Leadership For Student Engagement

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LEADERSHIP FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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Kennesaw State University

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

The work presented here is dedicated to my loving, dedicated, and supportive family, who shared in many memorable years of my teaching and educational leadership career. My father, mother, husband, and sister are the reason why I was able to stay persistent and provided me the impetus to grow and go farther never wavering in their support of my academic and professional goals. I thank my family for instilling in me the drive to push towards my dreams and endeavors. Their confidence in me has given me the courage, perseverance, and strength to pursue my doctoral degree.

“The path from dreams to success does exist. May you have the vision to find it, the courage to get on to it, and the perseverance to follow it.”

~Kalpana Chawla
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This dissertation has been a process which has taken years to complete. It began with a dream of attaining my doctoral degree and progressed to pursuing how to advance teacher capacity impacting student engagement and learning. Although only one name appears on this study, it would not have been obtainable without the ongoing support and assistance of many who believed in me. For that I give thanks to all who have encouraged, sacrificed, and assisted in my success of this research project.

I am most grateful to a number of people whose assistance and support have helped me through the entire doctoral journey. To my husband, Patrick Cooper, for his unwavering support, patience, and understanding of the sacrifices of our “together time” during this extensive process. My heartfelt appreciation goes to my dearest friend, Elizabeth Mavity, who has been my reader and re-reader, reviser, cheerleader, and the one person who has pushed me to persevere more than any other during this lengthy process. To my friend and colleague, Dr. Donna Taylor, who inspired me to begin this dream and coached me through the many phases, always there to lend her expert advice and support. Thank you to the teacher and principal participants of this case study for their generosity in sharing their professional perceptions and classroom observations. A sincere thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Ugena Whitlock for her leadership and guidance during this research study and to the other two members of my committee, Dr. Sheryl Croft and Dr. Chinasa Elue, thank you for your input, advice, and expertise. To the Educational Leadership Department staff of Kennesaw State University, my colleagues, friends, and family, thank you for your thoughtful insights and confidence in me which helped with my resilience through this dissertation journey.
ABSTRACT

There is a need for educational leaders to improve student engagement in the intermediate classrooms in elementary schools. Student engagement has mainly focused upon increasing student participation and students being compliant in completing classwork. Research over the last two decades has examined how without active student engagement, cognitive student learning will suffer. The years of research have identified several causes for why students are not engaged, including low motivation, a decrease in positive attitude towards school, and high dropout rates. If educational leaders are going to make strides to improve these issues then they must dive into the depths of what will increase engaged learning in the elementary grades, develop critical thinkers and problem solvers, and prepare students who are ready for the working world as collaborative humans who can work well with one another. Therefore, educational leaders must look closely at the ways we are engaging our students in the classroom to ensure they are not just passive listeners, but actively engaged in their learning. This qualitative case-study looks at the leadership characteristics, teacher self-efficacy, instructional practices, and engagement factors contributing to increased student engagement. The action research case study includes seven teachers in fourth and fifth grades and two school leaders. Three data sources used to triangulate the information included interviews, classroom observations, and teacher self-efficacy questionnaires. The results from this study are discussed in detail and an explicit action plan has been formulated including on-going job embedded professional development to increase student engagement within the elementary school.

Keywords: student engagement, active learning, student-centered learning, instructional practices, leadership characteristics, transformational leadership, professional development
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Helms, Turckes, and Hinton (2010) state that the primary goal of a school leader is to increase student achievement, and that the 21st century leader is far more complex than the days of overseeing operations of a small, one-room school house. As the role of school leaders shifts, Hallinger (2003) reports the refinement of educational leadership as an integrated model known as “Transformational Leadership” that combines advanced leadership practices and building teacher capacity. It is the school leader who, by the nature of his or her role, perhaps has the greatest influence upon teacher efficacy and instructional practices within the school, where students exhibit active growth and engagement, leading to academic success (Fredricks et al., 2011; Jones, 2009).

It is the school principal who sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become…if the school is a vibrant, innovative, child-centered place, if it has a reputation for excellence in teaching, if students are performing to the best of their ability, one can almost always point to the principal’s leadership as the key to the success. (U. S. Congress, 1970, p. 56)

Only a miniscule amount of research explores, either exclusively or as a portion of a larger analysis, the influence of the educational leader on teacher efficacy (Hoy & Tarter, 2011; Pajares, 1996, Pearce, 2017; Tschanne-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 2001) or the impact of a school leader on teacher efficacy related to student engagement at the elementary level (Scott, Hirn & Alter, 2014; Finn & Voekl, 1993; Hart, Stewart & Jimerson, 2011). Hence, educational leadership and its impact on teacher self-efficacy related to student engagement have been thoroughly examined within this qualitative study. Educational leaders today are responsible for
articulating a clear vision, being an instructional leader, empowering staff, and increasing student achievement; consequently, an educational leader’s role makes a paradigm shift (Marazano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005). Through this qualitative study, the researcher examined leadership practices impacting teacher efficacy and student engagement.

McGuigan and Hoy (2006) theorized that the ability to acquire and cultivate effective teachers is a prerequisite for the school leader. Therefore, principals representing low and high performing school districts must be cognizant of which leadership practices help teachers believe that they can and will make a difference with their instructional practices. Over the last two decades, transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most prevalent approaches to school leadership for enhancing teacher efficacy and inspiring teachers to challenge their levels of thinking while empowering them as active participants in decision-making (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Central tenets of transformational leadership embody leadership as a collective effort, where vision is clear, and trust, collaboration, and motivation create meaningful and relevant work (Bass, 1985; Bono & Dziewczynski, 2006; Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). With a growing body of evidence, transformational leadership is at the forefront of leadership styles by concentrating efforts on mentoring as well as emphasizing goals, teacher capacity, and student achievement (Bono & Dziewczynski, 2006; Lim & Ployhart, 2004; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Recognizing teacher capacity and students’ academic growth should be the focal point of school leadership; hence, the transformational leader is charged with monitoring and improving teacher pedagogy.

The Commission on No Child Left Behind (2007) claims that teacher quality is the key characteristic influencing student achievement. In this light, educational leaders are bound to build teacher capacity through the growth of teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is a vital element of overall academic effectiveness, and Tschannen-Moran et al. (2001) declare that over the last
two decades and beyond, empirical data has accrued regarding the positive relationship teacher efficacy has on student motivation, engagement, and achievement.

With teacher efficacy being interlinked to student outcomes such as student engagement, motivation, and achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992), Eccles (1989) asserts that school leaders must be progressive in creating an action plan to assess teacher efficacy and implement job-embedded professional learning reflecting the teachers’ specific voids of efficacy. Often, teacher efficacy is not addressed intentionally through professional development, and can be detrimental to the effectiveness of the teacher (Eccles, 1989). Confident teachers ensure that there are clear and attainable expectations and that they teach necessary strategies for students to be academically successful (Alderman, 1990).

By being prepared and organized, yet flexible enough to adapt to the changing demands of the learner, efficacious educators create learning environments that are valuable and relevant to the instructional needs of all learners (Allinder, 1994). Bandura (1977) defines efficacy as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome” (p. 193), and Pajares (1996) suggests that teacher efficacy is a context-specific construct, meaning that a human who has a strong self-concept can still have a shortfall with reference to sense of efficacy as an educator. Teachers who feel a low sense of self-efficacy when preparing and planning for instruction may influence their confidence in how well they can execute, which can impact student achievement in the classroom (Protheroe, 2008).

While a seemingly simple goal of educational leaders is to have effective and confident teachers, increasing student achievement is further correlated to complex concepts such as student engagement (Scott et al., 2014). Historically, research on student engagement has predominantly focused upon its impact on increasing student achievement, good behavior, and the importance of building relationships with students so they remain in school (Appleton,
Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Hart et al., 2011; Fredricks et al., 2011). Further research over
the last two plus decades reveals that student achievement will suffer without student
engagement (Appleton et al., 2008; Chapman, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2011; Lam et al., 2014;
Scott et al., 2014). It is necessary for school leaders and teachers to be cognizant of engagement
strategies that promote collaboration with others.

According to Fredricks et al. (2011), schools need to prepare students an ever-changing
world by providing them with 21st century skills such as proficiency in problem solving, critical
thinking, communication, and collaboration. Franklin D. Roosevelt stated it best by saying,
“We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future”
(Goodreads, 2017). The skills needed are addressed effectively within classrooms where
students are actively engaged and involved in relevant educational activities (Fredricks et al.,
2011; Jones, 2009). Ferlazzo attests, “Engagement is not about baiting a hook. It’s about
helping students find their spark and make their own fire” (p. 28). Educators must be persistent
despite challenges and obstacles when engaging students for high levels of learning.

School leaders and teachers must collaborate closely to monitor student engagement to
ensure that students are not just passively listening to lectures, but are engaged and actively
involved in reasoning, discussing, thinking critically, solving relevant real-world problems,
creating, and working with others (Hargreaves, 2004). This level of learning has the added
advantage of increasing students’ aptitude for learning in all areas. “Pedagogy should, at its best,
be about what teachers do that not only helps students to learn, but actively strengthens their
capacity to learn” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 34). School leaders must have a sense of urgency to
ensure that students are actively engaged so that they can extrapolate information and reach high
levels of achievement and capacity to learn.
Paradoxically, the need to demonstrate an increase in student achievement through performance on high-stakes assessments often becomes a barrier for student engagement and deep levels of learning (Smith & Szymanski, 2013). Due to the stress placed on principals, students, and teachers to perform well on such assessments, active student engagement is not always present in classrooms on a daily basis, even when teachers know it is needed. What happens instead is a widespread tendency to teach using methods that foster lower levels of learning, such as rote memorization and recall (Smith & Szymanski, 2013). In other words, when attempting to teach a large amount of information to students with a diverse range of background knowledge and understanding, educators often default to presenting information for recall so that it can be regurgitated in the classroom and on high-stakes tests. Smith and Szymanski (2013) explain the goal too often becomes demonstrating growth in achievements on testing day, rather than on developing a deep and lasting understanding, thus improving capacity for learning. While the aim of classrooms should be to draw students into learning through relevant and rigorous activities which promote active learning over passive absorption of information, the opposite too often occurs. When test scores are the priority of schools rather than depth of learning, student knowledge and actual achievement levels suffer.

More recently, research on student engagement has been built around the hopeful goal of enhancing all students’ abilities to learn how to learn and to become lifelong learners in a knowledge-based society (Gilbert, 2007). Within this newer research, the concept of student engagement has come to be viewed as both a designed process for learning and an accountability-based outcome unto itself. This recent body of research stresses a need for teachers and educational leaders to shift their focus from demonstrating student achievement through means of the grade or test score to developing students who can apply their knowledge
and skills as lifelong learners. To become tomorrow’s leaders, students must to be able to successfully navigate a complex and rapidly changing world with many unique challenges.

**Problem Statement**

Limited research has been conducted on factors that influence student engagement at the elementary level. Specifically, few studies have been conducted that focus upon the influence of teacher efficacy and leadership on student engagement. School leaders need direction and guidance to ensure that all educators within their respective schools participate in ongoing professional development to stay abreast of current research-based instructional strategies, best practices, and educational theories, to impact student academic gains (DeMonte, 2013). State and local school districts also acknowledge the need for more personalized learning to improve student achievement, as is reflected in the current teacher evaluation process within the state of Georgia, Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). With increasing teacher accountability for students’ test scores as a demonstration of academic achievement (Georgia Department of Education, 2017), a focus on engaging student learning is an essential, yet often missed component of instruction, as well as the reason why Georgia has developed such a detailed evaluation system to monitor all facets of instruction. By implementing the TKES evaluation for teachers, educational leaders in Georgia must be prepared not only to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional learning that goes beyond theoretical learning regarding student engagement, but also that empowers teachers to improve instruction, learning and engagement, assessment usage, differentiation for all students, positive climate for learning, communication, and professionalism (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

Planning for professional development is discouraging and challenging without critical insight from teachers. Through the preponderance of professional research, educational leaders currently recognize the significance of being cognizant of teaching practices which actively
engage students and strategically plan professional learning to enhance engagement (DeMonte, 2013). Bearing this in mind, along with professionals from a wide range of fields, educators are required to participate continually in sustainable professional learning in order to acquire new skills, strategies, and techniques to improve their job performance which affects student learning (DeMonte, 2013). Effective educational leaders, following the transformational leadership model, plan proactively for and ensure that their teachers acquire the necessary knowledge of pedagogical practices that impact student engagement (Marzano et al., 2005). Considering this information, school leaders continue to grapple with closing the gap between this theoretical knowledge and actual classroom practices. It is essential for transformational leaders to assess if teachers in their schools feel empowered to adjust the focus of their instruction from demonstrating achievement on high-stakes tests to fully engaging students in learning. Moving forward, it is imperative that school leaders create a professional learning plan personalized for their teachers in which student engagement and meaningful learning is the epicenter, followed by monitoring the progress and success of the plan (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Grabinger, Dunlap, & Duffield, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2007).

Although there have been many research studies addressed around engagement in the last decade, there is not relevant intermediate elementary action research that has been found to be reliable in interlinking student engagement to teacher self-efficacy (Scott et al., 2014) or school leadership to student engagement (Witzier, Bosker & Kruger, 2003; Marzano et al., 2007). In response to this void in research, the researcher conducted a qualitative action research study to examine teacher and academic leaders’ perceptions of self-efficacy related to instructional practices for student engagement as well as what leadership initiatives and professional learning are needed to increase teacher efficacy. Within the qualitative study, the researcher identified
effective leadership practices necessary to mitigate low levels of student engagement and learning in one suburban elementary school.

**Purpose of Study**

This action research study is intended as a rigorous qualitative methodology bound in the form of a strategically focused action research study in which the researcher engaged in analysis with the result to improve educational leadership practices for student engagement. This study examined leaders’ perceptions of teachers’ sense of efficacy and teachers’ perceptions of efficacy in utilizing effective teaching practices, resulting in student engagement. Further investigation depicted ways in which teachers’ instructional practices impacted student engagement, as well as ways school leaders more effectively ensured students were actively engaged, leading to academic success.

In this qualitative action research study, selected educators have denoted how school leadership influences student engagement, learning, and academic gains. Action research forged by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2009) is a public, critically reflective form of research which helps educational researchers develop various procedures within their school or classroom. Its primary goal is to bring one’s practice in line, to be more effective and productive for all involved (Elliott, 1991). Under Holly et al.’s (2005, 2009) interpretation, that action research is viewed as an influential, structured, systematic, rigorous research process that helps structure professional learning and growth for lifelong learning while keeping the ethical assurance to improving practices.

Despite increasing interest in student engagement around the world, there is no pure understanding of the concept of student engagement (Hart et al., 2011). While numerous studies indicate the importance of student engagement over student achievement, the use of high-stakes standardized tests as the measure for achievement often results in teaching practices that promote...
lower levels of cognition (Smith & Szymanski, 2013). In an effort to advance knowledge in the field regarding student engagement and the ways by which school leaders can promote practices ensuring engagement, the researcher initiated research to contribute to these understandings specifically in the elementary classroom.

In order to research successfully the impact that school leaders have on engagement, a study requires in-depth knowledge and is only meaningful and sustainable when measured using targeted data. Applying the local context of elementary education to this research provided additional information to make data and results more relevant, relatable, and actionable to stakeholders in education. The educational context for this study is elementary education. Kindergarten through second grade is referred to as “primary,” and third through fifth grades “intermediate.” Curriculum within elementary education includes the core subjects of Reading, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.

For this action research, the study was conducted in a large school district in the state of Georgia. The elementary school selected for this action research is located in a suburban metropolitan area outside a large city. The school is comprised of kindergarten through fifth grades. The research study was malleable enough to allow for the researcher to ascertain a robust amount of data for the action research study. The study included interviews with the principal, assistant principal, and a sampling of seven intermediate teachers to gain their perceptions and knowledge of student engagement. A questionnaire was also given to the selected teachers to gain further insight to inform this research. Observations were conducted in fourth and fifth grade classes with a focus on the three domains of engagement. The population of teachers volunteering featured a variety of teaching experience and advanced degrees to reflect the broad variation within all public schools. The overarching purpose of this research
study is to delve into ways teacher efficacy relates to student engagement and how it may be influenced by school leaders.

**Research Questions**

This action research study was framed by one main research question and two ancillary research questions. The nature of the action research study is such that these guiding research questions deliver a variety of viable outcomes to get a better understanding on how to improve one’s own organization (Stake, 2010).

1. How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?
2. How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink with levels of student engagement?
3. How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational factors contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

**Organization of Study**

This study was conducted using qualitative methods, explicitly structured as an action research study. The selection of action research methodology centers on the components of adult learning by providing educators and educational leaders with the vehicle which enables learning through a structured process of critical thinking, reflection, meaningful experiences, and inquiry. The systematic action research process helps to guide adult learning to improve one’s practice via a step-by-step process (Glanz, 2014). Researchers that engage in action research processes examine teaching and learning with the purpose to reflect upon and improve instructional practice. The researcher’s account is derived from the evidence that is gathered through a systematic and evaluative research process (Freeman, 1998).
Educational practitioners are involved in the process of inquiry to improve educational practice by studying the literature and research studies related to their questions and then choosing a structured research approach that will assist in refining current practice (Sagor, 2000). Sagor (2000) asserts that an important purpose for action research was “building the reflective practitioner” (p. 7). Danielson and McGreal (2000) state, “Few activities are more powerful for professional learning than reflection on practice” (p. 24). Thinking critically about their actions and practices is key if educators want to improve their practice and the practice of others within their profession (Schon, 1987).

This action research study used observations, questionnaires, and interviews of teachers and educational leader, to determine whether perceived relationships exist between the level of student engagement, teacher knowledge of engagement, teacher self-efficacy related to student engagement, and educational leadership practices. Although many research studies have been initiated in the area of student engagement in the last decade, specific, relevant information has not been found to be valid and reliable in interlinking student engagement to teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2001). By interlinking the two, educational leaders can more effectively plan appropriate professional development to foster higher student engagement in the intermediate elementary classrooms, thus raising student learning.

**Conceptual Framework**

With increased focus on school accountability over the past two decades, more attention has been placed upon studying and reporting the effectiveness of strategies designed to improve academic outcomes through effective educational leadership. “Worldwide, educators are concerned with student disengagement from school and learning” (Harris, 2008, p. 57). Currently, many school leaders have their teachers focus on enhancing student learning through traditional methods by improving students’ success with customary instruction and supplemental
resources (Marzano et al., 2005). In today’s world of expeditious change, growing innovation, and increasing knowledge, employers and employees must be able to relate tools and knowledge to new situations as well as problem-solve when challenges arise (Grabinger & Dunlap, 1997); therefore, evolving school leaders are charged to lead by taking all this knowledge to establish a vision, and create a plan to expand the level of learning (Dubinsky, Yammarino, & Jolson, 1995). Today’s students face a future that is more uncertain than any other time in history. “There are forces at work now for which there are no precedents” (Robinson, 2001, p. 5). A large percentage of current students will hold jobs that have yet to be created and the skills necessary to perform in those new careers are constantly evolving. For this purpose, educational leaders require ongoing, updated research to help create paradigm shifts to guide educators in how to increase student engagement and learning in order to prepare students for the 21st century (Robinson, 2001).

Hence, the status of the concept of student engagement has increased in the last few decades. This increased concentration on student engagement has resulted in a variety of studies about engagement. To further synthesize the research on student engagement, the components contributing to the phenomena of student engagement are explained to give an understanding of other researchers’ points of view and observations. Identified below are the variables within this case study that influenced this qualitative action research.

Studies over the past two decades expound upon ways school leadership affects student outcomes. According to Hallinger (2003), in twenty-first century schools, principals need to seek a balance in their role as manager, administrator, educational leader, and instructional leader, to ensure that instructional quality is the pinnacle of all decisions.

Previous professional research that transformational leadership can be implemented to facilitate effectively the transition to a more rigorous and relevant educational model in which
students are more actively engaged in their learning. (Grabinger et al., 1997; Lim & Ployhart, 2004, Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). An effective leader “involves purposes and direction. Leaders know the ends toward which they are striving. They pursue goals with clarity and tenacity and are accountable for their accomplishments” (Leithwood & Janzi, 2000, p. 7). With that in mind, a critical component of student success is the ability of a leader to share his or her vision with the members of the organization who play a direct role in the realization of the vision. As the school leadership team shifts its focus to grow professionally and acquire instructional practices to design lessons where active engagement is the hub, the work becomes more meaningful to students rather than recall and regurgitation of material. Student work becomes more meaningful and relevant when there is an authentic application of skills being taught (Grabinger et al., 1997). The transformational leader can be the impetus for this shift in instructional practices.

Leadership has been an interest of research for almost four decades in the educational context of the effects on instruction, curriculum, and student achievement. Marazano et al. (2005) designed a quantitative meta-analysis on school leadership that quantified the effect of school leadership on student achievement. There were 69 studies that bridged 23 years and their findings generated 21 features of an effective leader. Among these competencies were creating a vision, monitoring teachers and instruction, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, developing collaborative teams, and verbal as well as non-verbal communication skills. Looking through a different perspective, Cotton (2003) conducted a qualitative study on leadership and identified 25 qualities exhibited by effective leaders which impact teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The areas regarded important to leadership, according to Cotton (2003), were instructional leadership, shared leadership, and communication. Furthermore, Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) investigated the connection between transformational leadership, teacher efficacy, and school climate. Their research clarified how a positive school climate directly correlates to and is
necessary for teacher capacity and student achievement. Historically, leadership research collectively searched for what constitutes an effective school leader and although there are some variations in the findings, there are similar characteristics throughout, including a clear vision, shared leadership, strong professional learning, and instructional focus to ensure student academic success. The aforementioned studies have shown that the school leader is the linchpin to student achievement, which heightens the importance of scholarly research on leadership to be accessible for educators (Wallace Foundation, 2013). “Achieving success as a leader, by virtually any definition, requires doing the right things right” (Leithwood, 2005, p. 3).

Educational leaders seeking to improve student achievement are motivated to examine scholarly research to assist in guiding their focus on instruction and teacher pedagogy. “There are no magic bullets in education,” but educators must be cognizant of developing relevance of work and the engagement level of students (Ferlazzo, 2017, p. 33). An important review of quantitative research on student engagement tied to student achievement was introduced by Fredricks et al. (2004), Finn and Voelkl (1993), and Strambler and McKown (2013). These studies identified class size, positive environment, authentic work, student choice, motivation, and teacher practices as key components of student engagement. Also, research on student engagement takes on various viewpoints. For example, some studies report on the overall concept of engagement (e.g. Appleton et al., 2008). Nonetheless, in most studies, three types of engagement are identified: behavioral, affective, and cognitive (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Fredricks et al., 2004; Lam et al., 2014) which contribute to student learning. Historical research on engagement is quantitative and revolves around the secondary school context, leaving a gap in research at the elementary level.

Another viewpoint of student engagement exposes ways student engagement is measured in the academic environment (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Lam et al. 2014;
Wang, Bergin & Begin, 2014), and the research examines ways the dimensions of student engagement are associated with levels of achievement in school (Finn, 1993; Voelkl, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004; Lam et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Educational researchers used a assortment of methods to gather data on various dimensions of engagement, including interviews, observation, self-reported perceptions of engagement, anecdotal records, surveys, questionnaires, student achievement, and student demographic data.

Most research studies conducted on the dimensions of student engagement and how they impact learning are primarily quantitative, secondary educational in context, and they vary regarding which dimension is considered most important in impacting overall student engagement (Blumenfeld et al., 2005; Harris, 2008; Lam et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014). A wide range of agreement shows that student engagement produces positive student achievement; however, there is controversy over what counts as student engagement (McKinney, Mason, Perkerson, & Clifford, 1975). Blumenfeld et al. (2005) states behavioral engagement is student participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities. Most teacher data in the research focused on student behavior as the best predictor of student learning. Effective engagement is considered to exist when students have positive attitudes towards school, academic learning, and teachers; furthermore, Blumenfeld et al.’s (2005) research notes higher levels of student engagement when students identified that they had positive feelings towards their teacher and peers, as well as instructional activities. Cognitive engagement is considered to be present when students are focused, strategic, problem-solvers, and self-regulated in their learning.

Research depicts a lower correlation between cognitive engagement and overall student engagement which may be due to teachers and students not fully comprehending what entails cognitive engagement (Lam et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Blumenfeld et al. (2005) identify all three types of engagement that contribute to student engagement and lead to academic success in
school. While there is limited research at the elementary level related to student engagement, secondary level educational studies have been completed to identify specific factors that influence student engagement (Connor & Pope, 2013; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Wery & Thomson, 2013). Finn and Voelkl (1993) discerned school factors that are considered to be antecedents to student engagement to include supportive and respectful student-teacher relationships and positive emotions. Likewise, Wery and Thompson (2013) examined how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation impacts student engagement. Their study indicates that when learning is relevant and interlinked to the real-world, students are more inclined to be engaged in their learning, thus leading to academic success. Similarly, Harbour, Evanovich, Sweigart, and Hughes (2015) maintain additional teacher practices that are influential in increasing student engagement include modeling, opportunities to respond, and feedback. These are powerful strategies for teachers to utilize in daily lessons to increase engagement.

Additional research studies with reference to engagement delve into further factors which contribute to high levels of student engagement. While not comprehensive, a list of several factors which contribute to student engagement according to research studies, include:

- Active learning (Edwards, 2013; Grabinger et al., 1997; Templeton, Willis, & Hendricks, 2016)
- Educational leadership (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000; Clever, 2013; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Leithwood & Janzi, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Kruger et al., 2007)
- Instructional practices such as modeling, scaffolding, feedback, problem solving, and questioning (Dunleavy & Milton, 2007; Harbour et al., 2015; Hirn & Scott, 2014; Lane et al., 2015; Marazano, 2007; Marks, 2015)
- Motivation (Rukavina, Zuvic-Butorac, Milotic, & Jurana-Sepic, 2012; Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Servilio, 2009)
• School environment and relationships (Fraser, 1986; Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2014; Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015)

• Teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Guskey, 1986; Harris, 2008; Kahn, 2017)

• Teacher professional learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; DeMonte, 2013; Gulamhussein, 2013; Guskey, 1986, 2014; Mizell, 2010; Robbins, 1994)

Understanding the perceptions of teachers and their corresponding influence on student achievement can have a powerful impact for educational leaders who are hoping to implement a system that creates a paradigm shift to focus on actively engaging students. Teachers’ efficacy, pedagogy, and professional development are critical for school leaders to effectively design school improvement plans, thereby ensuring overall academic gains (Hoy & Tarter, 1992). With instruction and learning at the forefront of educational leadership, researchers have called for an integrated model of leadership that combines the monitoring of instructional pedagogy with the desire to increase teacher capacity and teacher efficacy (Kruger et al., 2007; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rows, 2008). Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) found a strong connection between transformational leadership and student engagement, mediated through building teacher efficacy, setting a clear vision, developing a strong sense of community and collaboration, and improving instruction within the school. “Transformational leadership aspires, more generally, to increase members’ efforts on behalf of the organization as well as develop more skilled practice” (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999, p. 20).

