given school or school district could be agreed upon habits and behaviors that every educational stakeholder with an interest would be held accountable to.

District-wide action research study. The purpose of this recommendation was to utilize what was learned in the action research study that informed this dissertation to further investigate how teachers and school administrators viewed the significance of intentionally building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms to enhance learning. The initial plan was to improve the study design and collection methods, and conduct research with a select group of educators from a local school district. The idea was to collect relevant feedback on the challenges, limitations, advantages, and benefits of connecting and relating with colleagues and students to confirm that relationships were a key to learning, and that with support and investment educators would be on board to intentionally build relationships in their schools and classrooms.

Design ideas involved conducting research with a diverse panel of teachers and administrators from elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in a local school district. The district-wide action research study included conducting a pre-interview survey, interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions, anecdote circle discussions, and a post-study survey to gather evidence. It involved collecting data from teachers, school administrators, and district administrators with district leadership support and encouragement. This study involved continuing to learn about how educators manage relationship and trust building practices in their schools and classrooms. Specifically, the focus was on learning about how relationships were managed between teachers and administrators, between teachers and students, and between students in the local district. Additionally, the study targeted understanding how local educators approached building connections and relationships with parents and caregivers, and the community at large.

School-wide relationship building intervention. In a workshop environment educators would learn about the benefits of building relationships at the beginning of the school year, every year, with the intent to build on the relationships throughout the school year. With teachers and school leadership working in tandem the necessary commitment, support, and investment would be in place to build relationships and learn how to measure the impact. A school-wide intervention would be co-designed in partnership with teachers, school administrators, and district administrators. In discussions, workshops, and projects educators would examine what it meant to intentionally invest in relationships. Through these means educators would learn how to identify relevant and sustainable relationship building mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors for their unique school community.

The intervention involved four distinct segments of training and professional development: learning how to build relationships and trust with colleagues, with students, between students, and with parents and caregivers in the community. The primary focus of each segment was to discover the culture, background, experience, gifts, talents, and skills of participants to learn about who they were, what they needed, what they wanted, and how they would contribute to the learning community. Teachers and school administrations would initially learn how to intentionally build relationships in their ranks. Subsequently, they would learn together how to identify ways to connect with students, and to encourage students to connect with one another. In addition, educators could expand their curriculum together to include the relational practices they agree upon, and produce relevant and meaningful instruction and outreach for their student population and families.

The design of a school-wide relationship building intervention involved conducting a program in a single school with teachers, school administrators, and district administrators. The intervention involved learning how to intentionally build relationships and trust between teachers and administrators, between teachers and students, and between students. It also involved learning how to build relationships with parents and families. One of the major findings from the action research study that informed this dissertation was that building relationships was a key to learning. A school-wide relationship building intervention had the potential to build on this finding and learn how to measure the impact it had on students, teachers, and administrators in a specific school. Additionally, the project had the potential to begin to develop sustainable and relational mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors for the classroom.

District-wide relationship building intervention. This recommendation was predicated on having support from individual teachers and administrators in the district to continue with the strategy to gradually commit to building relationships and trust at the beginning of the school year as a norm. The recommendation to conduct a district-wide intervention was also predicated on securing funding to build a team that would undertake a project of this size and scope. The design of a district-wide intervention would involve workshops and training with teachers and administrators across the board in schools and classrooms throughout a district, and involve learning how to intentionally build relationships with the larger school community. According to Jean (11.13.19), there are hints of this thinking in public education, "On a larger scale school-wide basis we focus on how we care, how we act, and how we treat one another. We call this STRONG: striving to be thoughtful, responsible, organized, neighborly, and generous." Jean claimed that this practice in individual classrooms reinforced that it worked in smaller communities hoping it would become the norm in the larger school community.

A district-wide intervention involved creating learning objectives, relational standards, sustainable curricula, and instruction that can be tested and measured. With success a project of this magnitude could impact education on a local level, state level, and national level. With success the work would establish the significance of understanding how to measure the realms of academic, emotional, and social learning to determine the success of student learning. The completion of a district-wide intervention would lead to understanding the benefits related to intentionally investing time, funding, and training resources; to enhance teaching and learning opportunities in schools and classrooms for teachers and students in a single school district.

Pilot course for teachers in training. The intent of this recommendation was to prepare new teachers through a relationship building practices course to learn how to develop and manage relationships with peers, students, and families. I contend that this would build confidence going into the classroom for the first time and provide a strategy for new teachers to cope with the demands of the job. The purpose of suggesting this recommendation was to present an opportunity for upcoming teachers to begin to understand the significance of building relationships and trust to help them manage the classroom and enhance student learning. Evidence from the action research study that informed this dissertation suggested that additionally, upcoming teachers would learn about the pitfalls of not building relationships and trust. The significance of learning about either experiencing the benefits or managing the chaos was captured by Carmela (04.10.19), a seasoned middle school teacher with a sharp understanding of how students learn, "When you have a relationship with people, with a student, and you understand them and know who they are, it is a whole lot easier to help them move forward."

The design of a pilot course would involve working with a local university that offers programs to earn various teaching licenses and endorsements. It would involve working with a teacher candidate cohort in a two-part course offered in back to back terms. Part one of a relationship building practices course would involve participating in interviews and surveys, to gauge the level of personal awareness and interest in building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms. Part one would also involve debating theoretical views on building relationships, and the study of 21st century approaches to education. A significant portion of the part one course would involve learning how to intentionally build relationships and trust between members of the teacher candidate cohort. Part two of the relationship building practices course would involve identifying, strategizing, and learning how to effectively build intentional relationships with students, between students, and with parents and caregivers.

The ideas for a course on building relationships provided an opportunity to test the notion, that a close examination of the benefits and value associated with building relationships would increase interest, awareness, and readiness for every teacher who had access to the information. With a deeper understanding and the confidence to build relationships entering the classroom for the first time, new teachers would be prepared to connect and relate. The opportunity to engage upcoming teachers with what it might take to build relationships with students and peers, before stepping into the classroom, could have a lasting impact on teacher practices. In the dissertation action research study there was evidence that some of the educators who participated in the study had a natural tendency to connect and relate with their students. There was also evidence that some of the educators lacked the intuition and ability to connect and relate. This course would partner teachers that had the natural tendency, skills, and abilities to connect and relate to students and peers, with teachers who did not have those instincts and

experiences. From this pilot course, a teacher candidate cohort would provide evidence of the level of teacher interest in connecting and relating, their awareness of the benefits of building relationships, and their readiness to embrace ways to build trust in their classroom.

