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Empathetic Student-Centric Decisional Mindset: A Grounded Theory Study Of Teachers' Judgment Experiences

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EMPATHETIC STUDENT-CENTRIC DECISIONAL MINDSET: A
GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF TEACHERS' JUDGMENT EXPERIENCES

by

Joshua Sean Grover
Bachelor of Science, North Dakota State University, 2004
Master of Science, Minnesota State University Moorhead, 2012

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

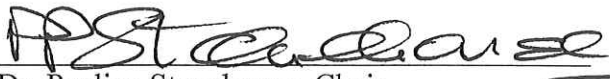
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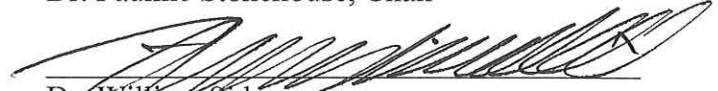
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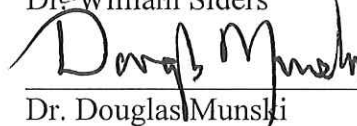
This dissertation, submitted by Joshua Sean Grover in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



Dr. Pauline Stonehouse, Chair



Dr. William Siders



Dr. Douglas Munski



Dr. Bonni Gourneau

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Dr. Chris Nelson
Associate Dean of the Graduate School

7/8/19
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Study of Teachers' Judgment Experiences

Department Educational Leadership

Degree Doctorate of Education

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Joshua S. Grover
May 20, 2019

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To my beloved wife Kristine,
my amazing children: Mac, Keaton, and Emma,
my parents: Jeff and Judy, my sister, JoRelle, and my brother, Jadon.

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ABSTRACT

Teachers must have the ability to make meaningful instructional decisions within the classroom. This ability to make decisions can be identified as a potential capacity within an organization within the broad theory of professional capital (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2013). Professional capital involves three mini-frameworks: social, human, and decisional capital. Literature supports the concepts of social and human capital investment within organizations (Gilead, 2009).

The conceptual framework for this study was based on the emergent theory of decisional capital. Hargreaves (2015) stated that it is within decisional capital that the capacities of experience, challenging and stretching, reflective practice, and teacher judgment are applied as potential influences on organizational success and well-being. The researcher cites research pertaining to the concepts of teacher judgment.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study were used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools. Teachers within rural northern Minnesota school districts were interviewed to discover their lived experiences pertaining to the day-to-day judgments they make within the classroom. A student-centric decisional mindset established the foundation or motivation of the decisional or judgment experiences of participants, the researcher identified several other factors influencing these experiences. Individually, these factors

where not uniformly consistent among participant responses. However, when combining and applying them to create the “picture” of the decisional or judgment experiences of rural northern Minnesota teachers, a highly complex system emerged.

The results of this study discovered that, teacher decisional or judgment experiences, while motivated by what participants perceived to be in the best interest of students, were influenced by: their ability to reflect on their practice, the freedom or lack-thereof to execute decisions within their environment, peer support and example, other people who inspired and motivated them to make decisions, their relationship with administration, the past experiences they have had, the passion they had for their subject area, and the power given to them by administration to make decisions. These elements added to Hargreaves’s (2015) emergent theory of decisional capital. The results of this study have implications for administrators in terms of building the decisional capacity of teachers.

Keywords: educational leadership, grounded theory study, qualitative, interviews, empathy, student-centered, student-centric, professional capital, human capital, social capital, decisional capital

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Within the K12 institution, student academic and social success is highly dependent on the expertise of the classroom teacher. Arguably, there is no greater influencer in terms of student achievement (Gehrke, 2005). The decisions or judgments teachers make is a potential determiner of student success and is worthy of gaining deeper insight (Spodek, 1987). The school administrator plays a crucial role in supporting a system that reinforces and encourages highly effective decision-making processes. Therefore, this grounded theory qualitative study is centered on the judgment experiences of teachers and what elements are to be cultivated by the school administrator in order to support the success and well-being of students.