Self-efficacy is the belief individuals have about their own ability to reach a certain goal (Bandura, 1997). Teacher self-efficacy is associated with student engagement and more positive student attitudes towards school (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006). Research on teacher knowledge regarding teacher self-efficacy related to student engagement appears to be absent from educational literature at the elementary level. Fundamentally, it could prove critical
for elementary teachers to understand what it means for students to be engaged (Harris, 2008). Khan’s (2017) secondary level research depicts teachers’ self-efficacy as a simple idea having significant implications affecting the level of student engagement. His study recognizes pre-service, in-service, and administrative support as key factors promoting teacher efficacy leading to increased student learning.

Professional development is often aimed at improving student outcomes by focusing on best practices and research-based strategies (Guskey, 1986). This is frequently the main focus for educational leaders when planning professional development for teachers. In this study, professional development is focused on improving student engagement and teacher efficacy regarding engagement as well as its impact on student academic success. Several studies have identified that teachers prefer and perform better if professional learning is active rather than passive (Guskey, 1986). Thus, professional development needs to be comprehensive, ongoing, and job-embedded in order to be meaningful and to impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Educational leaders must leave no stone unturned to acquire the instructional needs of their teachers to plan effective professional development to impact the rigor and relevance of instruction (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

United States government and state policies demand that educational leaders orchestrate school improvement plans to ensure students’ academic success, improve teacher quality, and provide professional learning for teachers to increase teacher capacity (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). Given the era of the No Child Left behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, educational leaders are obligated to ensure that teachers utilize research-based instructional practices for achieving students’ academic success. NCLB created a high level of accountability in a high stakes educational environment monitored tightly by school districts since 2001. While accountability is important, direction on how school leaders should build teacher capacity and
accomplish high levels of student achievement are not guided by the government (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). With the increased demands at the federal and state levels for accountability, states like Georgia are formulating their own monitoring evaluation systems such as the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). Effective school leaders are empowered with the new evaluation system to provide teachers with meaningful feedback and support so that they may further develop their craft and ascertain their goal of high student achievement. With the expanding role of school leaders, teacher evaluation is integral to the entire educational leadership role (Marzano, 2007), and the goal of TKES is to ensure quality instruction and optimal student growth and learning. An educational leader facilitates the instructional practices and professional growth of teachers. TKES, a comprehensive evaluation system, enables this process for leaders through 10 standards: professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, assessment strategies, assessment uses, positive learning environment, academically challenging environment, professionalism, and communication (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). The policies in place establish the value of student achievement and teacher professional growth, and it is in the educational leaders’ hands to invest in making the pivotal changes necessary for teachers to be effective.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are relative to the educational context, the discussion of student engagement, and school leadership. The definitions provided will ensure consistency and understanding of the terms throughout the study.

- **Active Learning**: Any instructional method that engages students in the learning process is considered active learning. It requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).
• Affective Engagement: This dimension of engagement involves students’ sense of belonging, students’ relationship with peers and teachers, and students’ value of school as an institution. It relates to the students’ feeling of assurance, safety, comfort, and emotions (Finn, 1993).

• Behavioral Engagement: This dimension of engagement involves student levels of conduct, persistence, and participation in school activities. Participation includes activities in and out of the classroom that are sponsored by the school (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Fredricks et al., 2004).

• Cognitive Engagement: This dimension of engagement involves the thoughtfulness and willingness with which students have to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. It also includes student investment in problem solving, work styles, perceptions of success and preference for challenge (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004).

• Educational Leadership: Involves leading and working with teachers and other education professionals on systemic plans to improve educational programming and academic outcomes (Leithwood & Janzi, 2000).

• Instructional leadership: When a principal displays knowledge of the curriculum and is focused on learning for both students and adults within the school. The learning is measured by the improvement of instruction and the quality of student learning. The school principal is the educator, administrator, coach, and mentor (Center for Educational Leadership, 2017).

• Motivation: The driving force by which humans accomplish goals is motivation; typically identified as intrinsic and extrinsic (Seligman, 1990).
• Professional Development: Activities and efforts designed to improve educator
effectiveness and student learning. Some of the types of professional development
options include courses, workshops, conferences, and trainings (Avalos, 2011).

• Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): This is a process within a school where a
collaborative culture is developed by a group of educators focused on the learning of
adults and students, to improve teaching and the academic performance of students, and
is results oriented (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016).

• Student Engagement: This refers to the degree to which students are motivated and
committed to learning, demonstrate positive behaviors and attitudes, and have
relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning (Daggett, 2005).

• Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES): Georgia’s state-wide comprehensive
evaluation system for teachers of record (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

• Teacher Self-Efficacy: Teachers’ beliefs in their ability to bring about necessary results,
revolving around engaging students, strategizing instructional practices, and managing

• Transformational Leadership: Leadership that creates a culture of collaboration and
engages teachers and staff in ways that inspire them towards high levels of purpose, and
commitment to work as a team in an effort to accomplish school challenges, as well as
reach school goals (Hattie, 2008).

**Significance of Study**

Educational leaders looking to be reflective practitioners should focus on what
leadership practices are paramount to strengthen teacher efficacy and what academic factors
contribute to strengthen teacher capacity. As was asserted in the opening of this research,
Hallinger (2003) and Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramaniam (1996) state that school leadership is
associated with school effectiveness. Furthermore, Judge and Piccolo’s (2004) research stressed that school leadership is paramount in developing effective teachers willing to pursue innovative teaching, building teacher confidence and capacity, and creating a positive learning environment, which leads to high student achievement. As Marzano et al. (2005) affirm,

At no time in recent memory has the need for effective and inspired leadership been more pressing than it is today. With increasing needs in our society and in the workplace for knowledgeable, skilled, responsible citizens, the pressure on schools intensifies. The expectation that no child can be left behind in a world and in an economy that will require everyone’s best, is not likely to subside. (p. 123)

This qualitative study aligns educational leadership in influencing teacher efficacy and student engagement within elementary schools. Often, struggles with teachers’ instructional practices impact student engagement and learning, school leaders need to find a way to persevere, keep focused, and improve with effective professional learning. A special note to mention is that teachers at Baypoint Elementary know necessary pedagogy skills to actively engage students; yet, do not infuse the best practices daily into lessons, as observed by the principal and assistant principal. Thus, this is a problem both school leaders need to address to increase student learning.

If school leaders do indeed lead to effective teaching and improved student engagement, there is an imperative need to have contemporary scholarly research documenting what leadership competencies will ensure this shift at the local school level. By conducting this qualitative study, additional knowledge has been identified on what elements are necessary to initiate high levels of student engagement and student achievement at the elementary school level. In summary, this study identifies specific leadership styles, qualities, and practices that a
principal may possess in seeking to create a paradigm shift where student engagement is at the forefront of instructional planning.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The National Association of Secondary and Elementary School Principals (NASSP & NAESP) (2013) emphasize, “Great schools do not exist apart from great leaders” (p. 1). A NASSP/NAESP publication entitled Leadership Matters and the Center for American Progress (2011) observe that both the federal and state governments have roles in supporting school leaders to develop highly effective schools. “In the past, federal policy makers haven’t given school leadership much attention and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act should ensure that all 50 states develop definitions of effective principals” (p. 1). It is through rigorous research from these two organizations along with the Wallace Foundation and other researchers that identify the importance of school leadership and linking it to student learning. The researcher’s case study delves into this priority. For this literature review on leadership for student engagement, the Kennesaw State University online library provided the main search engine within the databases of ERIC, JSTOR, Sage, and Science Direct. Keywords were researched to find historical scholarly research regarding school leadership related to learning, followed by a more tapered focus on how leaders can ensure active learning and engagement in classrooms. Research studies were found within the topics of school leadership, student engagement, teacher efficacy, teacher practices, and professional learning. Through the abundance of research read there was limited research found interlinking school leadership and student engagement at the elementary level.

This study aims to identify perceptions of school leader and teacher practices and to what extent these practices affect student engagement to raise student learning. The primary purpose of this literature review is to provide an in-depth understanding of the five components of student
engagement including leadership theories and practices, student engagement factors, teacher self-efficacy, professional learning, and the TKES evaluation system. In outlining this study, the researcher sought to find varied factors which contribute to high levels of student engagement. The Transformational Leadership Theory along with Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory provide contexts for school leader responsibilities to influence student learning and teacher self-efficacy interconnected with engagement.

Student engagement is the cornerstone driving student academic success. Appleton et al. (2008) postulate that clarifying the understanding of student engagement will assist educational leaders and educators to effectively cultivate teacher capacity and efficacy. Good teachers and strong educational leaders constructively impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Effective teachers are the single most influential factor influencing student learning, with school leaders following a close second. It is the responsibility of the educational leader to plan highly-effective professional development to build teacher self-efficacy and capacity (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Marzano, 2007) that leads to highly engaged students.

The theoretical framework of this educational study is underpinned by Transformational Leadership Theory and Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory. These leadership and psychological theories include a didactic perspective relative to the needs of students, teachers, and leaders within the educational context. They each emphasize unique important perspectives that impact student engagement.

**Transformational Leadership Theory**

“The world is calling for a new model of leadership that effectively addresses today’s challenges” (Anello, Hernandez, & Khadem, 2014, p. 1). Transformational Leadership Theory developed originally by Burns (1978), offers decision making by leaders who transform the values and goals of their subordinates. Barnard Bass (1985) is also recognized as one of the
creators of the transformational theory though his work was based on James Burns’ (1978) book on political leadership. Burns (1978) defines transformational leadership as a leader who

(1) raises the followers’ level of consciousness about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of reaching them; (2) gets the followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team; (3) raises the followers’ level of need on Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs, from lower level concerns for safety and security to higher level needs for achievement and self-actualization. (Bass, 2008, p. 619)

Over the last two decades, transformational leadership has risen to the top as a popular leadership theory (Bass, 1985). Leithwood (1992) further clarifies transformational leadership as a collective progression in which a member or members of an organization influence the interpretation of internal and external events, the choice of goals, the priority of the work, individual’s motivation and abilities, relationships, and shared focus to stimulate excellence within the learning environment.

Challenging seasoned beliefs on school leadership, the transformational leader enriches commitment to a well-articulated vision and inspires followers to develop new ways of thinking about problems. Relationships between transformational leaders and followers and the effects of this leadership approach have been examined in recent studies (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). Principals transitioning to make more innovative decisions and problem-solving within their schools are changing their traditional practices to the transformational approach.

Within the context of this study, transformational leadership influences the principal’s decisions toward increasing student engagement and learning by improving the teaching practices of the educators. Mora (2012) points out, “Leaders are agents of change” (p. 187), and they are the catalysts for educational movement within their schools zeroing in to make meaningful change. The question the transformational leader must ask is, “How can educators
create learning environments that empower all students?” Shields (2016) explains the eight tenets which are basic to transformational leadership as they fit into the educational context.

- Commanding deep and impartial change
- Deconstructing knowledge contexts that sustain inequity
- Addressing the distribution of power
- Focusing on private and public good
- Focusing on equality and justice
- Emphasizing connectedness within the world
- Balancing criticism and promise
- Demonstrating moral intent

Shields (2016) suggests that transformational leadership facets are interactive and continuous as team members work systemically together within any context. Notably, transformational leadership style is unique in that it assists with social challenges in various environments like education, government, and social agencies. The differences between the foregoing ideas on transformational leadership and Leithwood’s (2010) transformative leadership principles is Leithwood’s principles entail four tenets rather than eight: setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. Despite some contradictory research, both transformative and transformational concepts are grounded in many similarities. Thus, an essential task of the educational leader within the realm of transformational leadership is to ask questions regarding purpose of instruction, practices necessary to meet all students’ instructional needs, and the success of specific student groups (Shields, 2010). It seems obvious if school leaders want to be change agents for schools as transformational leaders, they must “commit to shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, [while] challenging educators to be innovative problem solvers, and
developing followers’ leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring and provision of both challenge and support” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4).

**Self-Efficacy and Cognitive Theory**


Through the 1940s and 1950s, psychology in the United States was mainly concerned with behavioral theories of learning involving behavior modification which focused on stressors and consequences to determine a specific behavior or change. Bandura (1977) studied the mental processes which occur between stimulation and response and formulated a social learning theory expanding upon the research of Miller and Dollard in the early 1940s (Huit & Monetti, 2014). Bandura (1977) studied why and how individuals respond to stimuli or strategies subject to environmental influences, personal influences, and personal worldviews. He explained that humans’ thought processes are a vital component in learning, molding personalities and contributing to behaviors. Individuals’ thought processes regulate how they are influenced by others and their world (Darner, 2012).

Bandura’s (1977) theory is a conceptual framework that encompasses the origins of efficacy beliefs, their functions, and readiness for change (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000), noting exercise of control and personal agency can be accounted for by an individual’s self-beliefs, while the individual is a product and a producer of his or her environment and social systems (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy beliefs vary according to Bandura by how much the individuals believe in their capabilities and skill level. He developed the concept of reciprocal determinism to explain a learning process that interlinks self-efficacy and self-regulation. According to psychologist Albert Bandura (1993), reciprocal determinism is a model composed of three
factors that effect behavior: the environment, the individual, and the behavior itself. According to this theory, a person's behavior guides and is guided by both the social world and personal characteristics.

Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy is influential in that it demonstrates that the individual has control to decide a course of action, use resources, and achieve goals (Pajares, 2002). Teachers and students can self-regulate and control decisions and behaviors. Beliefs about self-efficacy impact efforts and sustain determination (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Four primary sources of influence on self-efficacy are:

1. Mastery experiences, in which individuals learn to be resilient and sustain efforts.
2. Vicarious experiences, provided by social models to reference how people seek competent models to learn from and enhance their beliefs in themselves.
3. Social persuasions, causing the development of one’s skills and personal efficacy; a verbal persuasion that pushes an individual to believe he or she is capable.
4. Perceptions and interpretations of physiological indicators opposed to negative reactions to physical states. (Brouwers & Tomic 2000, p. 240; Pajares, 2002)

These four primary sources of influence on self-efficacy are important; nevertheless, the effects of self-efficacy beliefs are mitigated through psychological processes (Bandura, 1993; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Self-efficacy impacts engagement through several cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes according to Bandura (1993), effecting engagement through cognitive processes such as goal setting and the extent to which individuals commit to a goal. Additionally, self-efficacy is seen through the motivational process by the goals individuals believe they can attain, the effort expended on a goal, the value attributed to these goals, and how resilient to failures each individual might be. Leveraging affective processes is related to self-efficacy because individuals can control their thought patterns and manage emotions related to
goal attainment. Lastly, self-efficacy compels cognitive processes through choices individuals make to create beneficial and manageable environments. Through the four sources of influence and three domains of engagement processes on self-efficacy, one ascertains more self-confidence within one’s profession (Bandura, 1993; Brouwars & Tomic, 2000).

In short, transformational leadership and self-efficacy theories recognize that optimal learning begins with effective school leaders. “Leaders are exceptional individuals, capable of inspiring others to do great things” (Mora, 2012, p. 187). Bandura’s (1983) theory provides insight into the impact a teacher’s self-efficacy has upon engagement (Leithwood & Janzi, 1999). Each theorist communicates the belief that leaders, educators, and students require supportive, inspirational, and cognitive environments to succeed. When considering student engagement, both highlight the need to understand more about leadership practices, social experiences, and cognitive processes in learning. This qualitative action research study follows of how leadership influences student engagement at the elementary level.

**Guiding Research**

When conducting this study, it was necessary to explore the plethora of literature to clarify and describe the variables contributing to student engagement. Yazzie-Mintz (2010) articulates:

As dropping out problems have grown and as increasing numbers of students have started to see drop out as a viable option for expressing their dissatisfaction with school, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers have to look more closely at the factors that lead students to disengage and find ways to create engagement. (p.55)

This disparity is the reason for school leaders at any level to research and improve their practices to create a sustaining culture for student engagement. School leader expectations must evolve where leadership is strong albeit indirect by improving motivation, fortifying instructional
practices and teachers, and providing stakeholders with influence on decisions. In summary, the Wallace Foundation (2013) states it is the collective knowledge within the educational context which is more powerful than its parts. Indeed, school leadership remains one of the paramount parts.

领导

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) concurred with may aforementioned studies, and from their own six-year study they concluded:

Leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning.

To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership. Why is leadership crucial? One explanation is that leaders have the potential to unleash latent capacities in organizations. (p. 9)

It was not until the late 1980s that research recognized the importance of correlating leaders and followers (Bolden et al, 2003). Certain leadership styles were shown to be effective under particular situations and lose their effectiveness if the context changed. Like educator styles, there are several leadership styles including situational, servant, transactional, instructional, and transformational, which are appropriate for many educational environments (Avolio & Bass, 1993; Greenleaf, 1977; Hoy & Miskal, 2008).

Historically, in the 1950’s, studies on educational leadership pivoted around personality and character traits and examined the situational approach of leading (Redden, 1970). Through the 1960’s leadership research focused specifically on the situational approach as the most efficient leadership style (Warrick, 1981). Through the 1970’s into the 1980’s, the second generation of studies on leadership came to fruition and were a more consistent set of results. Stogdill (1981) identified nine qualities of a school leader including: results-oriented, problem solver, outgoing, self-confident, responsible, even-keeled, tolerant, influential, and organized.
Moreover, the evidence supports the deduction that the possession of certain traits increase the likelihood that a leader will be effective (Yukl, 2002). “It is more sensible and balanced having a leader that acknowledges the influence of both traits and situations when leading” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 423). A principal’s influence on schools and teachers extends beyond matters directly related to personality qualities and being a building manager.

In the 1970s and 1980s research on educational leaders highlighted servant leadership. “The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then the conscience choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 11). Spears (2005), after studying Greenleaf’s original writings, designed 10 qualities of a servant-leader: good listener, empathetic, helpful, alert, encouraging, visionary, foresightful, safeguarding, fostering, and community builder. These characteristics were not created to be exhaustive; however, they convey the vision for the servant leader.

In the 1990s the focus of research showcased transactional leadership, which is a style of distributed leadership where the leader grows and promotes leaders within the school (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003). The studies of Avolio and Bass (1993) acknowledge the leadership model in which a leader displays different leadership styles depending on the situation, moving from non-leadership to transactional leadership, and up to transformational leadership. In the 21st century, the traits and behaviors of leaders continue to be studied, and studies have revealed that the behaviors of leaders are predictors for leadership effectiveness (Koys, 2001). Developing teacher leaders contributes to the collective efforts of a school; thus, school leaders of the 1990s sought to expand their direct leadership to be distributed throughout the school, valuing shared decision making.

Hoy and Miskel (2008) describe the leadership style coined in the 1980s and 1990s as an instructional leader, one who emphasizes the improvement of teaching and learning within the
school by striving to change school curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment strategies to improve student achievement. “Policy makers became captivated with the idea that a path to school improvement was through principal instructional leadership and called on universities and districts to prepare principals to be instructional leaders” (p. 433). Instructional leadership is critical in the realization of effective schools, it is seldom prioritized due to the many tasks principals are accountable for within the school.

According to Brookover and Lezotte (1982), the role of principals as instructional leaders emerged revolving around research identifying leaders of schools who free themselves from managerial tasks and focus their efforts on improving teaching and learning as instructional leaders. It was Hallinger and Murphy (1985) who further defined the concept of instructional leaders with three dimensions: designing a clear mission and goals, managing the instructional platform, and promoting a positive learning culture. The instructional leader role evolved from a simplistic concept to a more complex format where leadership examines teacher motivation and shared decision-making along with curriculum and instruction.

In the 1990s instructional leaders took a backseat role to site-based management but resurfaced back to the top when increased significance was placed on academic standards and the needs for schools to be accountable (Jenkins, 2009). Strong (1988) notes that although instructional leadership is considered critical, it is rarely prioritized and only a small amount of time is devoted to it. Challenges with principals transforming into instructional leaders include a lack of in-depth training and classroom experience, lack of time, increased emphasis on accountability, and the communities’ expectation of the principal as a manager (Flath, 1989; Fullan, 1991). By having a major emphasis for greater accountability to increase student performance, instructional leadership continues surface within schools focusing on curriculum and instruction.
Within today’s 21st century schools, principals pursue a balance in their role as instructional leader and manager-administrator (Hoyle, 2005). The differences between administrator and instructional leader are copious. Administrators are generally preoccupied with completing the day-to-day building managerial duties, while instructional leaders set a clear vision and goals, allocate resources for faculty to meet those goals, closely manage the curriculum and pedagogy being utilized in the classrooms, monitor lesson plans to ensure they are closely aligned to standards, and evaluate and give feedback to educators (Hoyle, 2005). Expectations necessitate schools to guarantee that all students achieve mastery of curriculum standards, and local schools focus on implementing those requirements to the best of their ability. As a result, leading instructional efforts in schools have evolved into a key role for school principals.

Transformational leadership enables and empowers all stakeholders as a collective entity and is an extension of transactional and instructional leadership (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Transformational leadership has been shown to improve teacher instruction and increase teacher dedication to students, by being proactive in planning and inspiring teachers, thereby leading to increased student engagement and achievement. Educational leaders must be pedagogical leaders who lead data analysis, reflection, feedback, and hold everyone in the school accountable; yet motivate and ensure a positive school culture through teamwork (Southworth, 2004). Bass (1999) posits that by shifting leadership the responsibility shifts downward in leveling school hierarchy.

An additional perspective on characteristics of transformational leadership, Bass (1999) identifies four specific qualities: idealized influence, inspirational leadership, intellectual stimulation, and individualize consideration. Several researchers articulate the four qualities in detail.
• *Idealized influence* builds trust and respect in followers and provides the foundation for accepting necessary changes or redirection of school’s mission.

• *Inspirational leadership* changes the vision to provide necessary goals and procedures with the leader’s behavior encouraging, energizing, and exciting followers to reach goals collectively.

• *Intellectual stimulation* illustrates creativity and innovativeness where challenges, programs, and procedures are viewed with a fresh perspective from the group. The goal is to challenge and extend each person to reach his or her potential.

• *Individualized consideration* refers to the leader observing each individual’s needs for success and growth professionally, creating new professional learning opportunities differentiated for the needs of each individual. (Avolio, 1994; Atwater & Bass, 1994; Bass, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hoy & Miskel, 2008)

    According to Bass (1999), these qualities of a transformational leader will generate a sense of collective efficacy where teachers are more productive and effective by which improving student achievement. For the culture of a school to shift transformational leaders must establish a collaborative team where school goals and school improvement plans are designed by tapping the expertise of all stakeholders within the school (Bass, 1985). Along with the proliferation of research on this leadership style and its benefits of employee performance, there is a desire to know why transformational leaders bring about higher levels of teacher performance.

    Hallinger (2003) categorizes the refinement of educational leadership as an integrated model known as transformational leadership which combines monitoring practices with the increase of teacher capacity and is interlinked to student achievement. Taking instructional leadership behaviors and combining and implementing transformational leadership behaviors
produces significantly higher achieving schools. Robinson et al. (2008) state combining the instructional leader behaviors along with transformational leadership behaviors effect student outcomes that are three to four times greater than instructional leadership behaviors on their own. Transformational leadership behaviors also appear to affect student engagement through the focus of pedagogical skills being utilized by teachers and an emphasis placed upon teacher self-efficacy (Leithwood & Janzi, 2000). Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, and Sleegars (2012) confirm that teacher practices facilitate the effects of leadership on student engagement. The abundance of research gleans that these practices are the actions of a true transformational leader. In short, the transformational leader ensures that the instructional quality coupled with inspiration and intellectual stimulation is the top priority bringing the school’s vision to fruition (Flath, 1989). Through inspiring employees to do great work through example and the energy of the transformational leader’s personality, educators rise to higher expectations set by the school leader.

Blase and Blase (2000) outline specific behaviors and practices which leaders of highly engaged schools exhibit. These behaviors comprise giving feedback to educators in the building, making suggestions, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting continuous learning, supporting collaboration, providing job-embedded and on-going professional development opportunities, and giving specific praise for effective instruction. Leithwood, Jantizi, and Steinbach (1999) credit that leaders within a school must be agents for change, seek to improve student academic achievement through effective instructional leadership, possess transformational leadership behaviors, and implement professional learning communities (PLCs). It is a realistic expectation for a transformational leader to have a full understanding of the components of learning (Johnson, 1996). Recent research in cognitive science has produced a wealth of knowledge of how students learn, why they learn, and has acknowledged the most
effective strategies to impact student learning and engagement. Specifically, forward thinking and transformational leaders must make it a priority to stay abreast of current educational theories, research how to enhance learning within the learning environment, and learn how to develop teacher capacity best (Blumenfeld et al., 2005; Colker, 2008; Connor & Pope, 2013). Idealized influence by the transformational leader exhibits in-depth instructional knowledge, inspires high performance from all stakeholders, and promotes continuous professional learning of the collective team to improve student learning.

DuFour & Fullan, and Stiegelbauer (2002, 1991) describe the major responsibility of the educational leader of today as developing others within the school as leaders. Principals cannot accomplish the necessary responsibilities to manage a school effectively without the school functioning as a PLC, where everyone is committed to working collaboratively to achieve better academic results for their students. It is through good teaching and strong leadership that student engagement is most effectively impacted (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, 2007). The leader of the past knew how to “tell” and the leader of the future must be able to “ask” and work collaboratively as a community to meet instructional needs and overcome challenges. The process of learning together and identifying weaknesses and strengths as a PLC will assist in organizing and creating appropriate ongoing professional learning necessary and resources to focus on learning and results (DuFour, 2016). As a collective team, school leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers, should collaborate frequently to be results oriented and to strengthen academic performance of all students.