Evidence from the dissertation action research study demonstrated that educators who participated in interviews and anecdote circle discussions were open and ready to discuss, discover, and engage in relevant and contextual dialogue about relationships and trust. The participants of the study unanimously expressed that relationships were a key to learning, but in the final analysis for most of them it was difficult to find the time to prioritize and practice in accordance with that mindset. The recommendations suggested to work with a single school district provided an opportunity for educators to learn how to practice the art of building relationships, in a project that provided time, funding, and training in a supportive environment.

There were four school administrators who participated in an action research study interview. Each of them was in a position to significantly influence their learning environment by connecting and relating with their staff, teachers, and students. They experienced that connecting and relating were keys to learning and had the influence to invest, prioritize, and support practices. Their stories in particular were impressive and hopeful. A closer examination revealed that their successes were about intention, investment, practices, habits, and behaviors, all transferable mindsets and skillsets to enhance student engagement and learning. The district-wide research study, interventions, and pilot course recommendations were significantly influenced by the action research study findings and conclusions, and elements of the findings were incorporated into the suggestions made.

Concluding Statement

I was grateful for the way earning a Ph.D. at Prescott College supported who I was as a human being in a complex world. I chose to study at Prescott College because of the relationships that developed in the application process with the directors of the program at the time, and I sincerely believed I stuck with the program because of the relationships that developed with faculty and cohort members. Additionally, there was little doubt that the successful completion of this dissertation was attributed to the relationships that developed with my committee members: Dr. Lynne McMahan, Dr. Emily Affolter, Dr. Dale Rooklyn, and Dr. Rick Medrick. Through healthy relationships I experienced continuous opportunities to thrive personally, in my career, and in my studies and research. It was somewhat unbelievable to me that I had an opportunity to integrate and weave what I learned about relationships in my life into a Ph.D. research study and completed dissertation.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) a concluding statement presented an opportunity "to offer your own thoughts on the experience of conducting the research and what it means to you" (p. 318). In a very significant way the completion of this research study and dissertation was a culmination of higher education studies over a decade focused on student struggles in public schools, and how it might be possible to minimize some of those struggles. The findings from the study were similar to the conclusions I arrived at after three decades of training, coaching, and teaching, and after a decade of research and study. The action research study verified what I concluded from an experiential and academic point of view, that seeing individual students for who they were presented an opportunity to enhance their engagement in studies, their ability to learn, and opportunities to be successful in life.

In my undergraduate studies and masters program I wrote about bringing student and teacher voices to the forefront of educational reform to influence teaching practices and shift the way students' learn. I learned that student and teacher voices were missing in the decisions to reform curriculum and instruction with a priority to drill, test, and grade. Student and teacher voices needed to be heard in opposition. In the doctoral program I learned that the planets voice was also missing and needed to be heard to enact educational change through sustainable mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors. Through the study of grounded sustainability education theories, I realized the significance of including the voices of the natural world to help shift public education trends and practices. What was learned in the completion of the action research study and dissertation was that the ability to embrace the voices of students, teachers, and the planet was increased significantly through relationships.

A key ingredient toward a positive shift in educational reform included understanding the needs of students, teachers, and the planet, and connecting through intentional interpersonal relationships to learn how to address those needs together. With trusting relationships established in schools and classrooms all subsequent learning and instruction had the opportunity to better engage students. Therefore, bringing all educational stakeholder voices, insights, and beliefs together in relationships and trust to create relevant curriculum and instruction grounded in theory and practice, seemed like a sound strategy for overcoming U.S. public school conditions, challenges, and consequences.

Appendices

Appendix 3.1 - Demographic Study Survey Questions

Please highlight, underline, or note in any way - your choice for each question. Add any comments for clarity to better answer the question posed, and thank you for completing this. Please save your changes to the doc as a PDF and email it back to me.

1. Educator (Retired - Active)
2.Teacher (PK - Elem - MS - HS - Higher Ed)
3. School Administrator (Superintendent - Principal - District or School Admin)

4. Years in Education (any capacity)
5. Years in Role (current)
3. Educational Background (higher ed)

7. Gender Identity and Pronoun (he - she - they)
8. Sexual Identity / orientation (optional)
9. Age (optional)

10. Race (Asian - Black - Caucasian - Indigenous - LatinX) *
11. Ethnicity (common ancestor - place of origin - physical attributes) *
12. Culture (social group - social norms - social behaviors - social learning) *

13. City & State - School and School District
14. Public / Charter / Private
15. Urban / Suburban / Rural

16. School Population
17. Classroom Population
18. Student Population Demographics

** Note - these are acceptable social constructs based on the research I conducted and the way that I interpreted the research. Please feel free to simply identify yourself with any word, label, or phrase that might define your race, ethnicity, and culture more accurately. I will use the data in my dissertation to discuss the significance of seeing every student in more unique ways than the socially constructed labels we tend to use in education and society.*

Appendix 3.2 - Action Research Study Protocols

Step One: Purpose & Design

1. What information do I want to gather and why? I want to learn about the role relationship building practices plays in schools and classrooms, and the impact it might have on student learning. I want to learn about the interest, importance, and significance teachers and administrators place on building relationships in their schools and classrooms.

2. Who do I want to reach? Teachers and school administrators

3. What will I do with the information? I will use the data I collect to inform my dissertation, and I will report on relationship and trust practices in schools and classrooms through relationship building mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors.

4. What is the guiding research question? How do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students?

5. Identify additional research questions! What are teachers and school administrators doing in their schools and classrooms to build relationships and trust specifically through curriculum, instruction, and/or informal means? What are teachers and school administrators doing in their schools and classrooms to measure the success of building relationships and trust through curriculum, instruction, and/or informal means? What are some of the practices, habits, behaviors, and potential relationship building attributes that are manifested in a school or classroom when a teacher or school administrator intentionally reaches out to connect, understand, and relate to a colleague or student?