Statement of Problem

Paradigm Shift

Within the educational institution, there appears to be constant shifting in the supervisory practices of K12 administrators in recent years. A role that was once one of support and human resource management is now a position that wears many more “hats,” none more emphasized than that of the *enforcer* of “research-based” practices (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993). This concept is fueled by the persistent high-stakes accountability measures set forth by the Federal and State educational governing bodies (Cawelti, 2006). Now, more than ever, the school principal finds herself in a constant state of maneuvering

and jockeying her environment in order to find a balance that leads to student success and achievement (Catano & Stronge, 2007).

Coaching as Leader

Educational leadership preparatory programs have emphasized the importance of being a “coaching” leader. This term suggests a sentiment of strong support and respect and distributes leadership accordingly (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003). However, as the educational system within the United States seeks to be globally competitive, the stakes for local leaders have increased exponentially resulting in a style of leadership that strays from what is taught or even deemed effective within academic research.

In the January 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was signed into law. This paramount piece of legislation raised national awareness of the state of the American education system and created comprehensive accountability measures like the nation had never seen. These measures were to be executed in a focused improvement effort to be completed by the year 2014 (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003).

In 2015, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was signed into law. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, while similar to NCLB, provided states with more authority to determine standards and standardized assessments by providing flexibility in terms of proficiency rather than calling for the 100% achievement ratings required by NCLB (ASCD, 2015). Both laws share the commonality of specific accountability measures. These measures have made a profound impact on the styles of leadership needed to ensure fidelity within educational system.

Leaders today face profound stress and anxiety as a result of the pressures NCLB initiated (Daly & Chrispeels, 2005). As early as 2005, researchers began to predict the outcome of such specific oversight of the federal government. Between 2002 and 2005, there was a 53% increase in newspapers headlining with topics addressing the failing state of schools in the United States. Additionally, studies predicted that by 2014, states would see as high as 97% of schools not achieving the measures set forth by NCLB (Daly & Chrispeels, 2005). While the overall impact of NCLB may not yet be observed, the impact on educational leadership is now surfacing. School administrators, at least perceptually, have been charged to assume the power within the organization to preserve the fidelity of the system as a whole rather than distributing the leadership and empowering others (Heffernan, 2017). The coaching leader, which has been idealized by post-secondary institutions and educational leadership best practice research, seems to be unattainable.

Hyper-supervisory Practices

The fidelity of the system refers to the assurance of implementation regarding the myriad of initiatives implemented as a result of constantly searching for what creates the greatest opportunity for student success and achievement in order to be deemed proficient by governing authorities. In principle, the practice of ensuring such accountability is suitable and necessary within the educational organization (Heffernan, 2017). However, in doing so, it is necessary to investigate the level of ability or capacity within the organization in order to suitably release power to other individuals within the organization (Heffernan, 2017). If leaders perceive the professional capacity to perform within the organization as weak, again, according to the standards set forth by higher

authorities, they then begin to adopt a style which can be described as hyper-supervisory in nature. This style of leadership effectively removes the power from all other individuals within the organization (Moran & Larwin, 2017).

Teacher/Administrator Autonomy

The removal of power within the organization is similar to what the school administrator experiences as a result of the larger institution's governing practices. The ripple effect of removing autonomy first from the administrator continues down through the chain of command within the organization, essentially removing the freedom of decision-making from all stakeholders. Administrators are forced to create an atmosphere of high accountability thus reducing the decision-making ability of teachers (Hefferman, 2017).

Removal of autonomy in this manner could have profoundly detrimental implications for the organization. This is proven by research which supports the inverse. By empowering administrators, organizations see fewer turnovers in leadership and improved morale among those leaders creating a positive environment (Heffernan, 2017). Similar gains can be seen by empowering teachers (Moran & Larwin, 2017). If such power is removed, it can be assumed the benefits would also be removed.