DuFour (1998) professes that developing vision and teacher capacity through promoting a culture of continuous improvement is pertinent for school leaders to improve academic excellence. A wealth of past and current research has determined educational leaders significantly impact student outcomes through establishing high expectations for all stakeholders
and expecting all to be highly engaged, continuous learners who are searching to extend instructional knowledge (Braughton & Riley, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008). Professional teams of educators or PLCs are now found in schools and increasingly, educators see themselves as leaders rather than in “leader/follower” relationships resulting in high levels of teacher performance.

More recently, The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) clarifies leadership further as leading PLCs in which faculty members meet on a regular basis to collaborate on standards, pedagogy, and data to drive instruction (DuFour, 2016). In a PLC, educational leaders make student engagement, learning, and student academic growth as the main focus, set high expectations for performance, and create a close-knit culture of continuous learning (DuFour, 2016). Instructional leaders’ concentration on improving the quality of teaching and student engagement, by creating a framework for a strong collaborative learning environment meshes well by incorporating PLCs to meet leaders’ instructional goals (Center for Educational Leadership, 2015). While former transactional leaders create cost/benefit analyses, the instructional leader’s fundamental focus is upon instruction within the school, and has evolved transformational leaders to consider the whole school culture united with the instructional aspect, motivation, and challenges everyone within the school to inspire and empower one another to advance to higher levels (Lowe et al., 1996). As the whole school culture segues toward empowering all stakeholders to advance to higher levels, the united effort focuses on the factor of student engagement.

**Student Engagement**

“Perhaps the most critical shift in learning theory during the past twenty years has been a move away from a conception of learning as passive absorption of information to a conception of learning as the active engagement of meaning” (Wilson & Peterson, 2006, p. 1). In recent years,
schools are strained with the significance placed upon standardized tests as a determiner of academic success. Student engagement and active learning have become the target of educational researchers as the key components to academic success (Appleton & Lawrenz, 2011). As a result, an explicit goal of many school and district reform efforts, especially at the high school level, is to increase student engagement (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004).

Harris (2008) establishes that educators and educational leaders have varied ideas on how to define student engagement. The Great Schools Partnership defines student engagement as “the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education” (p. 1). Harris (2008) used semi-structured interviews to gather phenomenographic data, and the results pinpointed six categories of engagement: behaving, enjoying, being motivated, thinking, seeing purpose, and owning. Moreover, Harris affirms teachers appear to focus on participation and compliance rather than on engagement and the cognitive level of learning.

Though a clear and consistent definition of student engagement does not exist at the elementary or secondary level of education, student engagement is often described as a complex psychological construct comprised of multiple dimensions including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive elements as well as feelings of belonging, enjoyment, and attachment (Fredricks et al., 2011). Student engagement within the school relates to educators and educational leaders committing, valuing, and connecting with students to build education goals to best influence high academic success for all students (Appleton & Lawrenz, 2011). Skinner and Belmont (1993) define student engagement within the school environment as being the degree and quality of
emotional and behavioral involvement in learning activities, which connect to positive and active attitudes towards learning.

Researchers have studied what constitutes high levels of student engagement in the educational environment. Measuring student engagement is pivotal in understanding how to support educators, predict academic success, reflect on instruction, and restructure teaching practices to avoid poor performance (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Lam et al. (2014) examined and measured the three dimensions of engagement with the addition of a fourth dimension of academics; the study was completed across 12 countries. Regarding academic engagement, it is exhibited in the effort exerted on academic tasks and the completion of instructional work (Appleton & Lawrenz, 2011). Fredricks et al. (2011) researched student engagement and its relationship to achievement and found student engagement as the key to unlocking problems of low achievement.

![Figure 1. Three Domains of Student Engagement (Schindler, Burkholder, Morad, & Marsh, 2017)](image-url)
Having student engagement as a multi-faceted construct (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004), all dimensions refer to the unique issue of student engagement within the school environment (Figure 1). According to Appleton and Lawrenz (2011), a clear, determined set of engagement dimensions which attribute to the construct of student engagement does not exist because of varied factors. Nonetheless, Wang et al. (2014) best define classroom engagement as being comprised of affective (emotional), cognitive, and behavioral (concentration, persistence, and attention) factors.

Historically, educators and educational leaders have focused on behavioral engagement revolving around participation and compliance; without regard to the more current trend of research highlighting the critical domains of student engagement as being cognitive and affective engagement (Harris, 2008). Teachers must find a balance to actively engage students in learning, practicing, and integrating intellectual and social skills within all activities (Rivera, 2010). Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1977) proved that learning requires affective approaches to teaching within a cognitive environment. Emphasis on the cognitive domain of student engagement is needed for educators and educational leaders to help students attain the knowledge necessary for academic growth and to perform on standardized tests (Harris, 2008). After all, the affective domain of student engagement is as critical a component as the cognitive domain for improving student achievement (Connor & Pope, 2013). Educators should be cognizant of all three engagement domains of engagement when planning for instruction.

The groundbreaking work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1977) document the necessity of cognitive learning occurring through social interactions. Maslow’s (1971) hierarchy of needs also clearly denotes how psychological needs must be met before individuals can engage with one another and is a foundational characteristic for developing caring relationships within the learning environment. Specifically, Maslow states that learning and cognitive needs
cannot be met until basic affective levels of physiological, safety, belonging, and self-esteem are met.

Student engagement is also affected by contextual variables within and outside the environment as individuals are learning. Marzano and Pickering (2011) state that student engagement has long been acknowledged as the core of effective education, is more in-depth than student attention to a given task, and different from the behavior of compliance. Engaged students have the skills to work with others and transfer knowledge to solve problems by thinking outside the box (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Students are most engaged when the work allows for creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving to spur inquisitiveness. This type of learning is in opposition to tasks which require little thought or are repetitive, lack a high level of cognitive growth, and are conducted by compliant students rather than engaged students (Bowen, 2003). For a truly engaged student, the joy of learning sparks resilience to complete the activity or chosen objectives even when difficult (Schlechty, 2001). Student engagement also promotes students’ willingness, need, and desire to contribute to and be accomplished in their learning, thus promoting a high level of cognitive learning (Bomia, Demeester, Elander, Johnson, & Sheldon, 1997). Relationships and classroom environment are viewed in literature as important elements for enhanced student engagement.

When asked to reflect upon and pinpoint important characteristics that are key to student engagement and learning, teachers in perception surveys recognize that they are the integral component in student engagement and learning (Colker, 2008). Yet, even with an abundance of research in this area, it is still somewhat difficult to identify which classroom practices are most effective in supporting cognitive student engagement. “Our first job in applying any teaching approach is to engage students” (Ferlazzo, 2017, p. 32). Scholars agree that to engage learners teachers need to move from didactic to constructivist pedagogy (Taylor & Parsons, 2011). The
work students are producing must be relevant, interesting, and connected to students’ lives for
them to be more intelligently engaged in thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, and analyzing
skills (Dunleavy & Milton, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Traditional instruction focuses on students’
mastery of content through direct learning from teacher to student, but students reach higher
levels of achievement and develop higher levels of confidence in their ability to learn when
instructional activities connect the various domains of engagement.

Domains of Student Engagement

Attention in education today about differing viewpoints surrounding cognitive and
affective domains of engagement related to the learning environment is of significant interest
(Rivera, 2010). Educators and educational leaders are provided non-negotiable curriculum and
content, along with formative and summative assessments that largely influence their
instructional planning. The rigorous curriculum lends itself to teacher planning focused on the
cognitive domain with little time to consider the affective domain which has been shown to lead
to student engagement. Scholarly research indicates there must be a balance of the cognitive
demands with the affective needs of all students for engagement to occur (Rivera, 2010).
Cognitive engagement refers to students’ psychological connection to their learning and the
perceived relevance of school work, including student investment in goal setting, quality of
work, and sustained focus (Fredricks et al., 2004). More specifically, cognitive engagement
pertains to levels of effective study, homework completion, and the significance of investing in
one’s own academic growth.

Chapman (2003) remarks students who are invested with concentration, initiative, and
personal challenge are more cognitively engaged in their learning, leading to higher student
achievement. Grabinger and Dunlap (1997) describe productive and actively engaged learning
environments for students as Rich Environments for Active Learning (REAL). REAL
classrooms promote study and investigation through authentic learning to encourage problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration interconnecting cognitive and affective domains of student engagement. The REAL instructional environments follow Vygotsky’s (1978) constructivist theories such that students have ownership of their learning and have access to rich and complex knowledge constructions (Grabinger & Dunlap, 1997). These classrooms are in sharp contrast to traditional teacher-centered classrooms promoting inert knowledge with conventional pedagogical strategies resulting in low-level thinking and application. Conventional instruction often utilizes simplified tasks and fails to transfer knowledge to new situations. These conventional pedagogical strategies do not promote engagement as they are lacking in relevance or meaning to the students; therefore, the new knowledge will not be able to be extrapolated to new situations and contexts (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989). For students to be highly engaged, they must have daily opportunities to plan, control, and reflect on their own learning and apply their newly attained knowledge to real-world situations or problems. According to Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist view of learning, knowledge acquisition is a continuous individual course of constructing, interpreting and actively engaging with the real-world (Bednar et al, 1991; Goodman, 1984; Lebow, 1993; Jonassen, 1994; Savery & Duffy, 1995, Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2006). Through rigorous, relevant, and active learning experiences, students are challenged to infer knowledge in various situations contributing to more in-depth learning.

Teacher behaviors along with their instructional practices correspondingly contribute to increasing cognitive student engagement (Brophy, 1986; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kern Clements, 2007). Past and current research attributes higher-level student achievement with teachers who utilize modeling and make learning interactive and structured for the students. Students can then imitate the skills observed and connect them with previously learned skills and
generalize them across settings (Harbour et al., 2015). Doubet and Hockett (2016) recognize the use of essential questions as another important instructional practice for teachers, “Essential questions pique even the most reluctant learner’s curiosity, while begging to be discussed, debated, and explored” (p. 18). Educators within schools continue to grow in understanding how teacher’s practices and personality traits relate to increased student engagement.

Harbour et al. (2015) illustrate Opportunities to Respond (OTR) as producing positive efficacy to students due to immediately being given a chance to engage with the learning and opportunities to collaborate; thus, affecting cognitive engagement. Within OTR teachers ask two types of questions—fact and higher-order cognitive questions contributing to deeper comprehension of material. Where fact questions only require recall of information, higher-order questions require synthesizing and analysis of the content (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981). Wilson and Peterson propose, “Perhaps the most critical shift in education in the past 20 years has been a move away from a conception of ‘learner as the sponge’ toward an image of ‘learner as active constructor’ of meaning” (p. 2). Active learning is another pertinent method contributing to cognitive student engagement and learning. Mansell (2013) observed various teachers and their teaching styles, communication skills, and ability to engage students. Active learning is any instructional method that engages students in the learning process and requires students to apply and extrapolate material learned (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Mansell observed student interaction, feedback, student-centered learning, and active learning as essential components of engaging pedagogy. Williamson and Haigney (2009) examine the lack of engagement within or embedded in educational tasks. They note that educators need to draw students into learning activities and involve them in ways which will promote active learning over passive learning. Educators must seek to engage students beyond merely exciting activities and make learning relevant to the real-world. Cubukcu (2012) concurs that being able to transfer knowledge to real-world applications
also promotes retention of material and motivates the learner to be more active in acquiring knowledge.

A second noteworthy shift in education has involved a budding awareness among learning theorists of the social aspects of cognitive learning. According to Vygosky’s theory (Kozulin, 2003), social interaction also plays a fundamental role in cognitive development and therefore leads to higher levels of student engagement. Vygotsky also demonstrated that using writing and communication in internalizing information leads to higher critical thinking skills. Practitioners’ research depicts a low percentage of educators comprehend the importance of involving students in active, relevant learning and understand the impact this practice promotes on increased levels of engagement. Williamson, Haigney, Mansell and Cubuku, (2012) expose a close relationship between active and purposeful learning, and high levels of student engagement. Recent research suggests that all students need deep knowledge of content (Wilson & Peterson, 2006). Many educators perception is if the students appear to be engaged in academic work, they are actively engaged regardless of what type of work they are performing. There is a disconnect with what “active” learning looks like in the educational context.

A robust example of cognitive engagement is Problem Based Learning (PBL). PBL is a student-centered instructional strategy that instructs content and skills within a knowledge realm by using authentic activities in which students are utilizing their critical thinking and problem-solving skills to collaborate on projects (Boud, 1985; Savery & Duffy, 1995). In PBL, the problem is presented before the content is addressed rather than after the knowledge is disseminated. In this way, students find relevance to their learning and build substantial knowledge through transferring responsibility for their own learning. When completed with their tasks, students present, support, and debate their solutions to the problems within groups or the class (Grabinger & Dunlap, 1995). As Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000) explicated:
To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application...to develop competence...students must have opportunities to learn with understanding. Deep understanding of subject matter transforms factual information into usable knowledge. A profound difference between experts and novices is that experts’ command of concepts shapes their understanding of new information: it allows them to see patterns, relationships, or discrepancies that are not apparent to novices. (pp. 16-17)

Cognitive and affective engagement are the “unseen” dimensions that preclude academic and behavioral engagement collectively (Appleton & Lawrenz, 2011). Comprehending how academic, social, and personal factors affect students’ instructional levels to allow for the development of academic skills is essential to promote high levels of learning. Instructional choice is a teaching practice associating affective and cognitive engagement, influencing student academic growth. Instructional choice is a strategy that necessitates little preparation, is easy to implement, and supports academic growth (Lynne et al., 2015) and indicate a strong correlation exists between student choice and academic achievement. Cognitive and affective engaging teaching practices incorporate effective pacing, model enthusiasm and intensity, build strong peer relationships, and provide specific feedback. Feedback is an essential practice for teachers to use to increase student engagement and reduce behavior issues (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Highly engaging instructional strategies transcend the traditional structure of the classroom learning environment and are powerful tools to inspire students to take their learning to higher cognitive levels (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). As cognitive and affective engagement collectively merge, students internalize information at high levels; hence, it is important to have an awareness of managing students’ states of mind for engagement and learner success.
Educators and educational leaders need to understand how students think, behave, feel, and learn (Jensen, 2003). Recent scientific research supports that relationships between talking, learning strategies, and physical activity can influence changes in the brain. This evidence suggests teachers can study and implement practical strategies that alter the state of mind and increase student engagement. Jensen (2003) notes:

Research demonstrates that individuals who do the most talking, thinking, reflecting or moving do the most learning. Additionally, the research clearly states that when learners feel good about what, how, and with whom they learn, they are more likely to want to do it again. (p. 1)

The “unseen” affective and cognitive engagement interlink two powerful domains contributing to internalized, high level learning.

Affective engagement refers to students’ instinctual reactions in the classroom, and their emotional connectedness and sense of belonging with their teachers and peers (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Affective engagement is notably interconnected to the other engagement domains, behavioral and cognitive, which affects student learning and achievement (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). A strong association exists and educational researchers acknowledge the importance of relationships as connected to affective student engagement (Noddings, 1984). Engagement can also be understood through a variety of relationships “between the student and school community, the student and teacher, the student and peers, the student and instruction, and the student and curriculum” (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010, p. 1). Connor and Pope (2013) used several scales to evaluate the level of student engagement and its relationship to academic outcomes. Their research found full student engagement is closely related to positive teacher-student relationships; hence, as students advance through school, their engagement decreases. The Australian Society for Evidence-Based Teaching (2016) states having good teacher-student
relationships impacts student learning in a positive way. Students feel connected with their school when there are strong teacher-student relationships within the classroom. Subsequently, it is not unforeseen that teacher-student relationships have a substantial and positive influence on academic outcomes. In fact, the depth of the relationships an educator has with students has a larger effect on their outcomes than socio-economic status or professional status of parents (Australian Society for Evidence, 2016). Research on making a genuine and lasting difference with students further indicates that capitalizing time and effort into constructing strong relationships with students has the most powerful impact on their success (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, n.d). As former United States President Theodore Roosevelt stated, “Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” (as cited by Australian Society for Evidence, 2016, p. 1). Through relationships and being emotionally connected to educators and peers, students are impacted in a positive way influencing student academic success.

Three critical elements for building relationships which contribute to affective engagement with students are warmth, empathy, and time with the students (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, n.d.; Noddings, 1984). Teacher beliefs about students are also critical in that they influence how students are treated. Students are more likely to succeed when teachers believe in them considering the students recognize the attitude towards them and their potential ability (Australian Society for Evidence, 2016), thereby building their own self-efficacy towards learning. Student emotions constitute a strong association to affective student engagement and to the extent students are involved in their learning. How students feel emotionally during a lesson impacts how engaged they will be throughout the activity or lesson. If their emotions are negative in that moment, students are less likely to interact and engage in the task (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Skinner & Belmont (1993) associate the following emotions with active student engagement: enthusiasm, interest, enjoyment, satisfaction, pride, and vitality. Students
associate negative emotions with lack of engagement. Some emotions connected to negative emotions are anger, sadness, anxiety, boredom, frustration, and shame (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Kochel (2009) recognized emotional engagement as having extreme impacts on student engagement leading to high levels of learning. Peter Solovey and John Mayer coined the term emotional intelligence (EI) in 1990. EI refers to using and managing emotions more effectively for better self-awareness and inter-personal communication. EI is key in developing highly-engaged students (Raddawi & Troudi, 2013); Goleman (1996) details that emotional intelligence relates to about 20% of the factors that lead to success in life. Beard and Durlak et al. (2011) state, “Emotions can facilitate or impede children’s academic engagement, work ethic, commitment, and ultimate school success” (p. 2). Apart from building relationships with teachers, when students have opportunities to collaborate with one another, they develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum (Dunleavy & Milton, 2009). Managing student emotions is key to building relationships with peers, ultimately leading to positive collaboration and engagement. Many studies have reported the need for healthy relationships and emotions in the classroom. Student engagement depends on the management of positive and negative feelings in the classroom (Lang & Evans, 2006; Tuncay, 2009). Being mindful of the influence of affective engagement will prove to assist educators in navigating to increase student engagement and learning.

“Motivation and engagement have been described as students’ energy and drive to engage, learn, work effectively, and achieve their potential at school” (Martin, 2008, p. 240). A solid relationship exists between affective student engagement and intrinsic motivation which is considered more critical than relationships between extrinsic elements and student engagement (Kohn, 1993). Ryan and Deci (2000) share that in the classroom environment, student motivation refers to the amount of effort and focus a student places on learning in order to
achieve positive results. Motivation is a key component of affective engagement in terms of student interest and enjoyment of academics, both of which impact academic achievement and increase cognitive engagement (Martin, 2008, 2009, 2013; Schenck, 2011; Schunk, 2008). Many research studies have revealed that intrinsically motivated students have advanced academic achievement, lower levels of anxiety, and greater perceptions of their own ability (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002; Wigfield & Wagner, 2005). “Students who are engaged in their work are energized by four goals: success, curiosity, originality, and satisfying relationships excel in learning” (Strong, Silver, & Robinson, 1995, p. 8). Conversely, many classrooms rely on more active extrinsic motivation such as rewards, praise, and consequences as effective strategies to engage students in their learning (Gagne’ & Deci, 2005). Scholarly research in the field indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have the power to increase levels of engagement in the classroom environment, to enrich and promote learning at high levels and lead to higher student achievement (Harackiewicz & Hidi, 2000; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2007; Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Williams & Williams, 2011). Wery and Thomson (2013) also examined ways motivation impacts students who have challenges connecting with curriculum. To further note the importance of motivation on student engagement, Rukavina et al. (2012) studied children from 10 to 14 years old who participated in hands-on science and math workshops and compared their active engagement experiences to their regular classroom lessons. They found that if student learning is connected to meaningful involvement in problem-based activities related to everyday life, it helps pupils be motivated and engaged in their learning.

Additionally, students’ affective engagement in learning is anchored to the varied states of mind according to Guskey (1997) and Jensen (2003). Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is depicted as the process through which students enhance their capacity to assimilate thinking,
feeling, and behaving to achieve critical life tasks including academic success (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). SEL framework integrates research-based, student-centered, psychological principals of cognitive, social, and emotional learning where students partner with their teachers to collaborate and learn together (Zins et al., 2004). Zins et al. (2004) account that students and teachers work collectively toward cognitive outcomes as well as social-emotional outcomes in a caring learning environment. The authors emphasize that one of the key components of a caring SEL environment is respectful, supportive relationships that foster a safe and orderly environment in which students can learn.

Behavioral engagement is commonly defined as student attention and participation or lack of engagement in classroom activities including overall student conduct (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). A student who is behaviorally engaged depicts persistence, attention, participates in discussions and activities, contributes to the lesson, and asks questions (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). When a student is fully engaged he or she contributes productively to the learning environment and depicts a positive attitude. Behavioral engagement is connected to attendance and is a strong predictor of student achievement (Finn & Voelkl, 1993). Furthermore, educators must systematically ensure that positive school culture and climate are apparent influencing students to be present every day (Appleton et al., 2006). In effective learning environments, “Teachers are able to observe student engagement in real-time and employ strategies to reengage the student, which in effect, improves attention, involvement and motivation to learn” (Szafir & Mutlu, 2012). Teachers can further engage students by executing behavioral cues such as direction of attention, posture, facial expressions, proximity, and responsiveness to the lesson (Christophel, 1990). To fill the gap between cognitive and affective engagement, behavioral engagement is a pivotal component whereas it is directly welded to student learning. The teacher
role in engaging the learner is pivotal in all its varied applications and much depends upon the effective teacher.

**Teacher Self-Efficacy**

When examining student learning and engagement, the role of teacher self-efficacy is important to consider. Teachers’ belief in themselves and their potential for overall performance in their classroom directly contributes to the quality of teaching, student engagement, student performance, relationships developed, motivation, and the teacher’s instructional practices (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Elementary educators are the principle means through which students become conjoined to the school environment and serve as a critical ancillary factor in the adjustment to the students’ learning environment and preparing the students for the workforce (Mahar, 2004). During the elementary school years, educators are responsible for utilizing engaging instructional practices, formulating assessments to monitor student progress toward instructional goals, developing a deep understanding of grade appropriate curriculum, and utilizing classroom management and counseling skills to meet the broad range of educational needs of their students. Teacher self-efficacy contributes to their understanding and ability to identify the knowledge and instructional practices called for at a given moment (Evertson, 1976; Peterson, 1995). These actions can determine the level of student engagement in a classroom.

Albert Bandura’s (1993) self-efficacy theory hones in on teachers’ interpretations of students’ successes or areas of growth, and judgements about teaching practices. Teachers’ self-efficacy is related to their self-reflection on practices, behaviors, and thoughts. The extent to which educators believe in their capabilities and potential is what underlies the strategies chosen and also influences the outcomes of actions. Educators’ beliefs about what they can achieve accompany corresponding skills and knowledge which they can employ to achieve those goals.
(Arnold, 1997). Consequently, self-efficacy beliefs in a social cognition framework can weigh heavily on the manner and quality of student engagement.

Ashton and Webb (1986) remark that the more effective a teacher is, the more likely he or she will take risks, be open-minded, and utilize non-traditional instructional strategies to engage students in their learning. The amount of self-efficacy a teacher exhibits, according to Wolf and Hoy (1990), defines the nature and quality of student learning and engagement. Being a competent teacher is interconnected with being able to assess one’s own abilities and choose instructional strategies that will ultimately engage students, especially the challenging and unmotivated students. Broadly stated, teacher efficacy is connected to teacher effectiveness, commitment, enthusiasm for teaching, instructional behavior, attitude, innovative strategies, organizational skills, attention to student efficacy, and interest in work (Olayiwola, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001). Teacher efficacy is directly associated with student engagement and achievement, motivation, and relationships developed while interacting with students during class (Martin, 2008). As a result, the beliefs teachers hold about themselves is critical to understanding the teaching practices that impact engagement, the extent of their own engagement with their educational profession, and how they relate to their students’ learning, thus impacting the level of student engagement.

As Cantor (1990) intimates regarding one’s personality, one can have both knowledge and skills, but the disposition to make use of them and reach personal goals is up to the individual. The power of cognition creates choice and provides a basis for a person and/or teacher to move forward and apply knowledge. Nevertheless, teachers must reflect intrinsically to seek why it is necessary to change their behaviors and actions to grow professionally. Making change in personal schemas is hard, but seeking social support from others through PLCs will assist in progressing to be innovative teachers who believe in themselves and that they can make
improvements to their instructional approaches, thus impacting student engagement (Bandura, 1993; Cantor, 1990; DuFour, 2016). Pappa (2014) summarizes by specifying:

If we consider that our beliefs are supported by value systems, past experiences, teachers’ assumptions, expectations and beliefs regarding education, their students and their own role are vital elements in understanding the relationship existing between teacher self-efficacy and student engagement. (p. 29)

With the teacher being essential to the entire educational process and the teacher’s beliefs about self-efficacy having impact on that process, it is vital that professional learning be relevant and on-going.

**Professional Learning**

With teacher efficacy as the crux to teacher effectiveness and student learning the transformational leader grapples to plan professional learning appropriately to build teacher capacity. With that being said, the United States’ policies have traditionally left professional development decisions to school districts and local school leaders. Even though states require teachers to complete a certain amount of professional development for license renewal, they do not regulate the quality or relevance of the professional learning completed (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Those who are interested in reforming education of all types are pressing for an agenda of fundamental change in the ways teachers teach and students learn. “What is needed, however, are systemic, research-based changes in the way professional development is selected, delivered and evaluated” (Grossman, Compton, Igra, Shahan, & Williamson, 2009, p. 2057). In addition, Darling-Hammond (1995) asserts, “These expectations for practice assume fundamental changes in education policies in order to enable teachers to make the challenging and very demanding changes required of them” (p. 82). Planning effective professional
development continues to be one of the pivotal components for school leaders to develop highly effective teachers within their school.

Decades ago, dating back to the 1950s, professional development for educators has revolved around training for teachers to foster their educational growth to develop their pedagogical skills, thus resulting in changes in teaching practices, beliefs, and learning outcomes (Guskey, 1986). “Professional development is typically single-shot, one-size-fits-all workshops for teachers based on the expertise of the individuals delivering the session” (Moir, 2013, p. 1). To this end, recent studies have found that 90% of teachers report that the professional development they participate in is totally useless (Darling-Hammond, 2009). However, over the last decade researchers have identified the need to provide effective professional development that is on-going and job-embedded. Thus, a real concern is not that teachers are not receiving professional development, but that the typical professional learning is ineffective at impacting teachers’ pedagogy, student learning, and engagement.