6. Design Schedule & Timeline! Interviews, anecdote circles discussions, and a survey will be conducted over the summer of 2019 and during the fall 2019 term. The information will be transcribed, organized, coded, analyzed, and synthesized, and the results of the action research study will be reported on in my dissertation in the spring 2020 term.

Step Two: IRB Proposal & Consent
- Submit a Dissertation IRB Proposal Review Form and get approval
- Create an IRB Informed Consent and get approval

Step Three: Qualitative Questions
- Decide on appropriate number of questions
- Pay attention to sequence of questions
- Create open-ended questions
- Create conditional and plural questions
- Questions need to be reliable and verifiable

Step Four: Critical & Cognitive Connections
- Critical/cognitive discussions (pre interview and pre anecdote circle connections)
- Questions before proceeding with interview and anecdote circle discussions
- Discussion of interview and anecdote circle discussion process
- Discussion of interview, anecdote circle, and survey questions
- Questions vetted and approved (waiting approval)

Step Five: Recording / Note-taking
- Set up structure for recording
- Set up system for note-taking
- Participant preference (videoconference / phone / face-face)

Step Six: Outreach & Communication

- Identify teacher and school administrator participants
- Text or call potential participant to see if there is interest
- Send an introduction email with a short message to each participant
- Attach a brief overview of the project and researcher
- Follow up with each potential participant to schedule
- Send a consent email with a short message to each participant
- Attach an informed consent form questions

Step Seven: Interview / Anecdote Circle Call Sequence
- Technical (mute phone - turn off other devices - get on zoom early)
- Presence (be in a space free of distractions - be ready with all material
- Opening (thank you - exchange intros - cell if tech problems)
- Notification (one hour - interview / anecdote circle discussion)
- Choose a pseudonym (information collected will be credited to an alias)
- The role and value of questions and sub questions
- Collect demographic information before we begin
- Start recording NOW!

Step Eight: Responses & Analysis
- Organize and create a report on the demographic make-up of participants
- Transcription - carefully organize the recorded information
- Highlight / mindmap / categorize (code the raw data into like items)
- Look for patterns / repeating themes / tips / messages / stories

Step Nine: Results & Findings
- Analyze and synthesize the data (look for emergent themes)
- Produce a summary of findings
- Produce a relevant report

* Did the questions produce the information I was looking for?

Appendix 3.3 - Research Study Background Information

Research Study Story! This is a story about documented problems in our nations schools. Problems that can be addressed and mitigated through selected 21st century approaches to education that are influenced by relevant education for sustainability theories and practices. This is a story about the impact relationship building practices has on student learning, and a discussion about how building trust in schools and classrooms might hold a key to transcending the documented problems in our nations schools. This story is informed by personal experiences working with learners as a trainer, coach, and teacher; by ten consecutive years of higher education studies; by research conducted in a Sustainability Education PhD program; and by data collected in a doctorial dissertation action research study.

Research Study Problem! In large part due to income inequities, feckless reform, lacking resources, and an outdated system of education for the 21st century, public school students across the United States struggle academically, emotionally, and socially; especially students of color and students from low-income families. These struggles can lead to chronic absenteeism,

problems with reading, problems falling behind with schoolwork, the consequences of earning poor grades, issues when transitioning to a new school, and a sense of academic hopelessness. Eventually these struggles lead to students dropping out of high school early and the impact on society is significant.

Intent of the Dissertation! The intent of the doctorial dissertation and research is to shed light on an opportunity to positively impact public education in our nations schools. The primary focus is to shed light on certain disruptive conditions in our nations public schools, and the challenges they can create resulting in serious consequences for students and teachers. Additionally, the intent is to demonstrate that there are proven and effective approaches to education and learning that can help alleviate some of the challenges and consequences for students and teachers. The outcome desired is to learn if intentionally building relationships and trust between students, teachers, and school administrators has the potential to transcend the conditions, challenges, and consequences that students, teachers, and administrators face in their schools and classrooms.

Purpose of the Action Research Study! The purpose of the action research study is to explore the perceptions of a group of teachers and school administrators. The primary focus is to learn about educator views on building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. A secondary focus is to learn about educator awareness and practices, and their needs, desires, issues, and individual challenges associated with building relationships. The outcome desired is to understand if building relationships and trust in schools and classrooms might have a positive impact on student struggles, student interests, student learning, student retention, and student growth and development.

Research Study Questions! How do teachers and school administrators approach the idea of building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms with colleagues, with students, and between students? What are teachers and school administrators doing in their schools and classrooms to build relationships and trust specifically through curriculum, instruction, and/or informal means? What are teachers and school administrators doing in their schools and classrooms to measure the success of building relationships and trust through curriculum, instruction, and/or informal means? What are some of the practices, habits, behaviors, and potential relationship building attributes that are manifested in a school or classroom when a teacher or school administrator intentionally reaches out to connect, understand, and relate to a colleague or student?

Research Study Hypotheses! Building relationships and trust with students is relevant, meaningful, contextual, and sustainable, and demonstrates that it has an overwhelming positive impact on student engagement and learning! Building relationships and trust can create a safe learning environment that opens the door to implementing proven and effective 21st century approaches to learning! Teachers and school administrators would unanimously embrace the opportunity, if they were provided leadership support, an allotment of time, relevant training, and adequate resources to intentionally invest in relationship and trust building practices with colleagues and students.

Research Study Rationale and Significance! Theoretically and in practice, investing time at the beginning of every new school year to build relationships between students, teachers, and school administrators has the potential to create a level of trust in any learning environment. Trust can enhance learning and save time, and therefore makes investing the time at the beginning of the school year a practical decision. The significance of modeling relevant, meaningful, contextual, and sustainable relationship building practices in schools and classrooms could lead to reducing the likelihood of students being absent, falling behind with studies, and dropping out of school. In theory the practice could; open the door to additional sustainable education practices, help to reduce student struggles, enhance learning, and have a positive impact on society at large.