Teacher Empowerment

When then do leaders feel comfortable releasing the power and giving it to the individuals under their care? How can an effective leader trust his or her employees enough to distribute leadership accordingly? The core belief behind a coaching leader is to distribute leadership and to empower those people directly connected with students to make informed judgments in order create an environment rich with learning opportunities

(Burgess, Robertson, & Patterson, 2010). It is for this reason K12 administrators must discover ways to enhance the decision-making process in order for teachers to be empowered. Such enhancement dictates an investment of some kind, an investment in the people within the organization so the administrator can trust in the judgment ability of those people (Burgess et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Broadly, one element addressed through this study is, in fact, teacher empowerment. Moreover, this study examines what teacher empowerment looks like through teachers' judgment experience. The concept of teacher empowerment, by itself, is not new. Research has long suggested that teacher empowerment has profound implications on the level of student success and achievement, teacher self-efficacy, and general organizational climate (e.g., Sweetland & Hoy, 2000; Yin, Lee, & Zhang, 2013). Decisional capital speaks to the individual qualities teachers possess in order to determine whether or not they are to be empowered within their practice. Similarly, teacher empowerment may ultimately be dictated by the characteristics teachers possess as well as the environment in which they serve. In order to be empowered, the trust dynamic must be maintained between administration and teacher.

Teachers must also believe they are effective within their practice (e.g. Dee, Henkin, & Duemer, 2003; Edwards, Green, & Lyons, 2002; Newcombe & McCormick, 2001; Wan, 2005). There is also evidence to suggest that teacher empowerment is greatly impacted by the trust relationships between individual teachers and their colleagues (Yin et al., 2013). It is the concepts of teacher empowerment and autonomy and the ability or inability for administrators to rely on the decisions teachers make regarding student

success and wellbeing that led to an investigation of the judgment experiences of teachers.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study will be used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools. It is the desire of the researcher to use the subsequent findings to apply what is learned to his current practice as a school administrator and inform the reader of how the discovered concepts can be applied to current educational leadership theory.

Research Question

The question posed for this study is what are northern Minnesota teachers' perceptions of the basis of their decisional experiences in rural school setting? In order to gain the greatest understanding and yield the best results, this study utilizes qualitative research methodology, specifically a classical Grounded Theory approach.

Need for the Study

School districts across the United States invest substantial resources towards teacher professional development, yet little improvement has been observed systemically in terms of student success and achievement. Understanding factors that positively impact student achievement is a continued effort within the field of education (Jacques et al., 2017). Research is now emerging regarding how teacher decision-making processes and experiences positively affect student outcomes (Griffith & Groulx, 2014). A resurgence of literature has also started to reveal that, despite the overarching governing influence of standards-based practices and initiatives, teachers have largely remained student-centered in their beliefs and decisions (Griffith & Groulx, 2014).

The studies observed have largely been quantitative in nature. In order to gather a better understanding of these decisional experiences, it is necessary to consider qualitative study methodological practices. Qualitative research practices, when done skillfully and rigorously, provides a clearer picture of developing or existing phenomena (Sofaer, 2002).

The investigation of the decisional experiences of teachers is not a new concept. In 1982, researchers published an investigation of the experiences of teacher judgment experiences in four areas: effectiveness, usefulness, appropriateness, and attractiveness (Yinger & Clark). The results of this study proved to be promising but inconclusive in terms of discovery. Connections to reflective practice and understanding the role of previous experiences were revealed (Yinger & Clark, 1982).

Investigations also began evaluating the concept of decision-making as a moral activity (Schultz, 1998):

Pedagogic judgments carry the heaviest weight of all—the weight of acting on behalf of the other, of taking the responsibility for the other onto yourself, of guiding students to recognize purpose. In this sense no description of teachers' work can be complete without accounting for, in a central position, the moral expressiveness of judgments. This inquiry challenges us to understand all of life's endeavors as moral activity, especially as we affect, both directly and indirectly, the lives of the children surrounding us. (p. 9)

Such profound words illustrate, at least perceptually, how important the judgment experiences of teachers are in terms of student well-being.

Last, upon initial consideration of study topic, the researcher reached out to Andrew Hargreaves, expert in the field of educational research and professional capital. Through email communication, Dr. Hargreaves expressed that while much has been investigated in terms of investment in human and social capital, much is to be learned regarding decisional capital. When asked for clarity, he regarded the areas of teachers' instinctive judgment and the experiences surrounding their decisions as areas in need of investigation, the purpose of which would be to discover what educational leaders can do to improve the decisional capacity of teachers in order to positively impact student success and achievement (A. Hargreaves, personal communication, February 21, 2017).