Currently, Georgia has the Georgia Common Core Standards, which represent a retreat from the traditional rote, fact-based style of instruction toward teaching that fosters critical thinking and problem solving. Many states are following a college and career ready outline that calls for the growth of these skills among students (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Hence, educators will need to learn new teaching practices and skills. Each of these reforms contests traditional education and professional development, insisting that schools systematically and continuously improve student performance.

When looking at Georgia policy on professional development, House Bill 164, an educational bill, was signed by Governor Nathan Deal in 2015 and extended the suspension of professional learning requirements through 2017 (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). The General Assembly’s action does not suspend professional learning. Educators will continue to
engage in professional learning designed to improve teaching and learning and will follow school district requirements regarding professional learning. The legislation simply suspends the accumulation of Professional Learning Units (PLUs) for certificate renewal. The 2015 position of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) to temporarily modify renewal requirements during this period is separate and apart from districts who wish to continue their own requirements for continued professional development of the personnel employed in their districts. Beginning July 1, 2017, educators employed in a Georgia Local Unit of Administration (LUA) must engage in continuous job-embedded professional learning in their schools, school districts, education agencies, or universities. The GaPSC has a proactive plan for professional learning requirements for certificate renewal where all certified teachers starting in 2018 will review their school strategic plan and develop their own individual professional learning plan to renew their certificates. Teachers will also need to utilize data collection from walkthroughs, observations, and student growth data to help determine what will be included in their professional development plan. The professional development plan would also be uploaded to the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) to be monitored by school leaders. Professional learning in the state of Georgia has begun to take on a more individualized structure; however, this new reform for professional learning may not be effective for all educators.

This movement in professional learning recognizes there are some teachers who will do the bare minimum and may not strive to acquire the most pertinent learning for their specific field of education (Gulamhussein, 2013). It is the educational leaders’ executive decision to identify what teams and individual teachers need professional development to improve their craft. Educational leaders must provide research-based solutions to structure professional development such that teachers modify their instructional practices, leading to higher levels of student engagement and learning (Gulamhussein, 2013). Effective professional learning must
begin with the end result in mind, be on-going, relevant, job-embedded, and focus on student learning. Leaders must be mindful of what they want to accomplish with professional development and begin with the end in mind.

According to Guskey (2014), educational leaders must plan professional development by investigating what instructional practices are most likely to produce high levels of student outcomes and engagement within their schools. In deciding which practices to focus upon, leaders must be cautious of “quick fix” professional development activities and identify the best research-based professional learning for teachers (Grossman et al., 2009). Teachers are reluctant to buy-in to professional learning if there is not current research and data to support the professional development. After identifying the most effective professional learning for teachers, educational leaders must ensure they put in place organizational supports that are needed to implement newly learned pedagogical skills and provide spiraling, on-going maintenance (Protheroe, 2008). “High quality professional learning is the foundation on which any improvement effort in education must build” (Guskey, 2014, p. 6). Professional development has the potential to not only advance teacher practice, but to make a real difference for students.

Professionals around the world are in continual educational advancement to extend their knowledge and improve their individual work (DeMonte, 2013). Doctors, lawyers, scientists, and managers are just a few from a wide range of professions participating in sustainable professional learning to acquire new skills, strategies, and techniques to improve their job performance. All professionals, including educators, take years to develop their skills and be highly effective in their roles. This learning cannot stop after a few years. Society is ever changing and growing; therefore, we as educators, must continue to be lifelong learners in our field in order to stay on the cutting edge of education. Regardless, at present, the complexity of teaching is so great that one-third of teachers leave the profession within three years and half
leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2003). This attrition rate is highly concerning and research shows that it is due in part to the lack of support and professional development of teachers. Educators who do not participate in effective and sustainable professional development do not expand their skills and student learning suffers (Ingersoll, 2003). For this reason, the Georgia Department of Education has designed an evaluation system to reform professional development to meet the changing needs and provide support for Georgia’s current teachers (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Too often, professional development has been criticized as unfocused and irrelevant. But Georgia school systems are overhauling their professional development to tie them closely to teacher needs, to district, and school academic goals.

**Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES)**

“The ultimate goal of teacher evaluation systems is to improve the quality of instruction by clarifying expectations for effective teaching and helping teachers meet those expectations through high-quality feedback and support” (Reform Support Network, 2015, p. 1). Previous evaluation systems dating back to the 1980s revolved around supervisory and clinical approaches (Brandt, 1996). Danielson (2001) divulges how former evaluation systems have evolved by recognizing the intricacies of teaching and more effective initiatives to provide effective feedback, reflection, and instructional practice. Over the past decade, teacher performance has gained recognition as being the major contributor of student achievement. In the new age of higher accountability, efforts have been made by the government and states to improve teacher evaluation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required an emphasis on the impact of teachers on student achievement; thus, the evolution of teacher evaluation shifted to connect school improvement goals to teacher performance.

The Georgia Department of Education (2012) introduced the CLASS Keys evaluation system for teachers in 2010 and it served as a preliminary system in the efforts to reform teacher
evaluation. Two years after it was introduced, TKES was developed as a part of the 2012-2013 Race to the Top initiative to be more detailed in ongoing feedback and support to teachers. The Race to the Top grant focused on improving evaluators’ reliability and objectivity of the results and “articulates the entire range of teacher practices and student outcomes that citizens want from our education system and determine how to measure them” (Stumbo & McWalters, 2011, p. 13). Through this inclusive evaluation system, teachers will ascertain more rich, continual, and most importantly, specific feedback to strengthen their instructional practices.

The Georgia Department of Education (2012) developed TKES to accommodate teachers with meaningful feedback and support so they can meet the instructional needs of all students while increasing student achievement. On-going feedback and purposeful professional development assist teachers to meet the fluctuating educational needs of students. TKES distributes detailed information about teachers’ craft and performance as it impacts student learning. With teachers being the crux of education, TKES gives the opportunity for educators to enrich their instructional practices to meet continually the educational needs of all students.

The Georgia Department of Education (2017) affirms TKES encompasses three major elements which contribute to the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM), including Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), Professional Growth, and Student Growth. Georgia further explains in the official Code of Georgia GA 20-2-210 that teachers are required to be notified of the evaluation methods and standards utilized to further inform their yearly evaluations. The three elements which contribute to the overall TEM score are further outlined below.

Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS):

- TAPS provides school leaders with qualitative, rubric-based evaluation methods by when to measure teachers on the 10 quality Performance Standards.
• Two formative observations and four walkthroughs inform the Summative Evaluation each year for those teachers on a full plan or less than three years’ experience.

Teachers with three or more years of experience are on a flexible plan where only two 30-minute formative observations are required.

• All 10 standards must be scored on the Summative Evaluation

Professional Growth for TKES:

• Professional growth is measured by progress towards Professional Growth goals set by individual teachers at the beginning of each school year.

Student Growth

• Student Growth Percentile (SGP) is calculated annually for student growth based on Georgia state assessment data.

• For teachers of non-SGP grades or courses, this component is measured through Student Learning Objectives created by local school districts to measure SGP.

• Student growth is lagging data and will inform Summative Performance Evaluations from the prior year’s assessment. (Georgia Department of Education, 2017)

Providing quality feedback and support for teachers to improve their capacity and self-efficacy is necessary. It is through using the TKES evaluation system that Georgia school leaders may plan professional development that is relevant and job-embedded, meeting the instructional needs of teachers. It is important to measure growth of both the educator and the student.

Summary of Literature Review

This chapter provided a comprehensive examination of professional literature as it relates to leadership for student engagement. An overview of leadership theories and self-efficacy theories were reviewed and summarized including detail as to how they influenced this research study. A number of professional studies address styles, qualities, behaviors, and practices of
effective leaders which effect student engagement and intensify teacher awareness of strategies, factors, and instructional practices. Additional research touts it is the educational leader’s responsibility to build teacher capacity within the instructional environment to strengthen teacher efficacy and student engagement leading to higher levels of learning. Research related to student engagement is more comprehensive at the secondary level than the elementary.

To impact student engagement and learning strongly, today’s transformational leader must have vision and keen behaviors, skills, and knowledge to create and sustain a positive culture where students, teachers, and leaders are striving to grow and improve collectively (Lashway, 2003). Keeping teachers informed about current research, instructional practices/strategies, and intentional professional learning around research-based strategies to actively engage students in their learning is necessary (Blase & Blase, 1999). Scholars agree that schools will acquire higher gains if students are highly engaged. A strong school leader is the key component to set the vision for excellence and to execute a systemic strategic plan for success (DuFour, 2002; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Through the mindset of the transformational leader, school leaders should possess key leadership characteristics, instructional practices, and inspire stakeholders to work collectively to be results oriented.

Student engagement is a multi-faceted theory with copious aspects which contribute to its successful implementation (Wang et al., 2014). Three dimensions which must be present for students to be fully engaged are affective (emotional), cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Despite its direct link to student achievement and success, student engagement remains unclear and researchers need to continue to study the importance of promoting active engagement for elementary students by collecting and analyzing data to inform the field of education about student engagement at the elementary level and identify ways to impact teacher efficacy related to student engagement.
Self-efficacy impacts a teacher’s ability to influence student engagement and learning in the elementary classroom (Bandura, 1993). Teachers’ efficacy is built upon mastery of experiences that contribute not only to their knowledge, but their confidence in moving from theory into practice. Researchers must continue to study teacher efficacy and the best ways to impact the variables contributing to growing teacher self-efficacy which will expand student engagement in the classroom. Moreover, it is the job of the transformational leader to assess teacher efficacy and provide professional learning to strengthen areas of deficit.

It is paramount for school leaders to provide sustained modification in teachers’ learning opportunities to guarantee learning is powerful, relevant, and effective to build teacher capacity and efficacy (Hoy, 2000). “Teachers learn by doing, reading and reflecting (just as students do), and by collaborating with other teachers. This enables teachers to make the leap from theory to accomplished practice” (Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 83). If educational leaders want to change teachers’ perceptions that 90% of professional development is useless, they have to be change agents to improve professional learning (Gulamhussein, 2013).

After examining many studies where quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods were used, the researcher was unable to discover a study upon which to replicate this unique research study. This case study will further add to the findings and extend the understanding of how school leaders can influence student engagement at the elementary school level and will serve to fill the gaps in the scholarly literature. In this particular study, student engagement was evaluated through teacher observations, questionnaires, and interviews placing specific emphasis upon the three domains. Both teacher and leader perceptions of student engagement were further analyzed to determine their correlation. Through the analysis of the data, the researcher developed an action plan for school leaders to employ strategic professional development that interconnects each of the student engagement domains, thus increasing the potential for overall teacher
capacity and student engagement. Analyzing teacher efficacy and leadership practices from the perspective of the transformational leader will narrow the findings to specific leadership and professional development needs of the teachers.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODODOLOGY

Introduction

This section includes detailed information regarding purpose and process, the research method, focus research questions, selected participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis. This chapter details the methodological approach, an action research case study intended to understand the phenomena of student engagement, specifically how school leaders and teachers can impact student engagement, leading to high levels of learning. Within this section, the researcher will share her personal philosophy, educational experience, personal background, and worldview leading to the specifics behind the chosen research design. At the conclusion, the researcher will explain the strategies for trustworthiness and ethical principles, which the researcher considers to be of foremost concern when conducting a study.

Research Design

When choosing a research design, a researcher asks essential questions to determine which particular method is most appropriate by comparing alternative approaches. It is important to consider the full range of possibilities for any study and determine which approach closely matches the research questions set by the researcher. The knowledge gained through this multifaceted study is to establish the teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy associated with instructional practices that actively engage students at a high level. At the forefront of instructional leadership, educational leaders are charged to build teacher capacity (Darling-Hammond, 2009). This challenge lends itself to the qualitative approach where the researcher often makes claims based on constructivist perspectives while searching for multiple meanings gleaned through a natural setting to develop a theory (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is inclined to create descriptions and situational interpretations of a phenomena that the
researcher can propose to colleagues and others for modifying their own understandings of the phenomena (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). This study differs from quantitative research because it does not attempt to gather data from objective methods and is not intended as a statistical analysis, although the researcher does classify theme and code information gained (Hodder, 1994). In this study, the researcher hopes to develop understandings of the phenomena of student engagement at the elementary school level to help school leaders hone in on practices to increase student engagement and build teacher capacity. By doing this, the researcher is able to establish a detailed account of Baypoint Elementary’s (a pseudonym) intermediate teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions revolving around student engagement with intermediate students and how leaders can best impact the level of student engagement with elementary teachers. Previous research explores teacher self-efficacy; conversely, there is limited action research contributing strategic plans to foster teacher efficacy and capacity. To deepen the understanding of teacher self-efficacy related to student engagement and to create a valuable action plan in how school leaders can impact student engagement, the researcher utilized the action research design as the methodology encapsulated within a single context, an elementary school.

Of the numerous types of qualitative research utilized in the field of education, action research may be the most unique. Unlike many other types of research, the sole purpose of action research, as its name specifies, is for an action and/or an action plan to result from the study. Action research, as a methodical inquiry, is an invaluable tool that allows educational leaders to reflect on their practices, programs, and procedures (Glanz, 2014; Glickman, 1995; Sparks & Simmons, 1989). Glickman (2014) believes schoolwide action research is essential for school renewal and growth. Within that same vein, Danielson and McGreal (2000), Kemmis and McTaggert (1990), and Schon (1987) acknowledged action research as vital to the ongoing reflection of practitioners’ imperatives to improve teaching. Danielson and McGreal (2000)
specified, “Few activities are more powerful for professional learning than reflection on practice” (p. 24). When contemplating the many methodologies to utilize, the researcher chose action research as the formidable choice due to the impact it will have directly on Baypoint Elementary.

“The process of action research provides educational leaders and educators with the vehicle to enable learning through the process of critical reflection, experiences, and inquiry” (Glanz, 2014, p. 24). The use of this design promotes a high degree of professional scholarship to provide the impetus for the researcher as the school leader to acquire the knowledge, strategies, and valuable experiences to make intelligent judgements about how to impact student engagement at Baypoint Elementary. Action research is coming together with others to improve one’s practice (Corey, 1953; Stake, 2010). Kemmis and McTaggart (2006) called it participatory action research where the researcher studies an action with the intent to improve practice, and the research is carried out by the people directly responsible for improving the action. The process of action research provides a structured, disciplined approach to reflecting about the teaching and learning process (Sagor, 2000). “The three steps to select a focus in action research are knowing what one wants to investigate, developing research questions, and establishing a plan to answer the questions” (Glickman, 2014, p. 20). After selecting a focus, the researcher then follows the five steps to action research. These steps vary somewhat depending on the unique models noted in Table 1, which include the Sagor model, Kemmis and McTaggert model, Calhoun model, and Glanz model.
Table 1

*Five Step Action Research Processes*<sup>a</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Sagor</th>
<th>Kemmis/McTaggert</th>
<th>Calhoun</th>
<th>Glanz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Problem Formulation</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Selecting the Area of Focus</td>
<td>Reflect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Collecting Data</td>
<td>Select a Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Observing</td>
<td>Organizing Data</td>
<td>Collect Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Reporting Results</td>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>Analyzing and Interpreting Data</td>
<td>Analyze and Interpret Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Action Planning</td>
<td>Re-planning</td>
<td>Taking Action</td>
<td>Take Action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Five Step Research Process (Brown, 2002)

Although each of the four models depicted in Table 1 uses different verbiage, the crux is each includes using data to act on a distinct problem or area of concern. Regarding the above models, action research can be summarized as a cyclical process that enables planning, acting, collecting data, observing, reflecting, analyzing data, developing an action plan, and evaluating in a manner that is systematic, but flexible in nature (Brown, 2002). The models mentioned in the table above set the foundation for action research processes. Richard Sagor who developed the Sagor Model (1992), explained there are five steps to an effective action research study including problem formulation, data collection, data analysis, reporting of results, and action planning. Stephen Kemmis formulated the Kemmis model (1990) where there are also five steps within the progression that include planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and re-planning. The Calhoun Model (1994) was developed by Emily Calhoun which reflects five steps beginning with selecting the area of focus, collecting data, organizing data, analyzing and interpreting data,
and completing the process with taking action. The last model referenced is the Glanz Model established by Jeffrey Glanz included five steps starting with selecting a focus, collecting data, analyzing data, creating an action plan, and taking action. The action research model used in this study is one that combines the four models and fuses steps from each of the four models described and adds the addition of reflection as an anchor step throughout the process (Brown, 2002; Glanz, 2014). This modified action research model is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Action Research Model (Brown, 2002; Glanz, 2014)

By having Baypoint Elementary as the single focus of the study, a strategically focused action research study design provides the format for the data collection and analysis within a single context, and action research is intended as a rigorous methodology in which the researcher will, as an end result, develop an explicit plan to influence student engagement. The integration of reflection throughout the process is deliberate and assists in keeping the action research ongoing by the educational leader who is continually assessing instruction and seeking ways to improve the school (Glanz, 2014).
This qualitative research provided a comprehensive investigation of teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions and observations within Baypoint Elementary in a means to improve student engagement practices by creating a relevant and authentic action plan. With the researcher examining teacher and leader perceptions and engagement practices within one educational context, the similarities and differences between each participant within the study group provides the most compelling information (Stake, 2010). Through the study of each participant’s experience, perceptions were uncovered that were entrenched in specific context. The perceptions held by the participants became more developed through comparison within the data collection and through researcher interpretation. An action research study promoted an investigation of the phenomena of how educational leaders and teachers impact student engagement within its natural context when boundaries linking context and phenomena are not clear (Yin, 2009). Gathering the data information for this study involved using a broad range of sources to gain a deep understanding. By using observations, questionnaires, semi-structured and interviews, the researcher created a rich, multi-faceted collection of data to analyze (Stake, 2010). From the varied data sources, the researcher discovered common themes and was able to connect and triangulate the material within the context, giving a high level of trustworthiness to the research. This valuable action research case study explored the void in research on educational leaders impacting student engagement within elementary schools. Furthermore, with the reader in mind, this type of empirical qualitative research answers research questions hoping to ascertain associations with their own context, which the readers will find meaningful and valuable to improve their craft.

This qualitative approach provides an extensive amount of information from multiple data sources to create meaning for the reader (Stake, 2010). In exploring the rich descriptions of the teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions of student engagement and observations of instructional
practices impacting student engagement, the reader will obtain a true picture of how teacher practices influence student engagement. The information and specific details ascertained by the reader will assist in formulating an understanding of this unique qualitative study context and how it may benefit school leaders and teachers. Once the data is compiled and triangulated, the researcher will design a sustainable action plan to improve student engagement at Baypoint Elementary.

**Reason for Study**

Unlike this qualitative study, previous educational research on student engagement focused on quantitative approaches to help close the achievement gap, mainly set in the context of secondary school environments (Appleton et al., 2006; Archambault et al., 2009; Lam et al., 2014). Furthermore, past research studies on student engagement focused on behavioral aspects of student engagement rather than exploring other factors which also impact engagement such as school leadership and teacher self-efficacy (Bergin & Bergin, 2014; Fredricks et al., 2011; Harris, 2008; Piccolo, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, 2001; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). Specifically, looking further into action research studies, there is a deficit in educational research examining how school leadership and teacher self-efficacy impact student engagement (McNiff, 1998; O’Connor, 2006; Taba & Noel, 1957). By reading numerous research studies on student engagement, the researcher acknowledged a void in qualitative research on student engagement at the elementary level.

With few research studies exploring qualitative research on how school leaders influence student engagement at the elementary level, this particular study will be an impetus to foster teacher capacity and student achievement. Baypoint Elementary’s leaders seek to improve the instructional practices and build teacher self-efficacy. Due to recent accomplishments and the desire to continue to raise academic achievement in this high average performing elementary
school, this study will provide critical knowledge for continued improvement. Though the school has received four state level accolades in recent years, student performance on standardized tests has declined from the top five percent to the top 25 percent due to the revised state test where students currently must utilize critical thinking and analysis unlike prior state tests. With current and future parents looking for high performing schools for their children, it is imperative to increase results on the state tests by bringing improved instructional knowledge to extend teachers’ pedagogical skills. In examining Baypoint Elementary and the potential for high levels of performance, the researcher sought to better understand teachers’ self-efficacy and instructional practices leading to high levels of student engagement, especially on a day-to-day basis within the school. Teachers have a momentous effect on student learning in classrooms every day (Prillaman, Eaker, & Kendrick, 1994). By acquiring this knowledge through the study, the educational leader can create a plan to better develop the teachers and ultimately improve student performance on state tests.

**Research Questions**

According to Stake, “Research questions help maintain focus throughout a study and are among the most important aspect of a study” (2010, p. 77). The research questions guide the study. Then the overall approach and detailed steps of the methods explain how the investigation comes to fruition. The nature of a qualitative study are such that these guiding research questions will deliver a variety of viable outcomes (Creswell, 2003).

- How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?
- How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink to high levels of student engagement?
• How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational practices contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

The answers to these questions identify how teachers and school leaders of Baypoint Elementary perceive teacher efficacy as it relates to student engagement and instructional practices, thus enabling the principal to build teacher capacity.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the primary instrument of data collection and analysis within the strategically focused action research case study design relies heavily upon the instincts and abilities of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). The investigation included an effort on the part of the researcher to look for data supporting alternative explanations within Baypoint Elementary (Patton, 2002). As the principal of Baypoint Elementary for the last six years, the researcher acts as a true reflective leader looking to become a results-oriented practitioner, one of the most important responsibilities of an educational leader (Rickman, 2014). Currently, the researcher is not the immediate evaluator of the participants of the study; conversely, in the past the researcher was the direct evaluator of the teachers. When delving into the qualitative study, the researcher plans to take time to reflect regarding what has been examined and what steps the researcher needs to undertake moving forward as principal of Baypoint Elementary.

Practitioners who analyze the uniqueness of a problem confronting them, frame the problem in ways that structure its intelligibility, think about the results of their actions, and puzzle out why things worked and why they did not tend to build up a reservoir of insights and intuitions that they can call upon as they go about their work. (Starratt, 1994, p.66)

The researcher adhered to specific guidelines of APA Code of Ethics (1982) that did not disrupt or manipulate the natural environment of Baypoint Elementary. Progress of the study was maintained through data collection details documented in the researcher’s journal. Individual
interviews, observations, and questionnaires were gathered through a commitment to deeply examine and understand each participant’s perception and understanding of student engagement. It is by undertaking this action research study that the researcher hopes to contribute positively to other educational leaders’ desires to impact student engagement in their schools.

For the purpose of describing myself as principal of Baypoint Elementary, the following section will be written in first person. Prior to serving as the principal of Baypoint Elementary, the researcher, I, was employed as an assistant principal, instructional leader, curriculum specialist, and teacher who taught primary and intermediate grades, encountering a broad range of effective educators. I have been an educational leader for thirteen years, specifically a principal for six years this experience has provided me a strong understanding of instructional leadership. I am a female Caucasian, a sister, a friend, a wife, a mentor, and most importantly an educational leader. Undeniably, my extensive educational experiences span over twenty five years, and have shaped me into the principal I am today.

When researchers observe themselves they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement Peshkin (1988, p. 17).

My varied educational experiences led me to become interested in how to define and increase student engagement in the classroom. As a transformational leader, I aspire to work collaboratively with teachers to create an action plan to improve their teacher efficacy and research-based pedagogical practices yielding high levels of student engagement and learning. The qualitative study conducted by me utilized my background and ideological beliefs to shape this action research.
Research Design and Worldview

From an epistemological perspective, this study was viewed through a constructivist worldview as a basis for creating understanding through others’ instructional experiences and discussions (Creswell, 2013). According to Maston (2008), constructivism underscores the validity that authenticity and knowledge is “constructed” through involvement and understanding of others. The constructivist approach illuminated how teachers and leaders perceive their self-efficacy and why instructional practices effect student engagement. It brought to light perspectives of all participants and the areas for growth necessary for a transformational leader to take the research to instill habits, reflection, critical inquiry, and improve instructional practice through a sustainable action plan (Glickman, 2014). As a transformational leader, the researcher used her constructivist worldview for developing an understanding of data gleaned through the qualitative study and plans to utilize the information to ensure student engagement becomes pervasive through Baypoint Elementary.

This study utilized a qualitative approach followed by data collection and analysis. Silverman and Stake (2000, 2010) remark that an action research study is distinguished by its emphasis on holistic treatment of a phenomena and is intricately related to many incidental actions that require a wide, deep sweep of investigation to receive a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena. Qualitative research is inclined to be an effort to create descriptions and situational interpretations of a phenomena that the researcher can propose to colleagues and others for modifying their own understandings of the phenomena (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). Qualitative research is important in developing an understanding of the social sciences. It provides a method for researchers to create theories and models of phenomena. The researcher in this study utilized a qualitative study design using semi-structured interviews, self-efficacy questionnaires, and student observations to explore the phenomena of student engagement.
Further information gained from this qualitative study helped to develop an understanding of how teachers and leaders perceive student engagement and the instructional practices contributing to high levels of active engagement, and further define the essence of student engagement. The qualitative methodology used in this study allowed a comprehensive approach to understand better student engagement in its authentic and natural context through participants’ own words (Stake, 2010). Through the qualitative study, the researcher studied nine participants within Baypoint Elementary to ascertain vital data in an attempt to better understand student engagement and how a school leader would influence strengthening engagement at the school.

An action study design was used in this research to examine perceptions of teachers and school leaders within Baypoint Elementary. Action research study, an in-depth analysis of a finite approach based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2003), revealed previously unknown perceptions about the phenomena of student engagement at the elementary level, “knowledge to which we would otherwise not have access” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). Findings are stated verbally, not numerically, by describing in detail observations made of individuals in a school setting in order that educators and school leaders can discuss possible implications. The descriptive and detailed information gleaned is often missing from quantitative studies (Glickman, 2014). A qualitative approach is used to deeply examine teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions of engagement practices relative to teacher self-efficacy. The purpose of the study is to create a viable action plan to strengthen student engagement and learning at Baypoint Elementary.