Student Researcher! Richard Presicci is a fourth year PhD candidate at Prescott College in Prescott, Arizona intended to graduate from the limited residency PhD program in Sustainability Education on May 8th, 2020. Richard earned a Bachelors Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from Marylhurst University with an emphasis on leadership, organizational accountability, and training. He earned a Masters Degree in Education from Portland State University with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction. Richard resides in Portland, Oregon to be close to his work, three children, daughter in-law, son in-law, and his first grandchild and new best friend.

Appendix 3.4 - Research Study Consent Form

Introduction: You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by a PhD student researcher (student). The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study you will be asked to sign this consent form.

What is the purpose of the research study? The purpose of this action research study is to explore the perceptions of teachers and school administrators to learn about their views on building relationships and trust in their schools and classrooms. Through a better understanding of teacher motivation, needs, issues, and challenges there is an opportunity to learn about the impact building relationships and trust in the classroom might have on student struggles and student learning.

Why are you being asked to participate? You are being asked to participate because you are a teacher or school administrator in a public, charter, or private school.

How many people will be asked to participate? There will be twenty-four participants including the student. Twenty-three educators will be asked to participate in interviews, anecdote circle discussions, and a survey.

What will happen during the study? The student will provide an invite email, research study background information, a consent email, this consent form, and the research study questions for participants to review prior to the interview. Subsequently the student will conduct discussions and then follow up with participants for clarity if necessary.

How long will I be in this study? A videoconference call for an interview or anecdote circle discussion is estimated to take 60 minutes. There is a potential for participants to be on the call beyond the 60 minutes if they so choose.

What will happen after the study? The information collected through this action research study will be organized and categorized to capture relevant data. The data will inform the students' PhD dissertation work and views on building relationships in schools and classrooms.

Will video or audio recordings be made during the study? All interviews and anecdote circle discussions will be recorded. If a participant prefers that conversations not be recorded, the student will take handwritten notes. In the transcription of the interview recording or notes, the student will credit comments to an alias and that alias will be reflected in the organized, analyzed, synthesized, and reported data.

The student will take every precaution so that participant identities will not be identifiable in any transcript. All data and audio or video recordings will be stored on a flash drive. The data and recordings will be destroyed six months after the students' dissertation is submitted for approval.

Will the information that is obtained from me be kept confidential? The information collected will be coded with an alias and only the student will know the true identity of each participant. All documentation - from recordings and transcripts to the organization of any data - will be coded under the alias to ensure confidentiality. If a participant has any concern with respect to confidentiality, the student would be more than willing to field questions and share relevant information and processes.

When an interview or anecdote circle discussion is completed, the involvement by the teacher or school administrator will also be completed. If for some reason a participant requests that the student not use their data from the interview, the student will honor that request given the timeframe of the notice.

Are there any risks to me? Not likely!

Are there any benefits to me? Possibly!

Will there be any costs to me? None!

Will the student be paid to participate in the study? No!

Your Signature: By signing this form, I affirm that I have read the information contained in the form, that the study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered, and that I agree to take part in this study. I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this form.

_____

Participants Name (Signature)

_____

Date Signed

Statement by persons obtaining consent: I certify that I have explained the research study to the person who has agreed to participate, and that he, she, or they has been informed of the purpose, the procedures, the possible risks, and potential benefits associated with participation in this study. Any questions raised have been answered to the participant's satisfaction.

Richard Presicci
Name of Student Researcher (Printed Signature)
Date Signed

Appendix 3.5 - Research Study Interview Questions

Question One: Could you please explore the role that relationship-building practices has on your approach to teaching?

Question Two: Describe the training you have had, if any, related to developing interpersonal communication with other teachers and administrators?

Question Three: Please share some of the approaches you have personally made to connect with students in your school and/or classroom?

Question Four: What are some of the approaches you have personally made, on your own or in conjunction with other teachers and administrators, to connect students with one another?

Question Five: In what ways do you measure the success and significance of your approaches to building relationships and trust in your learning environment?

Question Six: Can you please share your view, for or against, the idea of making an investment in time, resources, and training to learn how to intentionally build relationships and trust in your school and classrooms at the beginning of a school year, with an additional intent to sustain that investment throughout the school year?

Appendix 3.6 - Anecdote Circle Guidelines

The following quote from deChambeau & Ramlo (2017) can help researchers and research participants to prepare and set expectations for an anecdote circle discussion. The quote is exact but spacing was provided to separate key points and numbers were added - no wording was changed.

The discussion plan and questions for this anecdote circle discussion were informed by this view. We will briefly discuss these guidelines at the beginning of the anecdote circle discussion.

[1] "Anecdote circles are lightly moderated group discussions intended to elicit examples of lived experiences. Anecdote circles differ from focus groups in that they are not intended to answer a specific question or test a hypothesis.

[2] Additionally, this method is not used to gather participants' thoughts and feelings. Instead, anecdote circles allow exploration of themes loosely directed through the use of question prompts delivered by a facilitator.

[3] As described by O'Toole and colleagues (2008), "anecdote circles can usefully act as a way to capture representational stories about an organisation [sic], and act as a vehicle for the design of intervention strategies for beneficial organisational [sic] change" (pp. 28–29).

[4] Anecdotes rather than complete stories are encouraged, as they are specific examples of lived or observed behaviors or situations. Prompting a participant for an anecdote rather than a story helps keep the examples short and to the point. Participants, if asked to provide a story, may feel the need to provide a carefully crafted narrative with a beginning, middle, and end.

[5] While they are not structured to answer a specific question or test a hypothesis, anecdote circles do have a particular direction that is determined by the themes the study is intended to explore" (p. 5).

deChambeau, A., L. & Ramlo, S., E. (2017). STEM High School Teachers' Views of Implementing PBL: An Investigation Using Anecdote Circles. Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning, 11(1). Available at: https://doi.org/10.7771/1541-5015.1566

O'Toole, P., Talbot, S., & Fidock, J. (2008). Anecdotally speaking: Using stories to generate organisational change. Qualitative Research Journal, 8(2), 28–42. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0802028

Appendix 3.7 - Anecdote Circle Plan and Prompt

Guidelines / Roles / Prompt - 6 min
- Introductions and connections
- Brief look at an anecdote circle guideline handout
- Role of each participant (storyteller & listener)
- Nature of the prompt (attract attributes, habits, behaviors)

Step One - Three Participants - 3 min
- *Three minutes* to think about and recollect a time...
* See *Prompt*

Step Two - One Storyteller / Two Listeners - 15 min
- *Five minutes* for each participant to share a story
- Listeners take notes - no interruptions or comments please

Step Three - One Storyteller / Two Listeners - 15 min
- *Five minutes* to clarify the story (Q&A)
- Together get a better understanding of the experience

Step Four - Three Participants - 15 min
- *Fifteen minutes* to debrief
- What happened in the story to create a positive impact?
- What concrete steps were taken that can be taken again?
- Identify relationship and trust attributes, habits, and behaviors!
- What did you learn as a storyteller and listener?