Research Framework

As mentioned previously, the studies investigated by the researcher have largely been quantitative in nature. In order to gather a better understanding of these decisional experiences, it is necessary to consider qualitative study methodological practices. Qualitative provides a clearer picture of developing or existing phenomena (Sofaer, 2002). This is a qualitative study that focuses on the judgment experiences of teachers and whether those experiences fit together in a cohesive and informative way to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools.

The researcher looked to Charmaz's conceptualization of grounded theory methodology (GTM) for the framework of this study. From this point forward, the GTM acronym will be used to refer to grounded theory methodology. According to Charmaz (1996), the Grounded Theory researcher constantly builds the research as it goes. This is in contrast to traditional research methodology in which the study is often explicitly planned out before research ensues. Charmaz (1996) also illustrated that the grounded

theorist will be deeply involved in the data in ways that call for constant collection, altering, and manipulation in order to gather the most meaningful information pertaining to the study focus.

Charmaz's (1996) approach to Grounded Theory is in partial contrast to traditional grounded theory methodologists. While Charmaz's conceptualization aligns with many of the concepts produced by Glaser and Strauss (2009), she does not believe most Grounded Theory research produces a resulting theory.

At present, most grounded theory researchers have aimed to develop rich conceptual analyses of lived experience and social worlds instead of intending to create substantive or formal theory. They wish to pursue more basic questions within the empirical world and try to understand the mysteries and puzzles it presents. (Charmaz, 1996, p. 48)

This belief directly applies to the goal of this study. The main purpose of this study is not to explicitly discover a theory, rather, it is to gain new understanding of the judgment experiences of teachers and whether the elements of decisional capital have meaningful implications for educational institutions.

Pilot Study

Before this formal study was initiated, a pilot study was completed. In order to ensure responses to study questions were rich and meaningful; two participants (2n) were selected to interview. The participants were selected based on convenience and willingness to be part of the study. Initial interview questions were selected broadly from the aforementioned decisional capital framework. Interviews were then coded and analyzed (see Appendix A).

Delimitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. Participants were recruited from rural school districts because of their similarity to the district in which the researcher serves, in terms of both geographical location and student body. The researcher's district is a public school residing within an American Indian reservation in northern Minnesota. In terms of student body, the researcher's district consisted of approximately 1,200 students as of the date of this study. The districts selected had approximately the same number of students, plus or minus 300 students. Each selected district resided either within a neighboring reservation or within close proximity of an American Indian reservation.

Districts were also selected based on geographical proximity to the researcher. This criterion was out of convenience to the researcher. This allowed the researcher to return to each individual in person as data were evaluated and when necessary to investigate further.

Finally, participants were teachers with varying years of experience. This criterion derived from Fullan and Hargreaves's (2013) provision that decisional capital is a factor of experience. The researcher sought to investigate as many aspects of the judgment experiences of teachers as possible. This would include whether or not years of experience were meaningful to the application of this study.

Assumptions of the Study

Within this study, there were two assumptions. The first assumption was that all schools contacted would allow and provide willing participants. The second was that all teachers initially contacted via email and formal invitation would be willing participants.

Study Significance

The significance of this study is difficult to ascertain. As this will be a grounded theory study, establishing significance could imply assumptions or hypotheses, which should be avoided when utilizing such methodology (Greckhamer, 2017). However, the potential significance to effective leadership practices is great. Ultimately, to determine a quality of leadership that encourages an investment in the decisional capital of the organization in a way that is meaningful and has positive implications for student success and achievement is the goal of this research.

Definitions

Throughout the study, the following terms are used. The definitions provided are to assist the reader in understanding the content accurately.

Capacity: The amount of capital possessed. In other words, capacity is quantifiable capital.

Capital: The investment in the capacity of people. Essentially, capital is the qualities necessary to function within an organization.

Data-Based Decision: Educational decisions based on information gathered by the teacher through monitoring of progress, observation, and other data gathering techniques (Baarends, Klink, & Thomas, 2017).