**Ethical Considerations**

A consideration of ethics is critical when conducting any research study. To reduce the risk to subjects of the study, confidentiality was guaranteed and the data collected did not have any components to identify the individual. The statements below are the Ethics Decalogue of the
qualitative researcher. The researcher interpreted data as objectively and honestly as possible without any manipulation to influence possible outcomes. The researcher only used information gained from informants under the exact protocols set in writing and signed by the informants to ensure understanding. The researcher ensured that the informants’ information was guarded for no one to identify them or the information they provided through the process. The researcher avoided closeness with participants and informants to ensure the researcher did not cross the line of professionalism. Additionally, the researcher respected them as professionals when interacting with them and respected their time. Finally, the researcher utilized effective communication when interacting with informants to be professional, respectful, and polite. In planning the qualitative research study, the researcher adhered to the following ethical standards as identified by the American Psychological Association (1982).

1. The researcher made a careful evaluation of the ethical acceptability of the study, including approval by the institutional IRB.
2. The researcher considered whether or not the study placed any subjects at risk.
3. The researcher retained the responsibility of ensuring ethical practice in research.
4. The researcher established a clear and fair agreement with the research participants.
5. The researcher protected the participants from mental and physical harm, discomfort or danger. If and when the researcher recognized undesirable consequences for the individual, the researcher removed or corrected the consequences.
6. The researcher provided the participant with information on the nature of the study in advance of participation.

**Context for the Study**

For this qualitative study, the researcher took into consideration several setting options; however, finally selecting Baypoint Elementary as the setting to observe and analyze student
engagement. In an effort to clearly depict the study details, a graphic is shown below that includes key components to answer the three research questions of the study.

**Strategic Action Research Plan: Leadership for Student Engagement**

![Diagram of strategic action research plan]

Figure 3. Action Research Study Plan.

**Site Location**

Baypoint Elementary is a 25+ year old public elementary school located in an upper middle-class suburb of a large city. Values of the homes in the area are tightly interconnected to the overall academic performance of the schools. This high average performing school has a total population of nearly 700 students comprised of 71% Caucasian, 9% African American, 8% Asian, 8% Hispanic, and 4% Multiracial. Two percent of the students do not use English as their native language. Eight percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. Over 25% of the students are gifted and 15% are students with disabilities. There is a total of 80 highly qualified
professional staff. Transiency is often a concern of schools within large districts. Transiency is not a concern for Baypoint Elementary as most residents move into the area and remain throughout their student’s school career. Historically, performance for the school over the years has been one of high performance until more recently with the change of the state test, the influx of House Bill 251 transfer students, and an increase in the number of students with disabilities. Within the last three years, academic ratings at the school have waned, so there are opportunities for growth. It is the desire of the researcher, through this study, to identify practices that will assist Baypoint Elementary increase its academic performance.

**Participants**

Creswell (2010) stated the selection of participants in a qualitative study does not have to be done through random selection; rather the researcher may handle the selection within the context that is available. Participants were not selected based on any sort of random sampling method as generalization was not an objective of this qualitative research. Instead, the sample was selected in order “to discover, understand, and gain insight” (Merriam, 2009, p. 61) regarding the phenomena of student engagement in qualitative research. The researcher considered Creswell’s statement when selecting the nine participants for this study. Seven of the participants were fourth and fifth grade teachers at Baypoint Elementary. The years of experience for the seven teachers span from four to 21 years of teaching. Two of the additional participants were the school principal and assistant principal and their experience ranges from 18 to over 25 years. The assistant principal has four years of leadership while the school principal has 13. Because the researcher has noted a decline in student engagement, particularly in the intermediate grades, the teachers selected for the study are all intermediate. The researcher observed mathematics in each of the seven teachers’ classrooms.
Teacher similarities were limited to only the grade level in which they teach and are noted in the letter seeking volunteers. Seidman (2006) identifies two criteria that should be monitored to ensure enough participants are in a qualitative study: sufficiency and the amount of information presented. The number of participants participating in this research study was small, and participants had similar grade level experience, since the nine participants will included two fourth grade teachers, five fifth grade teachers, and two administrators. As noted by Patton (2002), small case studies can be adequate for a qualitative study if a plethora of information can be obtained and analyzed. The number of participants at Baypoint Elementary involved within this qualitative study were sufficient to provide ample evidence involving leadership for student engagement.

Data Collection

The primary objective of qualitative research, specifically action research, is to produce viable data from a variety of sources. In this particular study, the primary objective was to produce data for school leaders to analyze, reflect, create an action plan, reflect, and modify to plan professional learning to grow teacher capacity and impact student engagement (Glickman, 2014). According to Creswell (2003), in a qualitative study, data is collected from a group of people who have experienced a phenomenon. For this study, three types of data were collected to include semi-structured interviews, observations, and questionnaires to better understand the participants understanding of the phenomena of student engagement. Stake (2010) noted that comparing how data interlinks to one another within the school context will increase the researcher’s understanding of the data collected. An Anticipated Reduction Chart referenced below in Figure 4 guided the researcher through the data collection.
Figure 4. Anticipated Data Reduction for Student Engagement at Baypoint Elementary

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews conducted with the teachers reflecting their comprehension of student engagement and self-efficacy related to student engagement. Yin (2009) states that using different data sources of evidence is one of the strengths of data collection. Seidman (2006) states, “If a researcher’s goal is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (p. 4). The interviews were conducted by meeting with the teachers in person and asking semi-structured questions relating to self-efficacy; their knowledge of the three student engagement domains (cognitive, affective, and behavioral); and how the school leader impacts teachers’ self-efficacy. Framing questions for
conducting the interview corresponded with the research questions and were aligned with the action research process. The interviews were semi-structured in that the questions were able to be modified or expanded upon in response to the answers of the teachers so that the interview takes on a conversational tone (See Appendix D). Follow-up questions were asked as needed for clarification or to extend the understanding of the question. The interview session was recorded to allow for a detailed account of the interview and took between 20-40 minutes. The interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient time and location. Patton (2002) states that interviews can be used to explain an individual’s experiences with their context, their opinions about various topics, and their knowledge. Prior to the in-person interview, the researcher emailed the interview questions to the teachers so that the actual interview was less threatening (Merriam, 1998). In a qualitative study, it is not essential for interviews to be identical; rather they serve as opportunities to learn something important about the phenomena from every participant (Vagle, 2016). Qualitative study interviews rely on the assumption that “there is structure and essence to share experiences that can be narrated” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 148) and it is expected to enable the interpretation of the phenomena when the participants share their thoughts. Baypoint Elementary teachers provided valuable insight through their interviews to better understand the depth of student engagement and the many factors contributing to high engagement.

Observations

Unobtrusive observations were conducted to collect supporting evidence to the seven teachers’ interviews and questionnaires. The purpose of these observations was to observe the seven teachers’ classes for evidence of student engagement as set by the Student Engagement Teacher Handbook (International Center for Educational Leadership, 2009). The researcher used data which was observed and heard. It was important for the researcher to take detailed notes while observing to grasp the essence of what was transpiring within the classroom and
instructional activity (Creswell, 2003). The researcher used the observations to gather evidence to support the three areas of student engagement: cognitive, behavioral, and affective. To increase credibility and reliability, the researcher utilized classroom observations, checklist protocols, and documented descriptive notes of what was observed in the classroom regarding engagement levels of students and instructional practices utilized (See Appendix F).

**Questionnaires**

Additionally, to acquire a broader range of varied insights, the researcher gathered data by utilizing a questionnaire about teacher self-efficacy related to student engagement to help gain a better understanding of the types of challenges teachers face as they work to engage students in the classroom within the three dimensions of engagement (affective, behavioral, and cognitive) (See Appendix E). Questionnaires are usually paper based or may be delivered online and consist of questions which all participants are asked to complete. The researcher developed questions revolving around the three dimensions of student engagement and adapted questions from *Bandura’s Self Efficacy Questionnaire* (Bandura, 2006). The combination of data sources the researcher used has been noted by Merriam (2009) as adding validity to the study. The questionnaires further added rich information concerning teachers’ perceptions of their self-efficacy related to student engagement and assisted in triangulating the data for the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the qualitative approach was analyzed in an ongoing basis using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This non-mathematical analysis process was used to guide the researcher through identifying themes and patterns within the four data sources collected (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Atlas.ti, a data analysis computer program, provided the researcher with the means to code and analyze each individual data source for
emerging themes and patterns. The data sources collected were organized by date, data collection method, and grade level to assist the researcher in the comparative method.

There were a total of three primary data sources used for analysis: teacher and school leader semi-structured interviews, a teacher self-efficacy questionnaire, and a classroom observation checklist and notes. Since this study is a case study approach, the researcher used all of the data collected during the study. In order to evaluate the perception of teachers’ knowledge of student engagement and teachers’ confidence levels with which they can effectively select and utilize teaching practices to engage their students better, the researcher conducted teacher and school leader interviews, classroom observations, and provided teacher questionnaires. The researcher observed the students involved in a math lesson in seven intermediate classrooms. The researcher interviewed seven intermediate teachers and two school leaders to gather information on their understanding and perception of student engagement and their own self-efficacy related to student engagement. The teacher and leader interviews were triangulated to classroom observations to determine if there were correlations or disparities between their perceptions of student engagement and what was actually observed in the classroom. Once data was collected through the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and observations, the data was further analyzed.

The qualitative data from all three data sources were entered into Atlas.ti to electronically code for themes within multiple qualitative data sources. For this research study, the mode for analysis was a Hermeneutic Unit (HU), a skeletal structure defined as the science of interpreting text empirically (Atlas.ti, 2017). The coding, themes, and data reports were used to draw conclusions about student engagement in intermediate grades. After the data reduction process was completed, triangulation of data analysis was made to ensure the same themes were found in all primary resources collected for this study.
In order to analyze the data, all data was prepared and the interviews with the seven teachers and two school leaders were transcribed. The researcher read each response thoroughly and returned the transcriptions to interviewees for member checking. After each teacher and leader verified the accuracy of the transcribed notes, the researcher identified some preliminary codes and themes to begin grouping the information into categories. At the completion of this step of the process, the transcriptions were uploaded to Atlas.ti and coded, additional themes emerged to assist in disaggregating the data further, and relevant quotations were highlighted to support themes. Due to having a minimal amount of interview responses within this study, there was not extensive information gained; however, there was enough consistency within the interviews to indicate several consistent themes.

Observation checklists with notes were the second data source analyzed and their purpose was to observe instructional practices. The researcher began by entering the checklist data from the three engagement levels into Excel item-by-item which were broken down into a Likert-type scale (very high, high, medium, low, and very low) within the three engagement levels (See appendix F) (Jones, 2009). The researcher converted the descriptions into a one to five scale to manipulate into Excel. Next, the researcher dissected the scores to identify the student engagement domains of strength and areas of weakness to correlate with other data sources and demographics later in the analysis. After the general disaggregating of data in Excel, the researcher uploaded the observation checklists and notes to Atlas.ti and coded by domains of engagement in conjunction with the student engagement level. The information gleaned from Atlas.ti queries with reference to the observations were rich in descriptive data.

The third data source was the teacher efficacy questionnaire relating to student engagement. The teacher efficacy questionnaire was designed to better understand the things that create difficulty for teachers as they work to engage students in their classroom. The
questionnaires were initially analyzed through the use of Excel as the questionnaire was set up into a Likert-type scale (Cannot do at all, Low ability can do, Moderately can do, and Highly certain can do) (See Appendix E). The descriptions on the questionnaire were assigned a zero to five scale and the researcher used the zero to five ratings to enter into Excel. The researcher studied the scores to identify the teachers’ perceptions of their own areas of strength and weakness taking into consideration the three student engagement domains. After disaggregation of data in Excel, the researcher uploaded the teacher efficacy questionnaires to Atlas.ti and coded by domains of engagement in conjunction with the student engagement level. Thus, the information ascertained through the data screening in Excel and Atlas.ti assisted later in analysis to triangulate data and identify overall areas of focus for professional learning within student engagement.

The researcher began this research process by examining educational literature studies from approximately 100 peer reviewed articles and/or studies. The themes which emerged from the scholarly readings provided strong background knowledge to the researcher. The themes which emerged from the research study noted and supported many of the themes ascertained from the primary data sources and were uploaded into Atlas.ti to analyze along with the interviews, questionnaires, and observations. To begin data analysis, the data was collected in the format of seven observations, seven questionnaires, and nine interviews. A matrix was created to look at all components of the research to organize and focus the data. The researcher utilized the information from the matrix to answer questions and compare data. Data reduction was completed to develop a process for data analysis in place. Through this analysis process, the research questions, case, issues, topics, information questions, and category analysis began.

The researcher’s reflections after reading the professional literature lead to identification of the following themes which most likely were identified during analysis period: relationships,
environment, emotions, active learning, classroom practices, motivation, self-efficacy, and dimensions of engagement. After coding all interviews, observations, questionnaires, and key articles, additional themes emerged. Additional themes found increased triangulation across all data sources in order to determine factors that contribute to high levels of student engagement, engagement areas, and instructional practices where there are weaknesses and strengths. To further the extent of data analysis, memos were added within Atlas.ti to note duly high, average, and low levels of learning taking place within the articles, observations, and interviews. This took the analysis to an even higher level than just triangulating factors that impact active student engagement. Stake (2010) provided structure for color-coding themes and how to analyze for common patterns, similarities, and differences. To help ensure reliability of the data, the themes were coded according to the data source and participant. To assist further, a table was created around the themes and codes to illustrate frequency and the varied data sources (See Table 2).

**Strategies for Trustworthiness**

Researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term *trustworthiness* to explain credibility, reliability, and dependability in qualitative research. These authors posit that trustworthiness of a study is key to evaluating its value and credibility is the assurance in the truth of the findings. Dependability relates to depicting that the findings are consistent and could be repeated. Confirmability is also vital according to Lincoln and Guba for a degree of objectivity or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias. Both authors suggest using a variety of methods for improving the probability that findings and interpretations are trustworthy. Within this case study, there were three recognized independent checkpoints, including dissertation committee members, participant review, and peer review. Through these checkpoints, credibility and accurate representation of data was safeguarded. The three data sources; interviews, observations, and questionnaires assisted in answering the three
research questions and how the researcher could identify relative leadership characteristics, educational factors, and practices conducive to student engagement. Arrangement of the data collection sources correlated with the research questions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

**Summary of Data Collection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collection Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?</td>
<td>Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink to high levels of student achievement?</td>
<td>Interviews, Questionnaires, Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational practices contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?</td>
<td>Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study was conducted from December 2017-March 2018. Arrangement of the findings follow this time line. An arrangement of the steps and timeline is summarized in Table 3.
Table 3

*Timeline for Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified parameters for the study</td>
<td>July 2017-September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed interview questions</td>
<td>July 2017-September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised interview questions</td>
<td>October 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identified participants</td>
<td>November 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of Kennesaw State Univ. IRB</td>
<td>November 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of School District Review Board</td>
<td>November 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed release forms of participants</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers completed questionnaires</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzed data of questionnaires</td>
<td>February 2018-March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted classroom observations</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzed data of observations</td>
<td>February 2018-March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted interviews</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribed interviews</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzed data of interviews</td>
<td>February 2018-March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validated results with participants</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulated data results</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed final draft of report</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed final report</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This qualitative study was underpinned by social constructivist theory, which states that knowledge is socially constructed and is changeable. Qualitative research that is based upon social constructivism will be impacted and influenced by the perspectives, knowledge, and beliefs of the researcher as well as those of the participants (Merriam, 2009). To build validity and transferability of the data, multiple forms of data have been used for triangulation, an online
coding program called Atlas.ti has been utilized during data analysis, and other strategies to ensure trustworthiness were incorporated that will be outlined in the following sections.

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, time was taken to create strategies to assure credibility, reliability, and validity (Creswell, 2013), as described in the sections below. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose, “In the final analysis, the study is for naught if its trustworthiness is questionable” (p. 287). The qualitative researcher in efforts to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected took additional effort to fortify the information through utilizing three data sources; thus delivered a plethora of information for analysis.

For credibility, the researcher triangulated methods, informants, information, and moments of time. To ensure validity, the findings must be believable, consistent, and credible if the researcher wants the findings to be useful. Validity is considered when designing research questions for a study and thus the questions need to be direct without being vague to maximize the validity. Additionally, by triangulating data, the researcher further substantiated the findings (Stake, 1995, 2010). Dependability and confirmability were also a priority during a study and were supported by external audits, providing a strong audit trail of reports and diagrams, utilizing a well-organized Anticipated Data Reduction Chart, triangulation of information, and detailed methodology description where all methods used were noted and the protocols for each (Creswell, 2013). Consistency can be thought of as reliability. Merriam (1998) describes reliability as being the extent or likelihood to which the researcher’s findings will be found again. That is, the more times the findings of a study can be replicated, the more reliable the phenomena are thought to be. In the social sciences, however, the notion of reliability is challenging. Studying human subjects can vary depending on measurements and observations and thus be problematic in reliability (Merriam, 2009). Through these protocols, the researcher was able to substantiate the results of this qualitative study. Concepts of validity and reliability
must be addressed from the viewpoint of the paradigm out of which the study is being conducted. Validation of findings is a critical component when conducting research to establish credibility of the findings and is seen as a strength of qualitative research. Credibility refers to the key criteria addressed by researchers which is internal validity, where the researcher seeks to ensure that the study measures what is actually planned. Validity denotes the extent the findings of the study can be applied to other circumstances (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, it was critical that the researcher took steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings where the findings were believable, consistent, applicable, and credible for other educators and researchers.

Specific steps or procedures were necessary to ensure the accuracy and consistency of data collection and analysis of qualitative studies. Strategies such as triangulation of the data, peer debriefing, detailed descriptions, field notes, and extended time in the context were utilized (Creswell, 2003). The researcher within this study used triangulation, detailed descriptions, and field notes to build validity and credibility of results. The researcher triangulated a variety of data sources to develop themes and code them accordingly, and used member checking by asking the participants if they agree with the accuracy of the themes that arose through data analysis. The data was entered into Atlas.ti to electronically code for themes within multiple data sources. The coding, themes, and data reports were used to draw conclusions about student engagement in intermediate grades. After the data reduction process was completed, triangulation of data analysis was made to ensure the same themes are found in all primary resources collected for this study. Stake (2010) describes triangulation as revisiting one’s data source to “look again and again, several times” (p. 123). The researcher builds credibility and validation of the study analysis and results through these processes.

As a constructivist researcher, the intent is not to provide findings that are generalizable to a larger population. The strategy is to describe the phenomena so richly that other educators
and educational leaders may draw their own conclusions as to the applicability of any part of this study. Thus, the researcher will attempt to use detailed accounts to assist the reader’s ability to decide when the findings should be transferred into varied circumstances (Merriam, 2002).

This qualitative research study was limited to one suburban elementary school outside a large city; thus the results cannot be totally generalized to other elementary schools. Additionally, this qualitative study focused on a public school and cannot be fully generalized to the private sector schools. Another limitation to mention is the varied circumstances, either positive or negative, of each of the seven teachers which could influence the data collection from the semi-structured interview questions or questionnaires. This limitation is one commonly found within studies. Further limitations include the subjectivity of the researcher’s interpretations of interviews and observations.

Stake (2010) states that for researchers, especially qualitative ones, it is important to learn how to deal with biases and how to seek objectiveness. The researcher within this study recognized and constrained biases, utilized the data, and analyzed with validation (Stake, 2010). Striving to be objective and reveal the data collected to critical viewing for further validation and feedback was a priority for the researcher. If the study were to be replicated, it could have multiple variations of the findings because the data relied on seven teachers’ perceptions and two leaders’ perceptions of student engagement, teacher self-efficacy related to student engagement, and seven observations of students, using a checklist in fourth and fifth grade classrooms. If additional participants were included in this study, results could be impacted while analyzing the data and establishing themes and theories.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the methodology design of the research study. The researcher used the qualitative methodology, specifically a case study approach to explore the phenomena
of student engagement and teacher efficacy as it related to student engagement for future use of school leaders developing an action plan for professional development for their elementary teachers. After observing the disparities between teachers over the years and how they actively engage their students, the researcher, as the educational leader, was compelled to find answers in how to best impact student engagement at Baypoint Elementary. This qualitative study assisted in ascertaining a deep understanding of teachers’ self-efficacy, instructional strategies impacting student engagement, and a focus for the researcher to plan professional development to build teach capacity.

Participants volunteered to be interviewed, observed, and provided responses on a questionnaire to ascertain the information necessary for analysis. Procedures were followed to ensure validity, reliability, and ethical considerations when conducting the study. The researcher then analyzed the data and findings, which will be explained in the following chapters. The results of this study provided valuable information for educational leaders grappling to influence teacher self-efficacy to improve the levels of student engagement in their schools leading to active learning. The methodology of this study was designed to be reliable, credible, trustworthy, and valid while reducing the limitations to the best of the researcher’s ability.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the results of the qualitative study through answering the research questions posed in an effort to ascertain what leadership practices are associated with the development of teacher efficacy leading to student engagement. By using qualitative research, the researcher was able to acquire emergent rather than a tightly prefigured collection of information and to take data obtained from a natural setting to conduct the research and build rapport and credibility with the individuals of the study (Creswell, 2003). Multiple data sources that were interactive and humanistic were utilized and analyzed to acquire the information of leader and teacher perceptions of leadership practices, teacher efficacy, and student engagement at Baypoint Elementary. Interviews, observations, and questionnaires were analyzed through Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis computer program. While examining themes, codes, and quotations, the researcher was able to answer the three research questions and explain the convergence of results and/or the lack of convergence of the varied methods of data collection.

Research Questions

This chapter delves into the findings and analysis of the multiple data sources funneled by the following research questions:

1. How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?

2. How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink with levels of student engagement?
3. How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational factors contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

**Study Participants**

The participants of this study included seven female teachers, one principal, and one assistant principal from Baypoint Elementary. Each participant has access to the student engagement phenomena by means of direct instruction or leadership of intermediate students and teachers within the school; thus, each was able to provide comprehensive and rich perceptions of student engagement. The participants’ profile data was collected including years of teaching leadership experience and advanced degrees acquired. To ensure confidentiality of each participant, the researcher assigned a code to represent each person (See Table 4). Of the 7 responders, only 1 had less than five years teaching experience and 5 of the seven have their master’s degree in an educational field.
### Table 4

**Participant Profile Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Highest College Degree</th>
<th>Years Teaching/Leadership Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>less than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>15 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>15 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>5 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>15 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>5 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>more than 10 years/less than 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>more than 15 years/more than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A biographical statement depicting each of the nine participants’ educational experience, years’ in education, and academic background is included to further clarify members involved in the qualitative study.

Teacher (T1) is a female teacher with less than five years teaching experience who holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education. She has taught fifth grade for four years. Upon graduating from college, she taught kindergarten for a year. This is her first year at Baypoint Elementary. She previously taught at another school in the district.

Teacher (T2) is a female teacher with a Master’s degree and also has a Gifted Endorsement. She has taught both primary and intermediate grades. She currently teaches fifth
grade. She began her career in Massachusetts. She is a veteran teacher with over twenty years of experience.

Teacher (T3) is a moderately experienced female teacher with over 10 years of experience who holds a Master’s degree in Curriculum Instruction and Assessment. She is currently teaching fifth grade. Her teaching experience has been mostly in the intermediate grades. She also has a Science and Gifted Endorsement. She has taught at another elementary school within the district.

Teacher (T4) is a moderately experienced teacher with a Master’s Degree in Elementary Education. Most of her experience has been at Baypoint Elementary. She has taught fifth grade for over 10 years. Additionally, she taught fifth grade for three years at a similar elementary school in the district.

Teacher (T5) is a less experienced teacher with about five years of teaching experience. She does not have any advanced degrees; however, she recently completed her Gifted Endorsement. She held three “supply” teaching positions in the district before becoming a teacher at Baypoint Elementary.

Teacher (T6) is a female veteran teacher with nearly twenty years of experience who holds a Master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She has taught in schools outside of the district that have different demographic profiles from that of Baypoint. She has experience in working at a Title 1 school. This is her first year teaching at Baypoint Elementary.

Teacher (T7) is a less experienced teacher with less than 5 years teaching experience who holds a Master’s degree in Early Childhood Education. She held a paraprofessional position prior to obtaining her first teaching position at Baypoint Elementary. She has taught only in the primary grades, first and second.
Leader (L1), the assistant principal, had a variety of teaching experience prior to becoming an administrator. She taught in primary and intermediate grades. Her teaching experience was in Title 1 schools within the district. She also served as an academic coach in the district. She has been Assistant Principal at Baypoint for four years. She has sixteen total years in education.

Leader (L2), the principal, had a variety of teaching experience both in elementary and middle school. She taught for a total of 16 years and an administrator for 13 years. She has served as a Curriculum Specialist in another state and as an Instruction Lead teacher in the district in which her school resides. She has a total of twenty nine years in education. She has served as principal of Baypoint for six years.

**Results and Analysis**

The primary data sources for the research study were interviews, teacher self-efficacy questionnaires, and teacher observations. Both the self-efficacy questionnaire and the teacher observation checklist contained a Likert-type scale coupled with descriptive narrative to further provide rich, qualitative perspectives. The method of coding involved the data analysis of the research gained through interviews, questionnaires, and observations. All three data sources were uploaded into Atlas.ti for analysis. Themes which developed from the study were examined thoroughly to code within the computer program, Atlas.ti, and the researcher identified descriptive information by reading the transcriptions several times, and then writing detailed memos broken down into subgroups interlinking across all documents. Variations exist in how to code research information; however, the researcher chose to color-code categories and linked text segments to the codes during examination of the data sources. Through the coding process, the researcher generated a thorough description of the environment and participants within the themes and codes, thus designing a detailed account of the information to analyze. Creswell
(2003) expounds, “Analyzing qualitative research is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 190). Through the primary data sources utilized, the researcher was able to prepare the data through transcriptions and uploading all data to Atlas.ti for further analysis.

The final step of the analysis involves the descriptions and themes which are represented in a qualitative narrative and tables to convey the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the interpretations and findings as “the lessons that were learned” (p. 194). These lessons could be the researcher’s personal interpretations enhanced from the researcher’s own culture and context or from the information gleaned from the literature or theories examined (Creswell, 2003).