** Prompt*
When have you experienced a positive turn of events because you personally and intentionally went out of your way to connect or relate to a teacher, an administrator, a student, or a parent - in your school or classroom?

Appendix 3.8 - Research Study Survey Guidelines and Questions

Thank you for participating in this post-interview survey. You participated in a research study interview previously with the student researcher conducting this survey. This survey is an extension of that interview study designed to collect more specific data that provides insights toward relevant and sustainable relationship and trust mindsets, practices, habits, and behaviors.

Survey Directions

There are three guiding questions listed below, numbered A-C. They inform three follow-up sets of questions asking you to rate how likely you are to support a particular investment.

1. Please respond to the follow-up questions by rating them from one to five.
2. One is very unlikely - Two is unlikely -Three is unsure - Four is likely - Five is vey likely.
3. Please **bold and underline** your choice for each of the 12 questions.
4. Please make comments at the end of the survey if you like.
5. Please save the completed survey as a PDF and email it back to me.

Survey Guidelines

Your school and/or school district leadership folks have agreed to provide allotted time, funding, training, and resources to support teachers and school administrators in learning how to intentionally build relationships and trust in your school and classrooms. Hypothetically, you are being asked to provide feedback to inform the way teachers and administrators in your school might go about learning together and prioritizing; how to intentionally build relationships and trust in your school and classrooms.

Survey Questions

Question A - What is the likelihood you would support an investment in ***Time*****?**

1. At the beginning of the school year to learn about and develop relevant and sustainable relationship and trust building **mindsets and values**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

2. At the beginning of the school year to learn about and develop relevant and sustainable relationship and trust building **practices and standards**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

3. During the school year to learn about and develop relevant and measurable relationship and trust building **habits and behaviors**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

4. During the school year to learn about and develop relevant and measurable relationship and trust building **attributes for the classroom**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

Question B - What is the likelihood you would support an investment in ***Funding*****?**

5. For **professional development** time devoted to building relationships and trust
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

6. For school **district leadership** support training devoted to long-term practices
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

7. For individual **school leadership** support training devoted to long-term practices
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

8. For teacher **mentoring programs** to help sustain support and practices
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

Question C - What is the likelihood you would support an investment in ***Training*****?**

9. About how to intentionally build relationships & trust **with other educators**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

10. About how to intentionally build relationships & trust **with students**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

11. About how to intentionally build relationships & trust **between students**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

12. About how to intentionally build relationships & trust **with parents or caregivers**
Very Unlikely (1) - Unlikely (2) - Unsure (3) - Likely (4) - Very Likely (5)

Comments welcomed and thank you for the work you do!

Appendix 4.1 - Major Finding One Data Sheet

Major finding one - key to learning: trusting relationships are a key to enhanced learning

Interviews	Importance	Learning	Community	Communication
Hazen	1 Comment	0 Comments	2 Comments	1 Comment
Pamela	2 Comments	6 Comments	1 Comment	2 Comments

Phoebe	2 Comments	0 Comments	0 Comments	4 Comments
Todd	4 Comments	5 Comments	0 Comments	1 Comment
Carmela	2 Comments	3 Comments	1 Comment	0 Comments
Steve	1 Comments	3 Comments	2 Comments	0 Comments
Bill	0 Comments	0 Comments	0 Comments	0 Comments
Vicky	1 Comments	1 Comments	0 Comments	1 Comment
Teach	8 Comments	0 Comments	3 Comments	1 Comment
Amy	0 Comments	0 Comments	0 Comments	0 Comments
Sinola	0 Comments	1 Comment	0 Comments	0 Comments
Jane	2 Comments	0 Comments	3 Comments	0 Comments
Jill	3 Comments	1 Comment	1 Comment	2 Comments
Joe	3 Comments	1 Comment	2 Comments	0 Comments
Dee	2 Comments	1 Comment	6 Comments	2 Comments
Joan	3 Comments	2 Comments	1 Comment	2 Comments
Jean	3 Comments	1 Comment	1 Comment	0 Comments

Anecdote Circles	**Comments**
Joan	No Comments
Storyteller One	Comments
Storyteller Two	Comments
Storyteller Three	No Comments
Hazen	No Comments
Todd	No Comments
Vicky	Comments
Storyteller Four	Comments
Storyteller Five	Comments
Storyteller Six	Comments

Appendix 4.2 - Major Finding Two Data Sheet

Major finding two - individual teacher impact: individual teachers have the capacity to produce relevant and meaningful learning opportunities through relationships and trust

Interviews	**Intentional Practice**	**Natural Tendency**
Hazen	No Comments	No Comments
Pamela	5 Comments	4 Comments
Phoebe	No Comments	5 Comments
Todd	1 Comment	2 Comments
Carmela	12 Comments	12 Comments
Steve	5 Comments	8 Comments
Bill	No Comments	1 Comment
Vicky	10 Comments	2 Comment
Teach	9 Comments	2 Comments
Amy	3 Comments	3 Comments
Sinola	6 Comments	4 Comments
Jane	3 Comments	6 Comments

Jill	3 Comments	7 Comments
Joe	3 Comments	4 Comments
Dee	7 Comments	7 Comments
Joan	5 Comments	7 Comments
Jean	8 Comments	3 Comments

Anecdote Circles	**Comments**
Joan	Comments
Storyteller One	Comments
Storyteller Two	Comments
Storyteller Three	Comments
Hazen	No Comments
Todd	No Comments
Vicky	Comments
Storyteller Four	Comments
Storyteller Five	Comments
Storyteller Six	Comments