Decisional Capital: The level of individual ability to make sound judgments, by the amount one is able to reflect on one's own practice, by the amount of experience one has in a given area, by the amount of practice one has had in a given profession, and by the amount one has been challenged and stretched to grow (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012).

Human Capital: The individual characteristics necessary to function within an organization..

Pedagogy: Technique, style, and procedure executed by the educator within the classroom, also known as teaching practice.

Professional Capital: The parent category of Fullan and Hargreaves's (2013) theory containing human, social, and decisional capital elements is professional capital. Professional capital is the broadest category pertaining to the amount of qualities necessary to function within an organization.

Reflective Practice: The ability for teachers to evaluate past actions and make improvements based on those actions (Loughran, 2002).

Social Capital: The amount a group of individuals are able to function together for the good of the organization.

Student-Centric Decisions: The practice of executing decisions based on the needs of students (Partnership, 2014).

Teacher Autonomy: The ability for teachers to execute the tasks required of their position free from outside directives.

Teacher Empowerment: The impact of relinquishing previously held status or position to the educator (Wan, 2005).

Acronyms

Throughout the study, the following acronyms are used. The definitions of acronyms are provided to assist the reader in understanding the content accurately.

AIW – Authentic Intellectual Work

CBB – Curriculum Based Beliefs

ESSA – Every Student Succeeds Act

GTM – Grounded Theory Methodology

NCLB – No Child Left Behind

SCB – Student Centered Beliefs

Researcher's Background

The researcher has had a great deal of experience within the field of education, as a student, teacher, and administrator. Having experienced nearly 15 years as a professional in the field of education, five of which within administration, the researcher is well versed in observing lived experiences within the classroom.

The researcher received his Bachelor of Science Degree from North Dakota State University in the area of K-12 vocal music education. While completing his undergraduate degree, the researcher experienced a great deal of success as both a performer and student. It was during this time he adopted the concept of reflective practice, discipline, and high expectations, both for himself and those he serves.

After completing his undergraduate degree, the researcher began his career in the field of music education as an elementary music specialist, choral director, and band director in rural North Dakota. As a teacher-leader, the researcher was given the opportunity to be part of major building and district level initiatives. The researcher gained a great deal of experiences in the areas of academic intervention, special education practices, technology innovation, and generalized teacher professional development. As a music teacher, the experiences the researcher gained in and out of the classroom lead to his decision to become an administrator. It was during this time that the researcher decided to pursue a Master of Science Degree from Minnesota State University

Moorhead. This was completed the summer 2012. Soon thereafter, having gained even more leadership experience and in pursuit of a position of educational leadership, the researcher applied and was accepted into the doctoral program at the University of North Dakota.

In the summer of 2014, the researcher was given the opportunity become a secondary principal in a rural community in northern Minnesota. The researcher's experience in curriculum and policy development, teacher observation and professional development, and special education intervention development led to a fascination with teacher improvement and student success.

This fascination continued as the researcher transitioned into the role of elementary principal within a larger public school residing within an American Indian reservation in northern Minnesota. The school the researcher served was labeled as a high-priority, school-improvement school by the Minnesota Department of Education due to poor academic performance. The researcher was tasked with creating a learning environment rich with opportunities for success and achievement.

The experiences gained by the researcher in the field of education establish a firm foundation as a scholar and investigator. Most important, these experiences have led the researcher on a journey towards constant self-reflection and a desire to ensure the decisional practices of the teachers he serves are sound.

Summary

Chapter I illustrated an overview of a perceived paradigm shift within educational leadership and the motivation of this study. It provided the reader with a description of the problem, purpose of the study, and broad research question. The chapter included an

outline of the need for the study, a brief description of the pilot study, and research framework. It also included delimitations, assumptions, definitions of terms, and the researcher's background; it concluded with the organization of study.