The following visual (Figure 5) denotes the themes revealed through this case study.
In reference to the three original research questions, a visual is provided to summarize the themes discovered while sifting through the qualitative information. Aligning the research questions with the data sources were the primary focus and the results were reported by structuring this chapter into the three data sources: interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Figure 6 depicts the associations of the research questions, the emerged themes, and codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Coded Clusters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Efficacy</td>
<td>Foster collaboration/PLCs, enthusiasm, experience, high expectations, PD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Practices</td>
<td>Cultivate active learning, hands-on, modeling, OTR, PBL, REAL, SEL, student centered, student choice, technology, varied activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Design job embedded, ongoing, relevant, collaboration/PLC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TKE5</td>
<td>Provide feedback, growth, motivation, PD, suggestions, support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Characteristics</td>
<td>Promote communication, high expectations, relationships, specific feedback, supportive, visible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Engagement</td>
<td>Ensure attitude, belonging, relationships, student interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Engagement</td>
<td>Create attention, classroom management, compliant, disengagement, interactions, participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Engagement</td>
<td>Design high level questions, motivation, relevant, rigorous, student centered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Practices</td>
<td>Plan active learning, hands-on, modeling, OTR, PBL, REAL, SEL, student centered, student choice, technology, varied activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Characteristics</td>
<td>Promote communication, high expectations, relationships, specific feedback, supportive, visible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6. Associations of Research Questions, Emerged Themes, and Codes.

**Interviews**

While examining the primary data source—semi-structured interviews—the researcher sought to examine principal and teacher perceptions of teacher-efficacy and school leadership relating to student engagement as associated with all three research questions. The three research questions addressed how school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement, perceptions of teacher efficacy related to student engagement, and how school leaders’ impact educational factors contributing to student engagement. The interviews established five main themes concomitant with the research questions and each of the seven teachers spoke specifically regarding each theme.
The five themes revealed in association with student engagement were Leadership Characteristics, Teacher Efficacy, Professional Development, Student Engagement Domains, and Teacher Practices. Collectively, these main themes consistently arose throughout each of the interviews with the seven teachers and two principals connecting to student engagement. The theme Leadership Characteristics was clustered with the codes of communication, high expectations, relationships, specific feedback, supportive, and visible. Teacher Efficacy was linked to collaboration and PLCs, enthusiasm, experience, high expectations, and professional development. Professional Development was bundled with the codes being job embedded, ongoing, relevant, collaboration and PLCs. The theme Student Engagement Domains were broken into Affective, Behavioral, and Cognitive. From those three domains each had a cluster of codes relating to each as noted in (Figure 6). The last theme was Teacher Practices and interrelated with active learning, hand-on, modeling, OTR, PBL, REAL, SEL, student centered, student choice, technology, and other activities. The findings discovered through the teacher and leader interviews for each of these themes will be shared.

**Leadership characteristics.**

*Feedback.*

When teachers were asked their perceptions of how school leaders influence student engagement and impact instructional practice, teacher responses indicated that the leadership practice most influential on teacher efficacy and student engagement is specific feedback. Feedback through informal and formal walkthroughs are paramount when reflective notes are left by principals or written within the TKES portal. Additional noteworthy leadership practices highlighted in the Baypoint Elementary teacher interviews that influence teacher efficacy and student engagement were leaders being visible/approachable, providing collaboration/PLCs, and providing relevant professional development.
Baypoint teachers expound that the significance of principal feedback influenced their teacher efficacy and assisted with their growth. One teacher (T4) stated, “I am someone who appreciates feedback because it helps me to improve my teaching and you (principal) help me to see my lessons from a different perspective.” Another teacher (T3) mentioned:

We trust your feedback, you (principals) have a different lens than we do, and it is not a generic statement, like I love that. The more specific your feedback the better, I can reflect and understand how to improve and engage my students.

Words of affirmation were also mentioned as improving teacher efficacy. Another teacher (T4) shared, “You guys (principals) are great about leaving little notes to share strengths you noticed and things for us to work on.” In regards to the new teacher evaluation system, TKES, teachers welcome principals in the classrooms and view their visits as a tool to improve their teaching. A teacher with only five years of experience (T7) expressed, “TKES has helped me a lot, because you come in all of the time…we started using TKES my first year and I like the feedback in all the different areas of teaching. Feedback is important to improve my teaching.” Similarly, the most experienced teacher participant (T2) explained:

I like when you give me specific feedback after an observation; it provides me a good picture of how effective my instruction is within my classroom from another point of view and helps me hone in on details I might want to change, or things that I am encouraged to continue.

Baypoint Elementary’s school administrators also expressed the importance of specific feedback when developing teacher capacity to improve student engagement. One assistant principal (L2) noted, “I do love to give positive feedback notes which I leave on teacher desks after I visit classrooms...but also, in their evaluations, and TKES portal. I believe it affirms their effectiveness and areas for growth.” Principal (L1) thought that giving verbal and written
feedback facilitated the growth of teachers along with creating a positive culture. She stated, “Teachers are always looking how to improve their craft, so we spend a lot of time in the classrooms every week to be supportive, give feedback, and to foster a positive school climate.” Teacher observations do not solely rely upon the observation of teachers to truly identify/evaluate student engagement. Principals must observe and question students. As assistant principal (L2) explained:

It is important to interact with the students when visiting the classrooms to see if they are engaged and to what extent. We learn a lot from asking deep questions to the students about what they are learning and why. Then, we leave notes to share our perceptions with the teachers.

*Relationships and supportive.*

Success of an organization is often described as “starting at the top.” The administration should strive to seek sustainable relationships with teachers and staff. Another key component of any school is for principals maintaining an approachable style, which is imperative to develop a positive culture. Providing teachers with the autonomy and flexibility to take risks to try new things fosters positive relationships with school leaders. Several teachers mention how Baypoint’s principals make a point to be supportive and build relationships with them. Teacher (T6) stated, “Principals who are available to talk and who come in and leave notes makes us (teachers) feel supported. I like to hear your side of what you see in my classroom and talk with you about concerns and you listen. Just to build that relationship with you (principals) is good.” Another teacher concurred with the importance of receiving support at school. Teacher (T7) expressed, “You guys are great at supporting us all the time. You have relationships with us and the students, which helps because we know you care about us doing well.” Teacher (T1) agreed, “We are encouraged to try different things or out of the box things, which I think is great. Just
having that support.” Several other teachers shared their words of affirmation relating to support from Baypoint leaders. Teacher (T1) said, “I have gotten a lot of support from all the administration. I feel comfortable to say I have tried X, Y, and Z can you help me?” Teacher (T3) expressed, “I think just your (principals) constant encouragement to remind us that the academics are important and you are there for us to help with professional development or anything we need.”

Principals of Baypoint when interviewed announced their priority of building strong relationships with teachers and students. Through healthy relationships, the school leaders believe they get to know their teachers better; thus, can provide better support. One principal (L2) explained,

I think knowing our teachers and students is the foundation for all we do at school. If people know you care, then they will rise to any challenge and push themselves to be their best. If I model building relationships, my hope is that teachers will do the same with their students.

The other principal (L1) responded, “I want the teachers and staff to see I am always available for them regardless of the time. My door is open for anyone to stop by and I frequently check my emails to see if anyone has a concern or issue for me to help them through.”

Visible.

Visibility of administration was referenced by a number of Baypoint teachers during the interviews as being instrumental in validating their work as well as monitoring instructional practices. Some teachers also suggested that the visibility of the principals conveys to students and teachers that their work is valuable. Teacher (T5) voiced, “You (principals) are in our classrooms often and I and the students appreciate you finding it important to see what
instruction and learning is taking place.” Another teacher (T2) concurred and shared, “When you (principals) stop by our classrooms the kids get excited, because you (principals) want to talk to them and see what they are learning. It is important to them and me.” Teacher (T7) agreed, “I love seeing you (principals) guys around the building and having you come into our classrooms, so you know what is going on with our teaching.”

Baypoint Elementary’s school leaders also communicated the significance of visiting all classrooms and walking the building to foster relevant and rigorous instruction for student engagement. One principal (L2) posits:

I think being visible in the classrooms is important on two levels, one for our teachers to see that we are monitoring what we expect of them and knowing that they need to run a tight ship, per se, because we are in and out of the classrooms, and we are around the building. We (principals) do have high expectations for time on task and being in the classrooms we can see it in action.

Similarly, the other principal (L1) expressed,

The teachers see me and thus they see I value everything they do within the school. As I walk the building and the classrooms, I am interacting with students and teachers on a regular basis. When I am in the classrooms, I like to talk with students to see if they can elaborate on the skill being taught.

**Teacher efficacy.**

**Collaboration.**

In the interviews, the teacher perceptions regarding the most influential elements impacting teacher capacity at Baypoint Elementary were collaboration and PLC teams followed by germane professional development. The two coupled together aid in significantly strengthening the ability of teachers to engage students. Collaboration was revealed in the
interviews two times more frequently than other types of professional development.

Collaborating with other schools and teachers influences teacher efficacy. One teacher (T4) stated that she “values professional learning with other schools and enjoys being able to go and talk to other teachers who teach the same grade and observe lessons being modeled.”

Teacher (T2) shared:

I think it helps me grow as a teacher when you (principals) highlight different teachers at staff meetings when they spotlight strategies and activities they use or when you show short teacher videos. Also, just having time to meet with teachers and my team to having on-going conversations about what we have seen in classrooms and set goals together supports me as a teacher is continually learning.

Teacher (T3) expounded, “how encouraging it was this year for you (principals) to foster fifth grade teachers to work closely with fourth grade so that we are more cohesive with our curriculum and instruction and has helped us all be more knowledgeable. It also ensured there was no overlapping of curriculum.” Teacher (T7) voiced:

We (teachers) have high expectations for ourselves and TKES has helped me to know specifically what areas I am strong in and what areas I need to grow in to be a better teacher. The responses you (principals) leave in TKES definitely help us to understand how to have an academically challenging environment. So, you (principals) and I both have high expectations for me to continue to improve.

Teacher (T1) communicated:

I think it is an intrinsic motivation thing to push myself to learn new ways to teach and motivate students. It’s my goal to figure out what works for students instructionally and with their behavior. I think about this frequently and I like to collaborate with my team
about new ways to teach. It is my personality to constantly reflect and figure out how I can change students’ behaviors that are making them disengaged.

The school leaders at Baypoint Elementary noted in their interviews that professional development to build teacher capacity for engagement must be relevant, ongoing, and collaborative. Both principals acknowledged that teacher capacity varies based upon experience, knowledge, and interest in specific content areas. Assessing the professional learning needs of teachers ensures that professional development is relevant and authentic. Principal (L1) suggested, “The importance of assessing to see where the needs are by asking teachers for input and taking into account principal observations are essential in making professional development meaningful.” The assistant principal (L2) commented:

Our collaborative teams meet weekly to discuss student data and instructional strategies that impact student learning. The teachers discuss ideas and best practices, benefiting all teachers on the team. Also, our Building Leadership Team meets monthly to discuss professional learning taking place at our school and reflects on how it working.”

**Professional development.**

**On-going and relevant.**

Professional development was highlighted by several staff members as having the greatest influence on teacher pedagogy. It was clear based upon interview responses that teachers appreciate professional development opportunities. They value time to collaborate with one another as well as other professionals within the district. Assessing the needs of teachers is necessary to ensure that professional development is personalized and relevant.

Teacher (T1) elaborated, “I like how there are always opportunities for us (teachers) to attend professional development we want to go to, we just have to ask. I feel 100 percent
comfortable coming to you (principals) if I want to attend any conference or training and you will say yes.”

Teacher (T7) expounded, “professional development comes in when we need to learn more about areas where we need to grow like cognitive strategies and making it work for students. I struggle with including high level learning.” Teacher (T2) explained, “I like to continue my learning, because I know I have more to learn about getting students into their learning. I also appreciate just having extra time talking with teammates and other types of teachers.”

Teacher (T4) stated:

I like how you (principals) are doing professional learning by having us go to Advanced Content trainings that are provided by the county where they always make sure we have what we need, having our teams meet with the writing coach to help us with the writing program from the county, and you (principals) always give us time throughout the year to collaborate with our team about STEM lessons and sharing instructional ideas.

Leader (L1) posits:

Some teachers come with a lot more background knowledge and instructional strategies. When we are in the classrooms it is our job to identify areas of weakness and strengths to plan differentiated professional development to improve their skill set. Providing professional development that is relevant to the teachers is essential; therefore, we (principals) include a variety of professional learning experiences where teacher leaders from our school and other schools within the district present their best practices, writing coach, and county specialists all deliver an array of professional development for our teachers.

Leader (L2) responded:
The challenge we (principals) have with planning professional learning for our teachers is that we need to look at the training for long-term (more than one year) to ensure the practices learned are transferred into the classroom. Another challenge, is that we (principals) hear from teachers after trainings are they do not have time for the hands-on/relevant learning every day. We (principals) need to figure out a plan on how teachers can efficiently and effectively infuse more rigor into their daily lessons.

**Student engagement.**

When filtering through this research study’s interview descriptive data, additional themes and codes emerged regarding student engagement to include affective, cognitive, behavioral engagement, and specific contextual variables within engagement (See Figure 6). Several of the noteworthy Affective codes were attitude, belonging, relationships, and student interests; Cognitive codes were high level questioning, motivation, relevant task, rigorous task, and student centered; and Behavioral codes were attention, classroom management, compliant, disengagement, participation, and interaction. Acquiring this research data will assist teachers at Baypoint Elementary as specified by Wang et al. (2014) when they expounded on the need for teachers’ attentiveness and decision-making when planning lessons by keeping in mind the three domains of engagement to actively engage students in their learning.

*Affective engagement.*

The interview data revealed all of the teachers at Baypoint Elementary believe developing the affective domain is most important when engaging students. Many of the teachers’ comments reflect the importance of developing relationships, student interests, sense of belonging, and trust. One teacher (T3) expressed this belief by saying, “For me, it's really about relationship building and trust, because learning has to extend from that. If they don't trust you,
there is no relationship and learning is compromised.” The most experienced teacher (T2) vocalized:

I want students to be successful and building relationships is critical to make that happen at school. I want students to feel accepted, trust me, and be comfortable in my class. I think that this motivates the students to participate and engage more frequently.

Obviously, if a student enjoys what they're doing in a structured fun activity and feels happy, they are motivated to do more at school, and that's important to me.

Likewise, one of the least experienced teachers (T7) agreed that the affective domain is critical when trying to engage students and stated, “Having relationships with students helps them feel connected with you and talking to them in the mornings lets you know what their needs may be for the day.”

Engagement is reciprocal and can be determined by school leadership, teachers, and parents. Both principals of Baypoint Elementary envision affective engagement as being the foundation for all three student engagement domains, leading the way to active learning and creating a positive culture. Affective engagement exists in a variety of relationships within the school setting. Relationships exist among teacher-student, student-student, teacher-parent, and school-community. The principals concurred that fostering relationships on multiple levels has a significant impact on student and teacher motivation as it relates to engagement and the cognitive domain.

Principal (L1) elaborated, “Our school and teachers, as a whole, do a great job with affective engagement. They work hard to build relationships, not only with their students, but also with the students' families, and parents.” The assistant principal (L2) further commented on relationships:
I think it's important to build relationships with the teachers, as well as the students. It's essential to build meaningful and lasting relationships with them, since I believe it links to motivating teachers and students in all they do. Having strong relationships, they know I value the importance of them as individuals and it shows.

*Cognitive engagement.*

Additionally, the teachers’ interview data revealed that they consider the cognitive engagement domain to be most challenging for them when designing lessons. Most of the teachers, four out of seven, acknowledged ensuring rigor and relevance with activities for all students, and incorporating student-centered tasks in content areas, are the most difficult aspects of lesson planning.

The teacher interview responses communicated the importance of creating lessons that foster real-life connections allowing students to apply their knowledge. Lessons that require greater concentration are the ones that are more cognitively engaging. As teacher (T5) stated:

There are students who have said that they don't value learning, or it's not as important to them, and that's really hard to work with when I am writing lessons. That is when I try to make even more real-life connections, because we need students to value learning and be motivated to do their best. If they don't value learning, they will not progress.

Another teacher expressed the challenge of differentiating the learning for the varied academic levels to meet their instructional needs. Teacher (T1), a teacher with less experience explained:

I try to make sure there are different types and tiers of work for different levels of students. So my lower-level students are still being challenged, but then maybe my higher students are doing something that's a real-world problem or trying to figure out something that's a little deeper level thinking or a bit more abstract. This is a challenge when planning. How can I engage each group of students at their own level?
Getting students involved in various student centered instructional activities is essential when teachers want to have students cognitively engaged. It is documented that high level learning takes place when teachers are not at the forefront of the learning, students are the center.

Teacher (T4) noted:

Having the students turn and talk with their peers gets them into the lesson where they are retaining more and they discuss and explain what they are learning. I also like to have the students create You tube teaching videos, which makes learning exciting and motivates the students to learn the material so they can teach it to someone. I try to include these strategies as much as possible.”

A less experienced teacher (T7) mentioned, “I like to have my students solve problems and do projects where they find it important and connect to what they are doing. The students look forward to completing these assignments, but these activities take a lot of time though.”

All seven of the teachers pointed out during their interviews how they apply various cognitive engagement strategies such as using hands-on, student centered, collaborative, inquiry based, problem solving activities within their daily instruction. The apprehension is that Baypoint school principals do not observe teachers consistently utilizing cognitive engagement strategies and approaches that increase the cognitive domain of engagement.

School leaders of Baypoint Elementary when interviewed branded cognitive engagement as the primary area for professional growth needed for Baypoint teachers particularly in regards to student goal setting and academic rigor. As assistant principal (L2) noted, “Teachers know what strategies are best to increase active cognitive engagement; however, they struggle to consistently include them into the framework when planning weekly lessons and infusing the active strategies into daily lessons.” Principal (L1) agreed that cognitive engagement is an area of weakness for Baypoint teachers and elaborated, “Our teachers can talk the talk, yet struggle
with walking the walk. When observing in the classrooms, I inconsistently see actively engaged students. Typically, the students are completing workbook pages or simple application tasks. The rigor is lacking.” Delving deeper into the interviews of the principals revealed a growing concern for Baypoint principals on how to provide the necessary professional learning to develop teacher capacity and teacher efficacy, specifically within the cognitive domain. Principal (L1) posits, “It is continually a challenge to find the appropriate professional development for our teachers, because we know what they have deficits in, but struggle with exactly what type of training to provide to foster more relevant learning.”

**Teacher practices.**

There are many best practices and approaches that contribute to an increase in student engagement. While the teachers conveyed knowledge of engagement strategies, they find it difficult to overlap content areas to make learning more meaningful and relevant. Within the same vein, the researcher established while teachers have knowledge of best practices to actively engage students, they do not continually include those effective strategies across all content areas on a daily basis.

As the researcher analyzed the teacher and leader interview data concerning the most effective teacher practices necessary to extend student engagement, the teachers identified instructional practices which were themed and coded as hands-on learning, modeling, student choice, student-centered, varied activities, PBL (Problem Based Learning), REAL (Rich Environment with Active Learning) (Grabinger & Dunlap, 1997), OTR (Opportunities to Respond) (Harbour et al., 2015), and SEL (Social Emotional Learning) (Zins et al., 2004). Although specific strategies were mentioned by all seven of the teachers and two leaders, there was no reference to the specific practices stated above. All seven teachers, in some regard, noted the importance of students being actively engaged in varied, rich, meaningful activities, while
having opportunities to collaborate with one another. The teachers’ beliefs of these powerful practices coincide with researchers.

One experienced teacher (T3) shared:

An important strategy to engage students would be varying teaching strategies to reach all the different learning styles, because there are many students with different learning needs, and making sure that you’re teaching differently to meet their needs, including small group time, team collaboration projects, and technology. Students love for me to change up what I have them doing to show their mastery of knowledge.

As noted researchers and authors have theorized, students need to have social interactions for learning to be internalized and teacher (T5) concurred, remarking, “I think group work is critical. It lets them work, interact together, and learn how to work with others, which is a life skill. This gives students more opportunities to improve critical thinking to get deeper learning.” Teacher (T5) responded to what she considers to be a best practice to engage students:

I think a terrific practice to engage students is the use of technology, in this day and age everything is so technology-based. The students are so savvy with it, and being able to bring that into the classroom, whether it's Adobe Spark, PowerPoint or making a little movie, like Movie Maker to show what they have learned is motivating and interesting to all students.

Another teacher (T4) expressed, “Giving students the opportunity to solve real problems and work collaboratively is necessary within the classroom because much of their lives are spent on devices, so they don’t know how to communicate or think critically.” This teacher communicated she is always looking into her “box of ideas” to find new ways to engage students. Baypoint Elementary’s least experienced teacher (T1) mentioned how student involvement in PBL assists her to engage students when she shared:
When my students found out that our school was actually getting a new playground and their design plans could be brought to the principal and assistant principal to help select the options for the actual playground being built, they ran with it. They were so excited and did not realize all of the math skills they were using in this project.

Another teacher (T7) stated, “Students need hands-on activities where there are various materials and resources to engage students. For example, our STEM projects make learning fun in their eyes.” Table 5 showcases all seven Baypoint teachers’ engagement practices expounded upon within the interviews.

Table 5.

*Individual Teacher Engagement Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1</td>
<td>Build relationships to improve attitude toward school</td>
<td>Change up ways students show their knowledge to keep them focused</td>
<td>Show how learning connects to the real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2</td>
<td>Children need to feel that they belong; need positive mindset of team growth and connectivity</td>
<td>Make learning fun so students want to attend school and participate</td>
<td>Use rubrics and pair talking to look over how tasks are assessed to learn how to improve work/grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3</td>
<td>Meetings in which we discuss how actions affect others so everyone feels comfortable</td>
<td>Regular movement breaks to help students focus</td>
<td>Differentiating class-work to assess current levels and challenge them in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4</td>
<td>Building relationships and learning interests outside school to promote comfort</td>
<td>Being reflective as to how attentive students are during lessons; using their interests when creating activities</td>
<td>Let students choose topics to promote excitement and passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5</td>
<td>Motivating students with choice, groups, or using</td>
<td>Songs or videos before math lesson; teacher</td>
<td>Math choice boards; real-world math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### When making pedagogical decisions school leaders recognize that Baypoint Elementary teachers have knowledge of factors influencing engagement and strategies; yet, the process of how it happens is up to the teachers and the time they spend in ensuring that lessons encompass the three domains of engagement. The school leaders believe that lessons including movement (ie. carousel activity, brain breaks, and centers); student choice of tasks to increase student interest and motivation; and providing rigor and relevance with any assignment is essential in increasing student interest and motivation. Similarly stated, school leader (L2) said, “Our teachers need to provide more opportunities for students to internalize their learning in hands-on activities like STEM projects, not just memorizing content. They need to analyze, synthesize, reflect, and create.” Interweaving student engagement, teacher efficacy, and leadership characteristics, a teacher (T2) stated in the interview, “Feedback is important for me to grow and improve my teaching.” As the researcher, and one of the school leaders at Baypoint Elementary, acquiring the knowledge from the seven intermediate classroom teachers gives powerful perspectives of their areas of strengths and weakness relating to students’ engagement, leadership practices, teacher practices, and needs for professional development.
Observations

While examining the secondary data source, discreet observations during mathematics, the researcher collected supportive qualitative data using an observation checklist adapted from the Student Engagement Teacher Handbook (Jones, 2009) (See appendix F). All seven teachers were observed to ascertain evidence of student engagement instructional practices across the intermediate grades. The research questions referenced during the classroom observations were:

- How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?
- How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational factors contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

The researcher used a Likert-type scale (5 = very high, 4 = high, 3 = medium, 2 = low, and 1 = very low) on the observation checklist (see appendix F) to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers relating to their instructional practices and ability to engage students across all three engagement domains: affective, behavioral, and cognitive (Jones, 2009). The researcher checked the appropriate level of engagement for each of the three domains: Affective domain within the four categories of positive body language, fun and excitement, comfort level, and personal connection; Behavioral domain within the three categories of compliant, verbal participation, non-compliance/disengaged; and Cognitive domain within the five categories of individual attention, clarity of learning, meaningfulness of work, rigorous thinking, and performance orientation. The second part of the observation checklist included taking descriptive notes regarding the specifics observed within the mathematics lessons. By taking notes on the observation checklists, the researcher was able to clarify and expound upon the Likert-scale checklist data to analyze and upload into Atlas.ti for further in-depth qualitative analysis by
establishing new themes and codes while using already established ones after analyzing interviews.

Additionally, the researcher uploaded the Likert-scale data into Excel after examining the classroom observation checklists. The data consisted of category-by-category observations of the seven teachers for each of the three student engagement domains. By converting the descriptive scale into a one-to-five scale to manipulate into Excel, data was disaggregated by the three student engagement domains, individual teachers, and the 12 descriptive categories within the three domains. Having observation data with both numerical and descriptive content, the researcher was able to discern a more comprehensive illustration of the classroom observation. The scoring for the observation instrument resulted in identifying the strengths and weaknesses for each of the seven intermediate teachers within the three domains, and more specifically, the 12 categories within the domains. With this copious data, the researcher (school principal) was able to distinguish the observed domains and factors to determine where differentiated professional learning is needed to enhance student engagement.

After data analysis, the researcher concluded all seven teachers were able to moderately engage students within all three student engagement domains (See Figure 7). The domain where the seven teachers lacked ability to ensure engagement was within the cognitive domain. The highest domain for student engagement was the affective domain recorded at 3.68, a moderate to high average rating. The behavioral domain was depicted as the lowest area when viewing the graph; however, one of the sub-categories was disengagement, which skewed the overall rating for that domain. Due to the low level of disengagement within the majority of classrooms, the overall score for the teachers within the sub-category of behavioral was low average, 2.86. Due to the researcher observing disengagement to be low level, the overall rating for the behavioral domain was skewed (a false positive). With that being said, the researcher recalculated the overall
average for the domain excluding disengagement which resulted in it remaining the lowest of the three domains. To begin to address the minutia of the domains observed, the researcher will delve into each one individually and elaborate on individual teachers’ observations.

In reviewing the classroom observations, the data and anecdotal notes indicate the need for the most support is within the behavioral domain, B2—*verbal participation*—where teachers provide opportunities for students to express thoughtful ideas, reflect on answers, and ask questions relevant to content.