Appendix 4.3 - Major Finding Three Data Sheet

Major finding three - willingness to invest: educators are willing to intentionally invest in learning more about building relationships and trust

Interviews	**Survey Response Submitted**	**TTL AVG - 12 QUES**
Hazen	Y	80%
Pamela	N	---
Phoebe	N	---
Todd	Y	97%
Carmela	Y	93%
Steve	N	---
Bill	N	---
Vicky	Y	93%
Teach	Y	100%
Amy	N	---
Sinola	Y	73%
Jane	N	---
Jill	Y	93%
Joe	N	---
Dee	Y	97%
Joan	Y	95%
Jean	Y	70%

Anecdote Circles	**Survey Response Submitted**	**TTL AVG - 12 QUES**
Storyteller One	N	---
Storyteller Two	Y	97%
Storyteller Three	Y	92%

Storyteller Four	Y	95%
Storyteller Five	Y	80%
Storyteller Six	Y	100%

Appendix 4.4 - Major Finding Four Data Sheet

Major finding four - role of support: educators need and want support from their schools and school districts to build relationships with students and their peers

Interviews	Get / Lack Support	Want / Need Support
Hazen	0 / 3 Comments	7 / 6 Comments
Pamela	11 / 3 Comments	0 / 1 Comments
Phoebe	5 / 2 Comments	0 / 2 Comments
Todd	4 / 3 Comments	4 / 4 Comments
Carmela	7 / 1 Comments	3 / 2 Comments
Steve	4 / 0 Comments	2 / 0 Comments
Bill	0 / 1 Comments	4 / 1 Comments
Vicky	5 / 2 Comments	1 / 0 Comments
Teach	9 / 1 Comments	0 / 1 Comments
Amy	2 / 3 Comments	6 / 5 Comments
Sinola	14 / 0 Comments	3 / 1 Comments
Jane	4 / 0 Comments	4 / 0 Comments
Jill	5 / 1 Comments	0 / 1 Comments
Joe	1 / 0 Comments	3 / 2 Comments
Dee	17 / 0 Comments	0 / 0 Comments
Joan	3 / 1 Comments	2 / 0 Comments
Jean	4 / 0 Comments	1 / 0 Comments

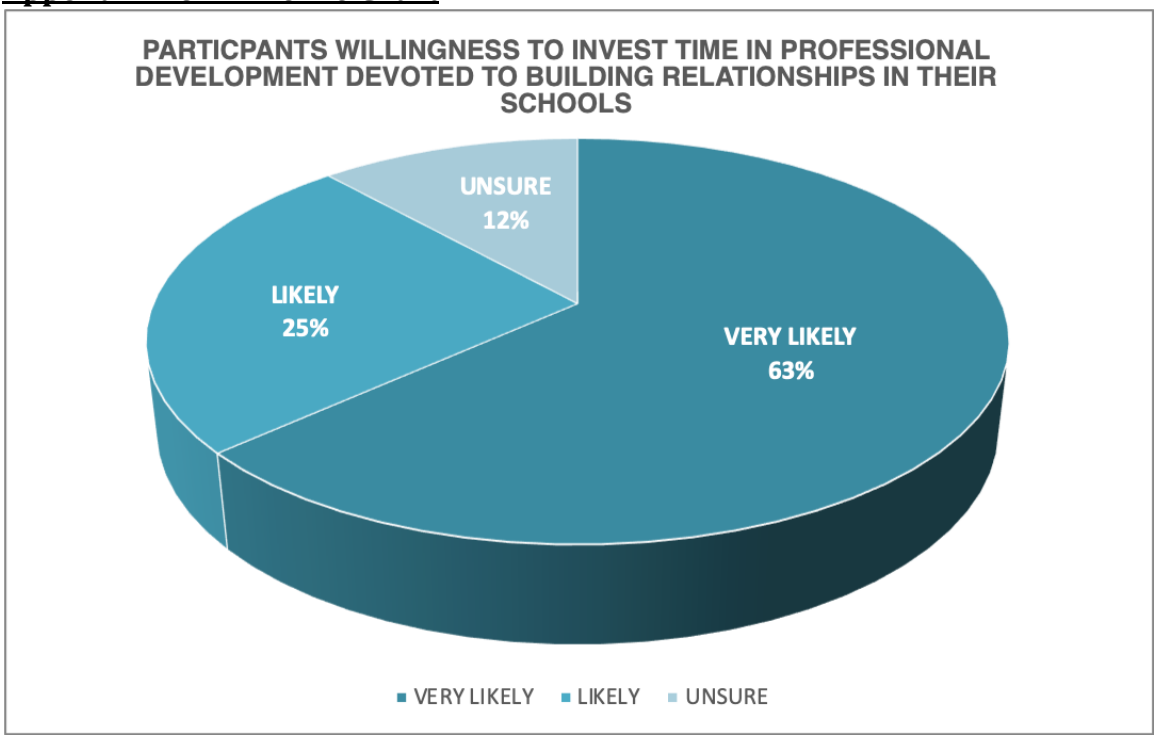
Appendix 4.5 - Major Finding Five Data Sheet

Major finding five - measuring the impact: educators are interested in learning how to measure the positive impact social and emotional learning has on student growth and development