The remaining chapters will include the background of research pertaining to the topic of this study, design of the research methodology, data produced, and conclusions or recommendations. Chapter II evaluates the current literature as it pertains to the judgment experiences of teachers and the application of decisional capital. Chapter III describes the qualitative research design of this study. This chapter discusses the topic and participant selection, interview methods, methods of analysis, validity, and ethical considerations of this study. Chapter IV presents the categories and theme developed from analyzing the data from teacher interviews. Chapter V provides the discussion and implications of results including recommendations for educational leadership practices.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study will be used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools. Following a brief exploration of the role of literature in a grounded theory study, an investigation of the historical research with regard to the judgment experiences of teachers will be presented. The researcher will also provide an examination of literature pertaining to the elements of Decisional Capital, the emerging theoretical framework of this study. Specifically, information pertaining to the elements of teacher reflection and teacher judgment will be examined. A comprehensive definition of the term judgment will also be articulated. Finally, the researcher will present an extensive investigation of current literature with regard to the judgment experiences of teachers according to the following elements: judgment accuracy, judgment and social capital interplay, teacher autonomy, data-based decision making, and judgment motivation.

Application of Literature Review in Grounded Theory Research

The application of a review of literature within grounded theory research has been subject to debate. When utilizing grounded theory methodology, it was particularly crucial to limit assumptions and bias. For this reason, Glaser and Strauss (2009) contend that a review of literature should be done once the data analysis process has been

completed. Charmaz (2006) believed in carefully evaluating the purpose of a review of literature within grounded theory research in order to limit the concept of “received theory” or seeing the research through the prior research of others. Corbin and Strauss (2015) held the position that all researchers bring at least a baseline level of knowledge from previous research to the study. Charmaz (1996) contends that Glaser’s concept of literature application was somewhat ambiguous, based on the perceived evolution of Glaser’s definition, “It is necessary for the grounded theorist to know many theoretical codes in order to be sensitive to rendering explicitly the subtleties of the relationships in his or her data” (p. 72). This is in contrast to the outlook shared with Strauss. Dey (1999) and Layder (1982) viewed Glaser and, to a lesser extent, Strauss, as naive in their outlook, contending that researchers cannot possibly remove themselves from prior literature.

Review of Literature Applied

The literature review conducted for this study served two purposes: to gain a well-rounded understanding of the theoretical framework of this study (decisional capital) and to investigate the historical and current research available regarding the judgment experiences of teachers. As an educational doctoral student, the researcher was required to produce a proposal to initiate research. A literature review was a requirement of this proposal. While Corbin and Strauss (2015) allow the grounded theory researcher to return to the literature once findings have been discovered, the researcher chose to thoroughly investigate the aforementioned areas in order to gain a solid understanding of the focus of the study and to identify gaps in current research. The researcher also

returned to the literature within the discussion chapter of the study in order to compare the findings to current research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Smith & Biley, 1997).

Professional Capital

At the time the study was conducted, the term professional capital was emerging as an educational leadership theory (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). Investing in professional capital is the single most important task leaders can do to create systemic improvement. With relentless and purposeful investment in professional capital, leaders can create environments in which teachers thrive (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). “Capital in any form is an asset that has to be invested, accumulated, and circulated to yield continuous growth and strong returns” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 1). True investment in professional capital requires leaders to grow and select teachers of the highest quality and settle for nothing less than the best teaching practices. This means teachers must be “highly committed, thoroughly prepared, continuously prepared, properly paid, well networked with each other to maximize their own improvement, and able to make effective judgments together using all their capabilities and experiences” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 2). The qualities necessary to develop capacity within an organization can be found within professional capital. Fullan and Hargreaves broke them down into three subcategories: human, social, and decisional capital.

Human capital. Human capital involves concepts such as qualifications, knowledge, preparation, skills, and emotions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). It is clear that without the human element, formal education as we know it would not exist. In fact, until recently, the human capital theory was thought to be a highly regarded model to utilize when focusing on systemic improvement. The idea focused a great deal on the

education of those people responsible for producing results. Human Capital maximization has shown to benefit both individuals and organizations. Investing in Human Capital often yields positive results for individual and organizational outcomes. Within education, the concept that learning breeds learning is highly advantageous. Most importantly, the idea of continuous education rather than individual training opportunities produces ongoing results (Crook, Todd, Combs, Woehr, & Ketchen, 2011; Psacharopoulos, & Schultz, 1972; vanLoo & Rocco, 2004).