Within the cognitive domain, C5, *performance orientation* was the overall lowest sub-category with a score of 3.43, falling within the medium ability on the one to five scale (See Figure 8). This sub-category relates to student understanding of what quality work is, the criteria for evaluation, and how the work will be assessed. When the researcher interacted with the students, many could not communicate the purpose of the activity or how the teacher would grade the assignment. For clear expectations, students need to have an understanding of

![Figure 7. Group Averages for Classroom Observations](image-url)

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cognitive engagement and the teacher needs to convey the purpose of the activity—how it is meaningful and relevant. This is one way students will be able to be academically successful.

When observing, the highest sub-category within the cognitive domain was C3, *meaningfulness of work*, with an average of 4.00, which is high engagement as noted on the observation checklist. Four of the seven teachers had students who, when asked, were able to articulate the meaningfulness of their work at high to very high levels; the other three teachers had a moderate amount of students who communicated the work was interesting, challenging, and relevant. The other three sub-categories remained at the moderate level averaging 3.29: C1, *individual attention* where students asked questions and responded to discussions, 3.29 for C2, *clarity of learning* where students are able to describe the purpose of the lesson or task and 3.43 for C4, *rigorous thinking* where students work on complex problems, create original solutions, and reflect on the quality of their work. The individualized accounts of each observation for all seven teachers are disclosed below (See Table 6).

![Cognitive Engagement Observation](image)

**Figure 8. Classroom Observations for Cognitive Engagement**
Table 6.

*Individual Teacher Observation Results for Cognitive Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
<th>C5</th>
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Within the affective domain, the highest sub-category was A3, *comfort level* with an average of 4.00 = high level (See Figure 9). The students felt comfortable to seek help and ask questions. Five out of the seven teachers scored very high in this sub-category due to the positive comfort level of the students. The lowest results within the sub-categories were A1, *body language* of the students, calculated at 3.29 = medium ability. The second highest sub-category was 3.86, A4, *personal connection*, where students have choice in how they demonstrate their learning. The third highest sub-category was 3.57, A2, *fun and excitement*, where students exhibit interest and enthusiasm and self-assurance. The individualized summary of all seven teachers are disclosed below (See Table 7).
Affective Engagement Observation
Avg Score By Sub-Category
(1 = Very Low Ability; 3 = Medium Ability; 5 = Very High Ability)

Figure 9. Classroom Observations for Affective Engagement
Table 7.

*Individual Teacher Observation Results for Affective Engagement*

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The third domain observed was Behavioral, which had three sub-categories. The highest sub-category under behavioral was B1, *compliant* at $3.43 = \text{medium ability}$, where students display focus on learning with limited disruptions (See Figure 10). Four out of seven teachers recorded at a high to very high ability and zero scored at a low level of ability. The lowest depicted on the chart, which is excellent, was the sub-category B3, *disengagement* where four of the seven teachers’ results showed very low disengagement. The third sub-category was B2, *verbal participation* with an average of $3.14 = \text{medium ability}$, where students expressed thoughtful ideas, reflective answers, and questions relevant or appropriate to learning. The individualized summary of all seven teachers are represented below (See Table 8).
Table 8.

*Individual Teacher Observation Results for Behavioral Engagement*

<table>
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<tr>
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Questionnaires

The third data source utilized by the researcher was a teacher self-efficacy questionnaire given to participants in hard copy for teachers to reflect on their perceptions of self-efficacy related to student engagement (See Appendix E). The researcher used the teacher efficacy questionnaire to ascertain descriptive statistics to better understand the teachers’ perceptions of what factors create difficulty for them as they strive to engage students in the classroom. The teachers rated how certain they were that they could do the statements, which were divided into the three engagement domains. The descriptive statements were assigned a zero to five scale within a Likert-type scale (Cannot do at all = 0, low ability can do = 1, moderately can do = 3, highly certain can do = 5). All seven teachers rated their degree of confidence by recording a number from zero to five using the scale. The researcher used the original three research questions to guide the analysis of the questionnaires.

- How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?
- How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink to high levels of student engagement?
- How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational practices contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

The researcher used the Likert-type scale on the questionnaire to elicit the teachers’ perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses involving their practices and ability to engage their students across all three engagement domains: affective, behavioral, and cognitive (Bandura, 2006).

The seven teachers rated themselves within each of the three domains on the questionnaire. The Affective Domain had eight efficacy statements, where teachers rated their comfort levels in getting students to value work, getting them motivated, getting them to value
learning, motivating students to show interest in work, getting students to believe they can do well on work, building caring relationships with students, connecting learning to personal interests, helping students feel accepted in the classroom, ensuring students feel enthusiasm and assurance they can be successful, and providing student choice in the classroom. The Behavioral Domain had eight efficacy statements: establishing effective classroom management, addressing behavior, controlling disruptions, getting students to follow classroom routines, sustaining student focus on assignments, providing appropriate consequences for misbehavior, and identifying the cause of student misbehavior. The Cognitive Domain had eight efficacy statements: crafting good questions, using a variety of assessments, providing alternative explanation or support when needed, implementing alternative strategies, impacting student focus and attention, ensuring quality work, teaching meta-cognitive strategies, and influencing critical thinking and problem solving (Bandura, 2006).

The researcher uploaded the data into Excel after reviewing the teacher self-efficacy questionnaires. The data consisted of ratings from the three student engagement domains and the eight efficacy statements under each domain. By converting the descriptive scale into a zero to five scale to manipulate into Excel, data was disaggregated by the three student engagement domains, individual teachers, and the 24 descriptive statements contained by the three domains.

The results for the questionnaire instrument revealed the teachers pinpointing their perceived strengths and weaknesses for each of the three student engagement domains, and more specifically, the 24 efficacy statements within the domains. With this numerical and descriptive data, the researcher (school principal) was able to delineate the engagement domains and factors where additional professional development is necessary to build teacher capacity in influencing increased student engagement and attainment of knowledge.
After reviewing the questionnaires, the researcher uploaded the Likert-scale data into Excel. The data consisted of teacher efficacy within the three domains of student engagement. By converting the descriptive scale into a zero-to-five scale to manipulate into Excel, data was disaggregated by the three engagement domains, the 24 descriptive statements within the three domains and by the seven individual teachers. The questionnaires were also uploaded into Atlas.ti where they were themed, coded, and memos were written. This further assisted the researcher in analyzing the data in a qualitative approach.

After data analysis, the researcher determined all seven teachers perceived themselves as moderately capable to use their pedagogy to influence engagement with students within all three student engagement domains (See Figure 11). The cognitive engagement domain was the area that all teachers responded in which they have the least amount of confidence. The behavioral domain was depicted as the second highest in confidence out of the three domains with a calculated average of 3.77, showing moderate to high moderate teacher ability. The domain the teachers perceived as the highest area within their craft was affective with an average of 3.98, a high moderate level of efficacy. To analyze the data further, the researcher studied each of the 24 ratings of the teacher efficacy statements for each of the seven teachers.
The domain where the results depict the least amount of confidence is the cognitive domain and within this domain, C6, *efficacy statement*, ensuring students produce quality work and C7, *teaching students meta-cognitive strategies*, were the overall lowest teacher efficacy areas with a score of 3.29, within the moderate ability on the zero-to-five scale (See Figure 12). Five out of seven of the teachers noted they moderately struggled with encouraging students to produce quality work and two out of the seven acknowledged they have a low level of ability to teach students how to think about their thinking (meta-cognitive thinking). Teachers’ perceptions of their highest efficacy area within the cognitive domain were tied between, C2, *using a variety of assessments* and C3, *providing alternative support* when students are having difficulty, both with averages of 3.86, a high moderate score. With these two cognitive efficacy areas in mind, six out of the seven teachers perceived confidence to provide a variety of assessments to monitor and evaluate student understanding, and five out of seven teachers believed they provide appropriate differentiation and support to students having difficulty with work assignments. The
other four cognitive efficacy areas persisted at the moderate level averaging 3.57 for C1, crafting good questions for students, 3.71 for C4, implementing alternative strategies, 3.57 for C5, impacting students’ focus and attention, and 3.57 for C8, influencing students to think critically and be independent problem-solvers. The summative account of each efficacy questionnaire for all seven teachers are displayed below (See Table 9).

Figure 12. Teacher Self-Efficacy for Cognitive Engagement.
Table 9.

*Individual Teacher Self-Efficacy for Cognitive Engagement*

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| Avg | 3.57 | 3.86 | 3.86 | 3.71 | 3.57 | 3.29 | 3.29 | 3.57 | 3.59 |
| Total Group Average | 3.59 |

The highest area as rated by teachers was affective efficacy, and the highest efficacy area within that domain was A4, *building caring relationships* with students with an average of 4.86, high moderate (See Figure 13). The lowest average was within A2, *motivating students* who show low interest in school work and A7, *ensuring that all students express enthusiasm* and assurance that they can be successful in completing tasks. Five out of the seven teachers felt only moderately proficient influencing students’ passion for learning. When viewing the other five efficacy areas for the affective domain, the outcomes of educator perceptions showed moderately high scores ranging from A1, 3.86, *helping students to value learning*; A3, 4.14, *helping students believe that they can do well*; A5, 4.00, *connecting student learning to student interests*; A6,
4.14, helping students feel accepted; to A8, 4.29, providing student choice. The individualized summary of all seven teachers is shown below (See Table 10).

![Affective Self-Efficacy Questions](image)

**Figure 13. Teacher Self-Efficacy for Affective Engagement.**
Table 10.

*Individual Teacher Self-Efficacy for Affective Engagement*

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Avg 3.86 3.29 4.14 4.86 4.00 4.14 3.29 3.29 3.98

Total Group Average 3.98

The perceptions of the teachers regarding the behavioral engagement domain and the eight sub-categories acclaimed the highest efficacy area under the sub-category B1, *establishing an effective classroom management system*, which yielded a highly moderate average of 4.29; an equivalent was B5 with a score of 4.29, *effective and efficient routines* (See Figure 14). All seven teachers rated as highly confident within these two behavioral efficacy areas. The lowest depicted average on the chart was the efficacy area B6, *teacher being able to sustain student focus on given assignments* with an average of 3.29 = moderately confident. Five out of seven teachers rated their self-assurance in sustaining attention of students on tasks as only “moderately can do.” The second highest efficacy area resulted in a three-way tie between B2,
B3, and B7 with the average being 3.71, a moderately high level of confidence. The teachers felt less confident in calming students when they are upset, controlling disruptive behaviors, and providing consequences for misbehavior. Following only .14 lower than the aforementioned three efficacy areas, B4 and B8 had an average of 3.57 (moderate confidence). The teachers believe they can be moderately successful in getting students to follow rules in the classroom and identify the cause of misbehavior. The individualized results of the seven teachers are represented below (See Table 11).

Figure 14. Teacher Self-Efficacy for Behavioral Engagement.
Table 11.

*Individual Teacher Self-Efficacy for Behavioral Engagement*

<table>
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**Evidence of Quality**

To ensure credibility of the results, the researcher used triangulation of the three data sources: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teacher self-efficacy questionnaires. The researcher compared and recounted the qualitative and numerical data, interpreted the results through the use of Atlas.ti and Excel, and wrote the conclusion of the case study to depict how each source interconnects or in isolation to inform the research questions. Member checking was conducted via personal follow-up questioning after the interviews for each of the nine participants to verify the transcriptions of their interviews. This process allowed for study participants to clarify and offer any additional information after the interviews. After
each of the three data collections, the researcher spent valuable time reviewing responses and deciding on applicable themes, codes, and memos to add in Atlas.ti. To ensure trustworthiness, a rich description of themes, codes and memos were created to account for the totality of data collected. Through the totality of evidence collected through the data collection process, the researcher was able to triangulate the evidence and develop an overall summary to create a viable action plan to increase student engagement for Baypoint Elementary.

Summary

This chapter reveals teachers’ and school leaders’ perceptions and observed knowledge of leadership practices, instructional practices, and factors contributing to student engagement. The results of this qualitative study depict the relationships between school leadership practices, teacher efficacy, pedagogy, teacher evaluation, professional development, and student engagement to impact student learning. An effective school leader recognizes that strong student engagement begins with supportive leadership, confident and knowledgeable teachers, and relevant professional learning. School leaders contribute, support teachers, and make decisions influencing professional learning to develop confident teachers.

Student engagement is a complex construct and it takes the school leaders and teachers collaborating to address the needs and issues and create a viable plan to promote improved student engagement. Both teachers and leaders must work collaboratively to identify gaps in student engagement, which is essential to active learning and overall student achievement. The researcher learned through this study that several factors impact student engagement at the elementary level. Teacher efficacy is directly tied to relevant, job embedded professional development and collaboration with colleagues, while focusing on cognitive engagement practices and having supportive leadership to ensure all are in alignment. The school leaders and Building Leadership Team should be attentive on seeking new methods of teaching and learning,
assessing those methods, and reflecting on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of the team’s decision-making process when moving forward. The collective team, including the school leader, must use the evidence gained to inform and improve instructional practice for engagement (DuFour, 2004). From this collective inquiry, the team then can turn the new knowledge into an action plan.
CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter examines the results of the findings in Chapter 4. There is a summary of the research, discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations for action, further studies, and conclusions. This research study investigated school leaders’ perceptions of how effective their teachers are in engaging students; how leaders can influence improved student engagement; and how teachers perceive their instructional practices, self-efficacy, and overall knowledge of student engagement factors within Baypoint Elementary, a high performing school. Within the last six years, Baypoint has observed a decrease in state test scores by students in the intermediate grades, possibly due to lack of student engagement in rigorous and relevant educational experiences. School leaders of Baypoint are on a quest to make positive strides to increase student engagement and learning. The core of this qualitative study examined in this action research concentrates on seven certified intermediate teachers and two school leaders. As the school leader, I also served as the main researcher in this qualitative, strategically focused action research study.

Research Questions and Answers

Action research is a means by which educators are empowered to actively engage in being reflective practitioners in search of optimal approaches to improve their practices. This qualitative study included two school leaders and seven intermediate teachers within the school context, Baypoint Elementary, an above average performing school situated within a large school district. The study focused on three data sources, including semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teacher self-questionnaires. The researcher observed teachers in all seven of the classrooms during a mathematics lesson using the Student Engagement Observation
Checklist (Jones, 2009), and the teachers answered the self-efficacy questions on the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Bandura, 2006).

The results of this qualitative study encapsulate the interlinking of school leadership, teacher pedagogy, and teacher efficacy all combining collectively to enhance engagement of the students at Baypoint Elementary. Marzano and Pickering (2011) specify that student engagement has long been recognized as the fundamental component of effective education. Engaged students have the skills to work with others and extrapolate knowledge to solve problems (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Fredricks et al. (2011) explains that the school leader has the greatest influence upon teacher efficacy and instructional practices within the school, to ensure that students are actively engaged and reach their full potentials. The data from this qualitative study showcases how leadership qualities and methods, teacher practices, and teacher efficacy collectively coincide to provide rich and pertinent academic experiences where students are challenged to be critical thinkers.

Outcomes of the data analysis found that Baypoint Elementary school leaders perceive their leadership methods and behaviors as fundamental in influencing effective instructional strategies and building teacher capacity for student engagement. Both Bandura (1977) and Vygotsky (1978) attest that learning requires affective methods to teach within a cognitive environment. Teacher perceptions of their own self-efficacy and knowledge of best practices for engagement were rated moderately high; conversely, when school leaders have observed teachers, a deficit with cognitive engagement experiences were sparse. Furthermore, teachers perceive school leaders at Baypoint as offering guidance, support, and opportunities to help them grow as educators to improve engagement. The results illustrate teachers’ apprehensions with how to effectively engage students contained by the cognitive domain.
Research Question #1

How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?

Appleton and Lawrenz (2011) declared that student engagement within the school context relates to educators and school leaders committing, valuing, and connecting with students to build student goals to influence student academic success. In analyzing the data pertaining to principals impacting engagement, the study yielded details through all three data sources: interviews, observations, and questionnaires. The interviews provided direct statements from the teachers and two school leaders regarding how leaders influence engagement. The initial questions focused upon the teachers’ understanding of student engagement through the three domains—affective, behavioral, and cognitive—followed by more in-depth questions regarding the methods which influence each engagement area, how school leader practices contribute to student engagement, and finally how the teacher evaluation instrument, TKES, interlinks with the three domains of engagement.

The teachers were not as clear with the specifics of student engagement, though they could elaborate on leadership practices which help to promote engagement. With regard to specific themes and codes that developed from their comments, teachers highlighted the following practices as being favorable: being supportive, providing specific feedback, being visible, communicating, building relationships, and having high expectations. Being supportive and providing specific feedback were noted the most in the interviews by the teachers. The teachers referenced 64 times how significant it was to have supportive leaders and 37 times how imperative it was to receive specific feedback by written notes, both verbally and written within the TKES evaluation portal. Through these leader characteristics, the teachers verbalized they improve their craft.
To further expound upon how leaders contribute to student engagement at Baypoint Elementary, the teachers elaborated it was necessary to have leaders who provided meaningful professional development that focused on improving instructional practices surrounding what the school expectations are regarding Writing Workshop and STEM. DeMonte (2013) notes professionals around the world are in perpetual educational advancement to extend their knowledge and improve their individual work. After further discussion within the interviews the theme of professional development was broken into codes, including *job-embedded, on-going, relevant,* and *collaborative.* Collaboration and relevancy was illustrated most frequently when speaking of the specific professional development needs of Baypoint Elementary. The teachers referenced collaboration 25 times and relevance 19 times which was more than double of the other codes revealed, thus essential for the school leaders to consider when planning to enhance student engagement.

Principals of Baypoint Elementary concur with the teachers in regards to the importance of school leaders needing to be supportive and visible, and providing feedback and developing relationships. Both the school leaders strive to be compassionate and supportive and they, too, referenced support and visibility 25 times within their interviews. In fact, visibility and providing feedback to teachers were referenced 12 times between the two leaders. With engagement as the focal point, both leaders also expressed setting high expectations for teachers and monitoring them by being visible and providing specific feedback as critical to successfully influencing any sort of change initiative. The concept of school leaders providing consistent support, sustainable relationships, and specific feedback is not a concern at Baypoint Elementary.

With regard to professional development, both school leaders spoke in the interviews to enhancing student engagement by providing appropriate professional development and ensuring it is relevant to the instructional needs of Baypoint Elementary teachers and is job-embedded,
on-going, and collaborative. DeMonte (2013) expressed doctors, nurses, educators, and engineers are just a few from a wide range of professions participating in continuous professional learning to acquire new skills, strategies, and techniques to improve their job performance. To that end, if school leaders want to observe outcomes of professional learning provided to their teachers, it is essential to set the expectations high and have a process in place, procedures, and a plan for evaluating the engagement practices being utilized.

Stake (2010) explains many qualitative researchers prefer observation data that is observed and heard directly by the researcher. “The eyes see a lot, simultaneously noting what, when, and why tied to the research question” (p. 90). With regard to classroom observations, the researcher observed mathematics lessons facilitated by the seven intermediate teachers and used the Classroom Observation Checklist to rate the level of learning engagement of the students in each of the three engagement domains from very low, low, medium, high, and very high (see Appendix F). Regarding the three domains, the checklist is divided into affective, behavioral, and cognitive. Within each domain, there were more specific sub-categories relating to the engagement domains. Contained under affective engagement includes positive body language, fun and excitement, comfort level, and personal connection. Beneath behavioral engagement there are the sub-headings of compliant, verbal participation, and non-compliance/disengagement. Below cognitive engagement are the sub-categories of individual attention, clarity of learning, meaningfulness of work, rigorous thinking, and performance orientation. After data analysis of the checklists, the researcher discovered the weakest area was the behavioral domain, compliance and participation, rating 3.28 as medium engagement and followed by the Cognitive Engagement Domain with a rating of 3.43, in which teachers are expected to provide rigorous learning activities, meaningful/relevant work, clarity of learning, individual attention, and respond on topic. The researcher acknowledged the high level of
affective engagement (3.68) within the five of the seven classrooms and contributed to the teachers building sustainable relationships with the students, where the students acknowledged being connected to the teachers. The low behavioral level was due to students being mostly compliant rather than actively engaged through verbal participation and discussion. The researcher is apprehensive due to her perception that teachers do not understand the meaning of behavioral engagement; thus, believing compliance equals high engagement. Bowen (2003) voices that students are most engaged when the work allows for creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving to inspire a desire for knowledge. On the contrary, most learning found within schools requires little thought, lacks high-levels of cognitive growth, and is steered by compliant students rather than engaged students. According to Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1977) and Vygotsky’s theory (1978), human cognitive learning occurs through social interactions and when students are given control over the choice of their tasks. Verbal participation of the students might be frequent to ensure high levels of learning engagement. Cognitive and affective engagement are intertwined within behavioral engagement; when students are working on challenging learning tasks which involve collaboration they will be motivated to participate in class discussions.

The third data source contributing to leaders impacting students’ engagement was the teacher self-efficacy questionnaire. After analyzing the data, the results uncovered the Affective Domain as the area where the teachers of Baypoint Elementary are most confident, rating 3.98, a high moderate score. The teachers evaluated their self-efficacy and the outcomes further disclosed the teachers being most self-confident in developing relationships with students, helping students to feel accepted within the learning environment, and infusing student interests into lessons and tasks. The questionnaires revealed that the teachers believed their weakest area
of confidence fell under cognitive engagement, where the teachers believe they lack knowledge in strategies to ensure quality work and how to teach students meta-cognitive strategies.

To ensure the school leaders of Baypoint Elementary influence student engagement, they should review the three data sources and set expectations for engagement-based learning where strategies will be observable daily within lessons taught in and across the curriculum, and documented in lesson plans. Telling teachers to engage students in their classwork is seldom enough. The foundation is set through creating a framework to include student engagement strategies, establishing the skills for the teachers through relevant professional learning, monitoring student engagement through the teacher evaluation system (TKES), and providing specific feedback for teacher reflection.

**Research Question #2**

How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink with levels of student engagement?

This qualitative study supports DeMonte’s (2013) statement in that teachers acknowledged that they grow professionally and engage students through professional development and building their teacher capacity. Teacher and leader perceptions of teacher self-efficacy were analyzed through the interview transcriptions and teacher self-efficacy questionnaires. The interviews revealed these themes for teacher self-efficacy: teacher experience, enthusiasm for teaching, collaboration with others/PLCs, risk-taking, and professional development. Further data analysis identified the most influential elements impacting teacher self-efficacy at Baypoint Elementary were collaborating and establishing PLC teams and providing relevant professional development. Selecting and coordinating professional development involves school leaders and teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) addressing the instructional needs by creating an action plan for promoting improved student
engagement. Both teachers and leaders must work collaboratively to identify areas for growth within student engagement, which is essential to active learning. The PLCs’ focus will be to seek new strategies, practices, and approaches of teaching and learning, and assessing and reflecting on implementation.

The teacher self-efficacy questionnaires disclosed Baypoint Elementary teachers feel most confident when influencing affective engagement in their classrooms where they are building relationships with students, developing connectedness and trust with students, fostering students to believe in themselves, and learning students’ personal interests. Positive school teacher-student relationships influence higher student engagement but also increase teacher morale (Fredricks et al., 2004). Affective engagement was the highest average of the domains at 3.98, showing a highly moderate confidence level amongst the teachers. Strong affective engagement is visible by both leaders when walking throughout the classrooms where teachers are often observed having personal interactions to learn more about the students, holding daily class meetings, and developing sustainable relationships. Consistently, during lessons teachers showcase student interests along with being mindful of student interests when planning. With regards to the efficacy questionnaire, the efficacy area where Baypoint Elementary teachers felt the least self-assurance was within the cognitive domain. The overall average of this domain was 3.59, which is in the moderate confidence range; however, the rating was slightly lower due to the teachers believing they have a hard time in ensuring that students produce quality work and find it difficult to teach students meta-cognitive strategies. School leaders having this knowledge must provide Baypoint Elementary teachers professional learning to advance a deeper understanding of effective cognitive strategies to enhance teacher pedagogy to create student centered classrooms where there are ample opportunities for students to work collaboratively on problem-based activities.
Research Question #3

How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational factors contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

Protheroe (2008) communicated, “Teachers level of confidence about their ability to promote learning can depend on past experiences and school culture. Principals can help develop a sense of self-efficacy by assessing their teachers’ instructional needs and defining a plan to support them” (p. 42). In examining the data concerning school leaders impacting educational factors contributing to student engagement, the study generated noteworthy facts through all three data sources: interviews, observations, and questionnaires. The interviews provided thoughtful accounts from the teachers and two school administrators regarding how leaders impact educational factors. There are several factors which contribute to student engagement according to the teachers. As mentioned in the results, teachers perceive Baypoint leaders as supportive by being visible, organizing relevant and on-going professional development, providing opportunities to collaborate with peers and other educators from around the district, writing specific feedback to develop them as educators (in the TKES portal and handwritten), and offering necessary resources to facilitate instruction. Baypoint school leaders both expressed high importance for relevant professional development and for specific feedback regarding instructional practices, including perceiving how teachers can improve their craft through verbal and written communication via notes and the TKES portal. The visibility and feedback of the educational leaders are viewed by teachers as being a critical factor in empowering teachers to grow professionally. According to teachers and school leaders, the professional development planned by the school leaders should be on-going and job-embedded involving REAL, SEL, PBL, and active learning strategies to foster high-level critical thinking where students have daily opportunities to collaborate, problem solve, and have student choice. Acting as
transformational leaders, Baypoint school leaders influence student engagement through a broad array of leadership practices and professional development, contributing to teacher efficacy and confidence.

**Implications**

Implications from this research suggest that student engagement should be the focus of professional learning at Baypoint School. It is through a deliberate and strategic plan of action that student engagement will be monitored and evaluated in daily classroom instruction. Understanding the three domains of engagement and how they are interconnected is critical as one looks to increase student achievement across all content areas. With the cognitive domain being the area that the research reveals teachers are the least confident, it is necessary for teachers to study the domain and identify instructional strategies/practices that result in increased cognitive engagement. Hopefully, in reviewing the results of this research study, other school leaders will see the importance of evaluating student engagement on multiple levels to ensure that lessons are planned and teachers have the pedagogy, training, and resources to optimize student engagement and building teacher efficacy.