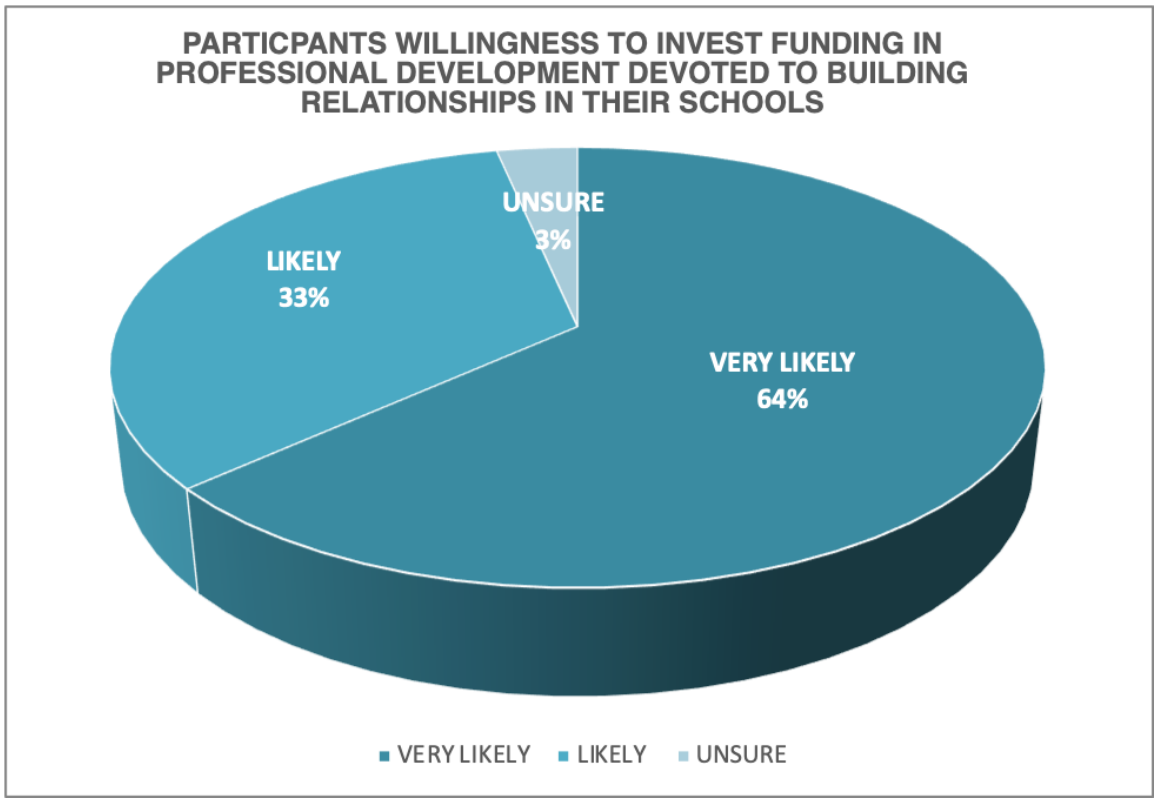
Interviews	Measurement	Systems / Time
Hazen	---	---
Pamela	---	7 Comments
Phoebe	---	---
Todd	1 Comment	5 Comments
Carmela	2 Comments	2 Comments
Steve	---	1 Comment
Bill	---	---
Vicky	3 Comments	---
Teach	3 Comments	---
Amy	---	---
Sinola	1 Comment	---

Jane	2 Comments	---
Jill	4 Comments	1 Comment
Joe	1 Comment	---
Dee	1 Comment	5 Comments
Joan	3 Comments	2 Comments
Jean	---	1 Comment

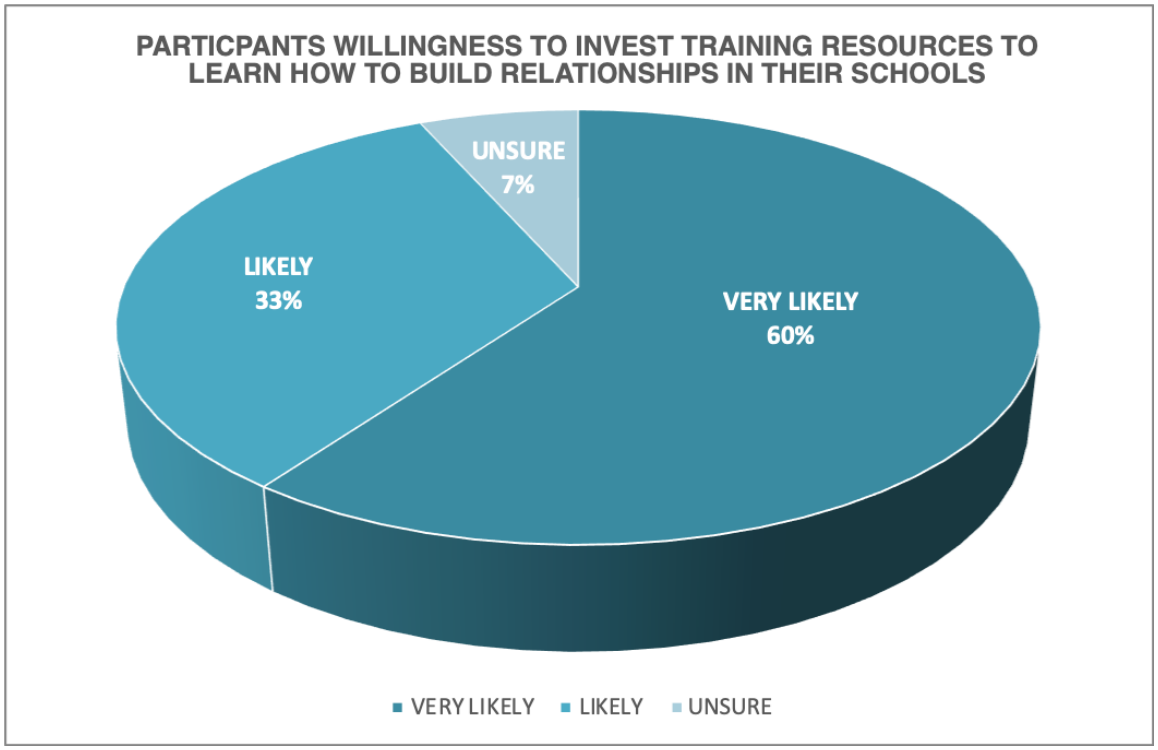
Appendix 4.6 - Time Pie Chart



Appendix 4.7 - Funding Pie Chart



Appendix 4.8 - Training Pie Chart



Appendix 4.9 - Research Study Survey Data Sheet

ALIAS	#	QUESTION	1-> 5	ANSWER
Carmela	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Carmela	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Carmela	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Carmela	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Carmela	5	Funding - Professional Development	4	Likely
Carmela	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Carmela	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Carmela	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Carmela	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Carmela	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Carmela	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Carmela	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely
Dee	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Dee	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Dee	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Dee	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Dee	5	Funding - Professional Development	4	Likely
Dee	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Dee	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Dee	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Dee	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Dee	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Dee	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Dee	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	5	Very Likely
Hazen	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Hazen	2	Time - Practices and Standards	4	Likely
Hazen	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	3	Unsure
Hazen	4	Time - Attributes	3	Unsure
Hazen	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Hazen	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Hazen	7	Funding - School Leadership	4	Likely
Hazen	8	Funding - Mentor Program	4	Likely
Hazen	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Hazen	10	Training - With Students	4	Likely
Hazen	11	Training - Between Students	4	Likely
Hazen	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely

Jean	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	4	Likely
Jean	2	Time - Practices and Standards	4	Likely
Jean	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	3	Unsure
Jean	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Jean	5	Funding - Professional Development	4	Likely
Jean	6	Funding - District Leadership	3	Unsure
Jean	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Jean	8	Funding - Mentor Program	3	Unsure
Jean	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Jean	10	Training - With Students	2	Unlikely
Jean	11	Training - Between Students	3	Unsure
Jean	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	3	Unsure
Jill	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Jill	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Jill	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	4	Likely
Jill	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Jill	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Jill	6	Funding - District Leadership	5	Very Likely
Jill	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Jill	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Jill	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Jill	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Jill	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Jill	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely
Joan	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Joan	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Joan	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	3	Unsure
Joan	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Joan	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Joan	6	Funding - District Leadership	5	Very Likely
Joan	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Joan	8	Funding - Mentor Program	4	Likely
Joan	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Joan	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Joan	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Joan	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	5	Very Likely
Sinola	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	1	Very Unlikely
Sinola	2	Time - Practices and Standards	1	Very Unlikely
Sinola	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	1	Very Unlikely

Sinola	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Sinola	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Sinola	6	Funding - District Leadership	5	Very Likely
Sinola	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Sinola	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Sinola	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Sinola	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Sinola	11	Training - Between Students	4	Likely
Sinola	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely
Storyteller 2	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Storyteller 2	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	8	Funding - Mentor Program	4	Likely
Storyteller 2	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 2	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	4	Likely
Storyteller 3	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Storyteller 3	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Storyteller 3	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Storyteller 3	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 3	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely
Storyteller 4	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	5	Funding - Professional Development	4	Likely
Storyteller 4	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely

Storyteller 4	7	Funding - School Leadership	4	Likely
Storyteller 4	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 4	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 5	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	2	Time - Practices and Standards	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	5	Funding - Professional Development	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	7	Funding - School Leadership	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	8	Funding - Mentor Program	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	9	Training - With Other Educators	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	10	Training - With Students	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	11	Training - Between Students	4	Likely
Storyteller 5	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely
Storyteller 6	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	6	Funding - District Leadership	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Storyteller 6	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	5	Very Likely
Teach	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Teach	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Teach	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Teach	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Teach	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Teach	6	Funding - District Leadership	5	Very Likely
Teach	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Teach	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Teach	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely

Teach	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Teach	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Teach	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	5	Very Likely
Todd	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Todd	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Todd	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Todd	4	Time - Attributes	5	Very Likely
Todd	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Todd	6	Funding - District Leadership	5	Very Likely
Todd	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Todd	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Todd	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Todd	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Todd	11	Training - Between Students	5	Very Likely
Todd	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	3	Unsure
Vicky	1	Time - Mindsets and Values	5	Very Likely
Vicky	2	Time - Practices and Standards	5	Very Likely
Vicky	3	Time - Habits and Behaviors	5	Very Likely
Vicky	4	Time - Attributes	4	Likely
Vicky	5	Funding - Professional Development	5	Very Likely
Vicky	6	Funding - District Leadership	4	Likely
Vicky	7	Funding - School Leadership	5	Very Likely
Vicky	8	Funding - Mentor Program	5	Very Likely
Vicky	9	Training - With Other Educators	5	Very Likely
Vicky	10	Training - With Students	5	Very Likely
Vicky	11	Training - Between Students	4	Likely
Vicky	12	Training - With Parents and Caregivers	4	Likely

Appendix 4.10 - Demographic Survey Data Sheet

ALIAS	ROLE	GRADES	YRS IN ED	GENDER	RACE	SCHOOL	LOCATION
Hazen	Teacher	High School	31	Male	Caucasian	Public	Rural
Pamela	Administrator	K-12	30	Female	Caucasian	Public	Suburban
Phoebe	Teacher	High School	3	Female	Caucasian	Public	Urban
Todd	Teacher	Elementary	20	Male	Caucasian	Charter	Rural
Carmela	Teacher	Middle School	16	Female	Caucasian	Charter	Suburban
Steve	Teacher	High School	18	Male	Person of Color	Charter	Urban
Bill	Teacher	Higher Education	8	Male	Caucasian	Public	Rural
Vicky	Teacher	Preschool	8	Female	Person of Color	Private	Urban

Teach	Administrator	Pre-Middle School	25	Female	Caucasian	Private	Suburban
Amy	Administrator	Higher Education	8	Female	Caucasian	Private	Suburban
Sinola	Teacher	High School	20	Female	Caucasian	Public	Suburban
Jane	Administrator	Elementary	12	Female	Caucasian	Private	Urban
Jill	Teacher	High School	2	Female	Caucasian	Public	Urban
Joe	Teacher	High School	25	Male	Caucasian	Public	Urban
Dee	Administrator	Elementary	21	Female	Caucasian	Public	Suburban
Joan	Administrator	K-12	13	Female	Caucasian	Public	Suburban
Jean	Teacher	High School	13	Female	Person of Color	Public	Suburban
Storyteller 1	Teacher	Elementary	2	Male	Caucasian	Private	Rural
Storyteller 2	Teacher	Higher Education	31	Female	Caucasian	Private	Suburban
Storyteller 3	Teacher	Elementary	1	Female	Caucasian	Charter	Rural
Storyteller 4	Teacher	Preschool	15	Female	Caucasian	Private	Suburban
Storyteller 5	Teacher	Preschool	4	Female	Caucasian	Private	Suburban
Storyteller 6	Teacher	Preschool	12	Female	Caucasian	Private	Suburban