**Limitations of Findings**

Limitations to the research include the size of the setting, the number of participants, the role of the researcher as the school leader, and the grade levels included in the study. Although limitations are identified, the researcher strived to maintain a high level of professionalism and consistency in completing observations and interviews. In designing this particular study, the researcher chose one elementary school which factored into the results of the research questions posed. Furthermore, the researcher selected seven teachers from the intermediate grades. As noted in the Significance of the Study in Chapter 1, special considerations should be acknowledged regarding the school leaders’ awareness of Baypoint teachers’ working
knowledge of effective pedagogical skills for engagement; however, they do not utilize a framework to ensure active engagement strategies are included in daily lesson plans across the curriculum. By expanding the research to include additional elementary schools and varied demographics, validity and credibility could be further substantiated in the evaluation of teacher efficacy, student engagement, and leadership practices related to student engagement. In addition, adding to the number of teachers included in the study could also broaden and enrich the data collected. Additionally, the study may include teachers in the primary grades providing a wider sample increasing the quantity and varying the results of data.

The school principal as the primary researcher is an additional limitation to the study. With the researcher serving as the school principal, she worked hard to analyze, observe, and interpret the data collected in a non-biased manner. This information is shared with the readers so they may consider that knowledge as they view the results within this study. The fact that the school leader is principal and has some knowledge and perceptions of student engagement at the school means that some interpretations of the data may be based upon the leader’s experiences and judgements from day-to-day interactions. Conversely, this may ultimately make the data more meaningful and authentic.

**Discussion**

Educational leaders are reflective practitioners continually seeking new approaches to improve instructional practices within their schools. Hence, this qualitative study was aimed to examine specific leadership characteristics and practices which impact teacher efficacy, instructional practices, and student engagement at Baypoint Elementary.

Preceding the researcher’s term as principal of Baypoint Elementary, only two prior principals oversaw the elementary school over the course of 23 years. The school had one vision, educational focus, and leadership style for 23 years. Upon being named principal of
Baypoint Elementary, I recognized the importance of revisiting the vision, mission, and instructional priorities. Although Baypoint Elementary was a high performing school with high expectations, consistent and school-wide best practices for instruction were lacking. Within the first week as the new principal, six years ago, I noticed as I circulated daily throughout the school and classrooms that teachers were surprised to see me in their classrooms and interacting with students. I observed that teachers were actively teaching; however, the students were mostly compliant and not engaged in their learning. Much of the classwork centered upon rote learning and traditional approaches. Six years ago, the students were performing extremely well on state tests, as the tests were low-level, knowledge-based questions that did not require students to infer, explain, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate. Knowing the state tests were being rewritten to include written extended responses and integrating high-level critical thinking, I made it a priority for teachers to reflect upon instructional practices, teacher efficacy, and student assessments by providing professional learning to build teacher capacity; thereupon increasing the level of instructional rigor and relevance.

Successful teachers not only teach well, they utilize a framework for planning instruction and assessments that provides varied learning experiences and assessments to meet the instructional needs of all students. Williamson et al. (2012) also believe there is a tight connection between active and purposeful learning and high levels of student engagement that cross all three domains of engagement. Instead of relying on traditional methods and getting the same results, I searched for quality educational literature, conferences, and professional development to strengthen the teachers’ repertoire and enable them to deliver instruction in more meaningful and exciting ways, leading to more motivated and engaged students. My goal is to achieve a level of collaboration in which teachers work together interdependently to impact instructional practice in ways that will optimize results for students, teams, and the school.
With this plan in mind, I started to work collaboratively with the teachers to establish a sense of urgency for higher expectations to engage students in their learning and shift learning from knowledge and application to higher level critical thinking (quadrant D) learning (Jones et. al, 2009). We are striving to embrace our school’s mission statement, “Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships for All.” Merging fun, problem-based activities in a structured environment is necessary for 21st century teachers to enhance day-to-day instruction and is an important skill for teachers to be cognizant of in ever-changing learning environments (Marzano & Pickering, 2011). Teachers are transitioning to have student engagement at the forefront of planning, and I am ready to take the steps to further empower the teachers and students with the actions described in the section that follows.

**Recommendations for Action**

In the analysis of the data surrounding student engagement, it is clear that the three domains of engagement are interconnected and must be considered as one evaluates and plans for instruction. This section will outline a specific action plan that will develop and strengthen student engagement and the overall learning experience for students. The plan will be created by the school principal along with input from team leaders and encompass specific principles, skills, habits, and strategies related to engaging students. The researcher identified Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as an optimal framework to execute the action plan set forth. As recalled from the literature, the PLC will contribute to growing teacher efficacy, capacity, and student engagement at Baypoint Elementary. DuFour (2004) expounds it is through collaboration of all stakeholders, the PLC, who must put forth a concerted effort to develop school-wide practices that foster high levels of student engagement. The PLC recognizes the importance of engagement and constantly seeks better ways to achieve the team’s goal. Having teacher input when designing the action plan will ensure buy-in. The collective team, including the school
leader, must use the evidence gained to inform and improve instructional practice for engagement (DuFour, 2004). Through the PLC, the collective group will establish a worthwhile action plan to strengthen student engagement at Baypoint Elementary.

First and foremost is the need for teachers, students, and administrators to strategically develop an integrated understanding of the three domains of engagement: Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral. Through studying and understanding these domains, specific student skill sets, habits, and teacher pedagogy will naturally evolve. This qualitative research study distinguished strengths and weaknesses in all three domains; yet, when the data of the interviews, questionnaires, and observations was triangulated, the cognitive domain was identified as the most challenging of the domains.

Through stakeholder collaboration, PLCs, the principal will engage teachers, parents, and students in understanding the domains of student engagement. There will be a laser emphasis upon developing and understanding the cognitive domain of engagement since that was the domain identified as being most challenging. In PLCs, educators work together interdependently in collaborative teams to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable. Furthermore, according to DuFour (2004), PLCs turn their learning into action. The principal, as the transformational leader, will begin a strategic plan to increase student engagement by implementing a step-by-step approach to ensure that all of the domains are highlighted.

1. Strive to promote a school-wide culture of engagement by involving all stakeholders in the process of understanding the three domains and how they are interlinked to student engagement. Attention will be given to identify what those domains look like, sound like, and feel like in the school setting.
2. Foster healthy relationships between teachers and students, impacting the Affective Domain. This dissertation suggests that relationships are key in increasing students’ motivation and the desire to perform their personal best on academic tasks.

3. Plan professional development that focuses upon systematic and sustainable strategies/approaches that automatically engage students. The result of such staff development is to ensure that the learning environments for all students is rigorous and relevant, thus promoting cognitive engagement.

4. Provide release time for peer observations so that teachers may observe and provide feedback to one another regarding their ability to integrate the domains consistently in the classroom.

In seeking to promote a school-wide culture of engagement, the transformational leader will structure a book/literature review study with grade level teams to focus upon researching and studying the three domains of engagement as well as factors that contribute to an increase of engagement in those domains. The teams will be charged to develop rubrics that include the three domains and strategies/habits/practices to consider while collaboratively planning lessons. In addition, they will be directed to develop observation “look fors” that will later be used as they observe one another with a focus upon student engagement. The rubric will serve to provide consistency and a standard expectation within the school as educators measure the levels of student engagement. In addition to structuring teacher expectations for researching and studying the domains, a parent component will be critical in helping to establish a school-wide culture and understanding of student engagement.

In addition to teachers expanding their knowledge of student engagement, it is paramount that parents share the same understanding of the domains of engagement as the teachers. Parent interactions with students at home can impact and complement strategies implemented by the
teachers, resulting in increased student motivation, initiative, and critical thinking. Once the teachers are well-versed in their understanding of the domains, they will be asked to facilitate a parent night with the intent of educating parents about the three domains of engagement. At this meeting, teachers will share the school-wide plan to increase student engagement and provide suggestions to parents regarding how they, at home, may positively impact the domains.

The Affective Domain is critical in that it focuses upon teachers building and developing healthy relationships with students. Students are more likely to commit to engaging in rigorous learning when they know teachers, parents, and their classmates care about and value them. In this study, teacher and principal perceptions indicated that the majority of the teachers feel highly effective in establishing relationships with their students. The staff will be directed to have grade level and cross-grade level conversations regarding strategies they use to foster relationships between teacher-student and student-student. Having consistent school-wide practices in place such as formal class meetings or “Responsive Classroom” expectations, and common vocabulary, rules, and procedures will serve to enhance the Affective Domain of student engagement.

Supporting and enhancing teacher pedagogy of best practices for impacting student engagement through in-depth and job-embedded professional learning will be the next critical step in increasing the levels of engagement. This study revealed the Cognitive Domain as the most difficult for teachers to impact. As teachers begin to focus on this domain, it is the structure and careful planning of lessons that ensures that cognitive engagement is most prevalent.

Ensuring that student work is rigorous and relevant creates conditions that naturally require students to be motivated and to feel personally invested in the work. Training will be provided to assist teachers in developing personalized and active learning strategies as research suggests those two approaches have the greatest impact on creating environments where rigorous
and relevant learning can take place. Personalized Learning recognizes that every student contributes to the class dynamics in unique ways. The approach recognizes that students’ interests and learning styles vary from student to student. The training will teach teachers specific ways to get to know students and use the information learned to personalize learning; thus, tapping into students’ prior knowledge, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Students are encouraged to work at their own speed and pace.

Active learning strategies will be another focus of professional learning impacting the Cognitive Domain of engagement. If a student is excited and having fun, socially interacting, or is emotionally tied to his or her learning, there is a higher opportunity for deep cognitive learning (Kozulin, 2003). These strategies frequently require students to work in collaborative groups in which students have structured dialogue with one another and specific roles in researching, analyzing, and problem-solving. Correspondingly, feedback, collaboration, and discussion are essential practices for teachers to utilize with students to increase engagement and reduce behavior issues, and they interlink the affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement domains (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Varying instructional strategies and delivery increases student interest and attention to task.

It is through grade level collaboration, PLCs, that teachers will be held accountable to ensure that lessons consider all three domains of engagement and that lessons include elements of personalized and active learning strategies. Teachers will utilize the rubrics they developed within their collaborative teams to plan lessons. While feedback from administration was shared by Baypoint Elementary teachers as positively influencing their craft and empowering them to grow professionally, other research suggests that peer observations have even a greater impact upon teacher pedagogy and best practices. The principal will provide release time for teachers to conduct peer observations. Team PLCs will focus the learning and relentlessly question status
quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current data and best practice is an essential part of each team’s decision-making process (Dalton, 1998; Gusky, 2007).

By developing trust among the staff through PLCs, peer observations can be a powerful practice for teachers to learn from one another and informally evaluate the implementation of new practices. Using checklists designed specifically to focus upon student engagement domains and tied to TKES standards, teachers will observe one another and provide written and verbal feedback. The TKES standards addressed within the checklist will reflect instructional strategies, differentiation, engagement, and academically challenging environment. After classroom observations, grade level PLCs will establish specific protocols to discuss and review the observations. The collective team, including the school leader, must use the evidence gained to inform and improve instructional practice for engagement (DuFour, 2004). They are to seek evidence of student engagement and learning. Teacher observations have the potential to significantly impact specific practices and improve the quality of instruction, specifically related to student engagement. The literature has shown the PLC framework viable for school leaders when designing and implementing a school-wide professional development plan to strengthen teacher efficacy and student learning. A timeline for execution of action plan is depicted within Table 12.
Further Studies

After the completion of this study, it is evident that there is a need for continued research on student engagement at the elementary level, particularly across grade levels. Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers need to make comparisons of the similarities as well as disparities to the current study of intermediate teachers and leaders at Baypoint Elementary to better
comprehend the essence of student engagement and how to engage students in challenging learning activities where there is rigor and relevance.

Recommendations for further research should be evaluated on a broader scale where the number of teachers and educational leaders are from across contexts, not isolated to one school, one demographic, and one performance level. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to examine elementary students’ and parents’ perceptions of student engagement and the instructional practices they are experiencing within the elementary setting. When developing a strong and effective PLC within the school environment, it is necessary for all stakeholders to be knowledgeable of the vision and instructional focus. To that end, inquiring about the perceptions of student engagement from students and parents within the PLC would assist in the journey to increase engaged learning. Researchers know that school leaders, teachers, students, and parents influence students’ engagement at school; therefore, educators need to have a more defined awareness of how those varied factors impact the others to support or not support student engagement within the classroom.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomena of student engagement as it is exhibited in seven intermediate elementary classrooms, as well as examine how school leadership practices contribute to teacher efficacy relating to student engagement and instructional practices. Through the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and self-efficacy teacher questionnaires, this study found the particulars of teachers’ and leaders’ perceptions, experiences, pedagogical skills, and leadership characteristics relating to student engagement. This study found the crux of student engagement as developing sustainable relationships with students where teachers and principals make personal connections with students, establish trust, and make students feel valued. With this instilled within the
students, teachers are more capable to take the next steps to planning lessons where they can use the knowledge they have acquired from a strategic action plan to highly engage students. When triangulating the three data sources, the study illustrated teachers have the most challenges with cognitively engaging students within their classrooms. Even though the teachers have displayed the knowledge of best practices to engage students cognitively, they lack the framework and process to ensure they are purposefully planning rich environments of active learning where students are encouraged to set goals, be reflective and critical thinkers, and to collaborate and discuss learning with peers. Teachers, through sustainable professional learning, should conceptualize how all three engagement domains are interlinked to provide engaged learning, ascertain research-based best practices which include multiple engagement domains, and utilize a strategic process to include strategies in lessons.

As a transformational principal, I received confirmation through this study on what leadership practices and behaviors are necessary to lead a school of actively engaged students. Being visible in the school every day, providing feedback on instructional practices, and interacting with students is just as important to my teachers as research reflects. Scholarly literature has shown, when planning professional development for teachers, it is pertinent to work collectively with a school’s PLCs to plan the most relevant professional learning and ensure the learning is job-embedded and on-going. Future professional development at Baypoint Elementary will include in-depth and on-going professional learning including how the three domains of engagement work jointly, how and what framework to utilize to consistently plan engaging learning strategies throughout all content areas, and modeling how and what to observe in a peer lesson. The next steps when planning will be creating “look fors,” debriefing how the process will work in classrooms, discovering what procedures are necessary during collaborative team meetings to discuss student engagement, and finally how to monitor progress.
As principal, I shall be cognizant of new teachers transitioning into our school each year to provide professional learning prior to their tenure at Baypoint Elementary, ensuring the continuity of professional development to build teacher efficacy and capacity.

Implementing this strategic plan will require the traits of a transformational leader to empower and embrace new, innovative practices. Teachers, school leaders, students, and parents will collaborate to ensure a shared articulation of the vision and plan to increase student engagement at Baypoint Elementary. It is through the comprehensive action plan that the school’s PLC can work by having a shared understanding of what it encompasses. Over time, the influence of an effective PLC having a clear and intentional action plan will involve collaboration, including peer observations; reflection in collaborative teams on progress and observations; and monitoring the progress of student engagement. This will purposefully and certainly attain the goal of increased student engagement leading to increased student learning and achievement. Through transformational leadership practices, the school leader will establish and implement the action plan where Baypoint teachers will acquire expansive pedagogical knowledge, build a peer support group (PLC) to grow as educators, and impact student engagement and learning at Baypoint Elementary. A collaborative culture is conducive to effective teaching and engaged learning. School leadership directly impacts student engagement through developing self-confident teachers who have a toolbox full of effective research-based best practices to utilize every day where students are engaged in relevant and rigorous lessons. High performing schools do not exist apart from great school leaders. It is the school leaders who impact student learning by being educational visionaries who design sustainable professional learning plans to foster teacher efficacy.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Letter

Consent for Participation in Interview and Questionnaire

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Felicia M. Angelle from Kennesaw State University as part of her Doctoral degree in the Department of Educational Leadership, under the supervision of Dr. Ugena Whitlock. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about leadership practices, teacher self-efficacy, and instructional practices which impact student engagement and learning of elementary students. I will be one of approximately 10 people being interviewed for this educational research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.

2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves completing interviews and questionnaires by a researcher from Kennesaw State University. The interview/questionnaires will last approximately 30-40 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty from my school will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at the Kennesaw State University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the IRB office of Kennesaw State University.

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

____________________________      ________________________
My Signature                                     Date

____________________________  ________________________
My Printed Name                        Signature of the Researcher

For further information, please contact:
Felicia M. Angelle; 770-642-5610; felicia.angelle@cobbk12.org
Appendix B: Consent Letter

Consent for Participation in Classroom Observation

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Felicia M. Angelle from Kennesaw State University as part of her Doctoral degree in the Department of Educational Leadership, under the supervision of Dr. Ugena Whitlock. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about leadership practices, teacher self-efficacy, and instructional practices which impact student engagement and learning of elementary students. I will be one of approximately 8 people being observed during a math lesson for this educational research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one in my school will be told.

3. Participation involves being observed by a researcher from Kennesaw State University. The observation will last approximately 30 minutes. Notes will be written during the observation of the math lesson.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name or any students by name in any reports using information obtained from this observation, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty from my school will neither be present during the observation nor have access to raw notes.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at the Kennesaw State University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the IRB office of Kennesaw State University.

7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

____________________________      ________________________
My Signature                                         Date

____________________________      ________________________
My Printed Name                                  Signature of the Researcher

For further information, please contact:
Felicia M. Angelle; 770-642-5610; felicia.angelle@cobbk12.org
Appendix C: Interview Questions

School A - Self-Efficacy Related to Student Engagement
Teacher Interview Protocol

Name: ____________
Date: ____________
Grade level: ____________

Good afternoon and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Felicia Angelle and I am conducting this interview for a research study as part of my Doctoral Dissertation in Educational Leadership at Kennesaw State University. This interview will take about 30-40 minutes to complete and will include eleven questions with a few possible follow-up questions. The questions will focus on your experiences with teaching tied to self-efficacy relating to engaging students in learning. All of your responses are confidential and will only be used for the educational purposes of my action research study.

**Demographic Questions: Teacher**

1. What is gender, age, race (optional)?
2. What grade do you currently teach or have you taught in the past?
3. How many years teaching experience do you have at the elementary level?
4. What advanced degrees do you have, if any?
5. Have you taught at other schools during your career? Which ones?
Appendix C: Teacher Interview Questions

Self-Efficacy Related to Student Engagement

- How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?
- How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink to high levels of student engagement?
- How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational practices contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

Affective:

e.g., motivation, relationships, identification with school, sense of belonging, school connectedness

What extrinsic (within school) or intrinsic (within self) factors impact your ability to influence affective student engagement within your classroom?

How can I, as a school leader, assist you in developing pedagogical skills that increase affective engagement in the classroom?

Behavioral:

e.g., student attention, discipline approaches, disengagement, attendance, participation in school activities, being on time

What extrinsic (within school) or intrinsic (within self) factors impact your ability to influence behavioral student engagement within your classroom?

How can I, as a school leader, assist you in developing pedagogical skills that increase behavioral engagement in the classroom?

Cognitive:
e.g., perceived relevance of school work, personal goals and autonomy, value of learning, success in school, quality of work, sustained focus

What extrinsic (within school) or intrinsic (within self) factors impact your ability to influence cognitive student engagement within your classroom?

How can I, as a school leader, assist you in developing pedagogical skills that increase cognitive engagement in the classroom?
Appendix D: Interview Questions

School A - Self-Efficacy Related to Student Engagement
Principal/Assistant Principal Interview Protocol

Name:_________
Date: _________

Good afternoon and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Felicia Angelle and I am conducting this interview for a research study as part of my Doctoral Dissertation in Educational Leadership at Kennesaw State University. This interview will take about 30-40 minutes to complete and will include eleven questions with a few possible follow-up questions. The questions will focus on your experiences with leadership and leadership practices tied to teacher self-efficacy relating to engaging students in learning. All of your responses are confidential and will only be used for the educational purposes of my action research study.

Demographic Questions: School Leaders

1. What is gender, age, race (optional)?
2. What grades have you taught prior to becoming a school leader?
3. How many years teaching experience do you have at the elementary level?
4. How many years do you have as an educational leader and in what positions have you held?
5. What advanced degrees do you have, if any?
6. Have you been a school principal or assistant principal at other schools during your career? Which ones?
Appendix D: School Leader Interview Questions

Self-Efficacy Related to Student Engagement

- How or to what extent can school leaders influence teachers to maximize student engagement at the elementary level?
- How or to what extent can school leaders’ and teachers’ perceptions of teacher self-efficacy interlink to high levels of student engagement?
- How or to what extent can school leaders impact educational practices contributing to student engagement at the elementary level?

Affective:

e.g., motivation, relationships, identification with school, sense of belonging, school connectedness

What extrinsic (within school) or intrinsic (within self) factors impact your ability to influence affective student engagement within your school?

How can you, as a school leader, assist in developing pedagogical skills that increase affective engagement in the school?

Behavioral:

e.g., student attention, discipline approaches, disengagement, attendance, participation in school activities, being on time

What extrinsic (within school) or intrinsic (within self) factors impact your ability to influence behavioral student engagement within your school?

How can you, as a school leader, assist in developing pedagogical skills that increase behavioral engagement in the school?

Cognitive:
e.g., perceived relevance of school work, personal goals and autonomy, value of learning, success in school, quality of work, sustained focus

What extrinsic (within school) or intrinsic (within self) factors impact your ability to influence cognitive student engagement within your school?

How can you, as a school leader, assist in developing pedagogical skills that increase cognitive engagement in the school?
Appendix E: Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

Teacher Self-Efficacy Related to Student Engagement

This questionnaire is designed to help gain a better understanding of things that create difficulty for teachers as they work to engage students in the classroom. Please rate how certain you are that you can do these by writing the appropriate number using the scale below. Your answers will be confidential and will not be identified by name.

*Rate your degree of confidence by recording a number from 0 to 5 using the scale below:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannot do at all</td>
<td>Low ability can do</td>
<td>Moderately can do</td>
<td>Can do</td>
<td>Highly certain can do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Efficacy to influence Affective Engagement**

1. Help your students value learning.
2. Motivate students who show low interest in school work.
3. Get students to believe that they can do well in their school work.
4. Build caring relationships with your students.
5. Connect student learning to personal interests, goals, and experiences.
6. Help students to feel accepted in the classroom.
7. Ensure that all students express enthusiasm and assurance that they can be successful in completing tasks.
8. Provide your students choice in the classroom.

**Efficacy to influence Behavioral Engagement**

1. Establish an effective classroom management system.
2. Calm a student who is disruptive or noisy.
3. Control disruptive behavior in the classroom.
5. Establish effective and efficient classroom routines.
6. Sustain student focus on given assignments.
7. Provide appropriate consequences for misbehavior.
8. Identify the cause of a student’s misbehavior.

**Efficacy to influence Cognitive Engagement**

1. Craft good questions for your students.
2. Use a variety of assessment strategies

3. Provide an alternative explanation or extra support when students are having difficulty...

4. Implement alternative strategies in your classroom

5. Impact students focus and attention to given tasks

6. Ensure that students produce quality work

7. Teach students meta-cognitive strategies

8. Influence students to think critically and be independent problem-solvers

Appendix F: Classroom Observation Checklist

Student Engagement Observation Checklist

Grade__________________
Teacher_________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Positive Body Language
Students exhibit body postures that indicate they are paying attention to the teacher and/or other students.

Fun and Excitement
Students exhibit interest and enthusiasm and self-assurance.

Comfort Level
Students are comfortable to seek help and ask questions.

Personal Connection
Students have choice in how they demonstrate their learning.

Notes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIORAL ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Compliant
Students are focused on the learning activity with limited disruptions.

**Verbal Participation**
Students express thoughtful ideas, reflective answers, and questions relevant or appropriate to learning.

**Non-compliance/Disengaged**
Students are pretend working or not doing classwork.

**Notes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Individual Attention**
Students ask questions and respond on topic to the content presented.

**Clarity of Learning**
Students can describe the purpose of the lesson or unit. This is not the same as being able to describe the activity being done during class.

**Meaningfulness of Work**
Students find the work interesting, challenging, and connected to learning.

**Rigorous Thinking**
Students work on complex problems, create original solutions, and reflect on the quality of their work.

**Performance Orientation**

Students understand what quality work is and how it will be assessed. They also can describe the criteria by which their work will be evaluated.

**Notes:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Level of Student Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


December 14, 2017

Ms. Felicia M. Angelle
365 Fallen Leaf Lane
Roswell, GA 30075

Dear Ms. Angelle:

Your research project titled Leadership for Student Engagement has been approved. Listed below is the school where approval to conduct the research is complete. Please work with the school administrator to schedule administration of instruments or conduct interviews.

School
Shallowford Falls Elementary School

Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research project, changes must be submitted in writing to the department of Accountability, Research & Grants prior to implementation. At the conclusion of your research project, you are expected to submit a copy of your results to this office. Results cannot reference the Cobb County School District or any District schools or departments.

Research files are not considered complete until results are received. If you have any questions regarding the process, contact our office at 770-426-3450.

Sincerely,

Cindy Nichols
Grants & Research Manager
Accountability, Research & Grants

Appendix H: KSU IRB Approval
11/17/2017

Felicia Angelle, Student

Re: Your followup submission of 11/9/2017, Study #18-218: Leadership for Student Engagement

Dear Ms. Angelle,

Your application has been reviewed by IRB members. Your study is eligible for expedited review under the FDA and DHHS (OHRP) designation of category 7 - Individual or group characteristics or behavior.

This is to confirm that your application has been approved. The protocol approved is Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, questionnaires for teachers and principals to improve educational leadership practices to build capacity of teacher self-efficacy. The consent procedure described is in effect.

NOTE: All surveys, recruitment flyers/emails, and consent forms must include the IRB study number noted above, prominently displayed on the first page of all materials.

You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application effective immediately. The IRB calls your attention to the following obligations as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. The study is subject to continuing review on or before 11/17/2018. At least two weeks prior to that time, go to http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/progress-report-form.php to submit a progress report. Progress reports not received in a timely manner will result in expiration and closure of the study.

2. Any proposed changes to the approved study must be reported and approved prior to implementation. This is accomplished through submission of a progress report along with revised consent forms and survey instruments.

3. All records relating to conducted research, including signed consent documents, must be retained for at least three years following completion of the research. You are responsible for ensuring that all records are accessible for inspection by authorized representatives as needed. Should you leave or end your professional relationship with KSU for any reason, you are responsible for providing the IRB with information regarding the housing of research records and who will maintain control over the records during this period.

4. Unanticipated problems or adverse events relating to the research must be reported promptly to the IRB. See http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/reporting-unanticipated-problems.php for definitions and reporting guidance.

5. A final progress report should be provided to the IRB at the closure of the study. Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.
KSU Institutional Review Board Director and Chair