Social capital. The investment in human capital is not without contention in the world of education. Success in education largely relies on the concept of social cooperation. Human capital investment places a great load on the idea of improving the individual leading to individual gains. This concept creates tension within the educational institution. Educational organizations must walk the tenuous line of investing in human capital while ensuring the social capacity is not jeopardized (Gilead, 2009).

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) articulated that social capital involves the following elements: trust, collaboration, collective response, mutual assistance, professional networking, and the concept of push, pull, nudge. Social capital has evolved over the years to include a myriad of definitions. It is often different depending on the disciplines it is applied to. “Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons; it is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production” (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). As people are a constant variable, so are the workings of social capital. Whether an attribute of the individual or the group; social capacity often takes on one of three forms: enforceable trust,

informational channels, and appropriable social organizations (Coleman, 1990). Within these forms, the overall common thread of valued resources within social networks is present. Resources improve and progress is often observed in organizations in which a high amount of social capital is present. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) suggested that it is necessary to not underestimate the power of social capacity to be an agent of change. Its impact on learning for students is great. Collaboration within schools can create learning environments that are stimulating and engaging. When taken to the level of teacher-administrator collaboration, social capital can truly make gains within the educational system. (Kawachi & Takao, 2013; Knipprath & De Rick, 2014; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997; Vorhaus, 2014). “Alone and together, teachers can ignite the spark that will set change alight” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 5). The problem with social capital is that it involves taking time away from the job at hand within any organization, education being no exception. “There is simply not enough opportunity and not enough encouragement for teachers to work together, learn from each other, and improve expertise as a community” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 5).

Decisional capital. The third element of the professional capital triad is decisional capital. Decisional capital is the ability to make decisions and all the complexities involved with informed decision-making. Knowing how and when to make the best judgments in the highly unpredictable world of education has many layers of complexity (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012).

“Decisional capital involves making decisions in complex situations on innumerable occasions with different problems and cases. It is what professionalism is all

about, especially when well-qualified professionals do this together” (A. Hargreaves, personal communication, October 5, 2017).

Like judges, after many years of practice and analyzing that practice and lots of case examples with others, teachers and other professionals know how to assess situations effectively. The evidence helps, but it’s never incontrovertible. In teaching as in law, it’s the capacity to judge that makes the difference in the end. (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, ¶ 8)

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) suggested that decisional capital is developed during a process in which professionals engage in five subcategories, experience, practice, challenging and stretching, reflection, and judgment. Experience is regarded as both a function of time and the individual events that occur over time. Practice refers to the opportunity for individuals to exercise what is learned multiple times. Challenging and stretching is the degree to which individuals have the opportunities to grow beyond their ability (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). The concept of reflection is derived from the efforts of Dewey and Schon and their work with reflective practice (Hébert, 2015). Fullan and Hargreaves’s work builds on their work and the research of others. In this section, available literature will be used to explore the areas of teacher reflection and judgement. The review of available literature produced little with regard to the areas of experience, practice, and challenging and stretching. Searching for the terms *teacher reflection* and *judgment* yielded information most applicable to the structure and guidance of this study and seemed to be the most consistent elements within Fullan and Hargreaves’ literature (Conexus Education, 2015; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). Experience, practice, and challenging and stretching were suggested by both Fullan and

Hargreaves as elements of decisional capital yet were not as consistent within their decisional capital framework definition when cross-referencing written literature and interviews produced by Fullan and Hargreaves (Conexus Education, 2015). For this reason, teacher reflection and judgment were the main subjects investigated within review of literature. The other three elements were evaluated throughout the study investigation in order to reveal potential and applicable connections and interactions. This research aided in the development of the study design. Aside from the work of Fullan and Hargreaves (2012), literature was sparse with regard to the specific topic of decisional capital. As mentioned previously, the concept of Decisional Capital has been applied to the area of law. Decisional capital has only recently been associated with the field of education,

Reflection

Self-reflection has great potential to improve teacher practice. It has a positive impact on not only student achievement but also the climate and motivation of students and teachers alike (Belvis, Pineda, Armengol, & Moreno, 2013). The reflective process includes research about one's own practice. Conducting action research enables professionals to create new knowledge which improves their practice. "They invent new solutions to nagging problems, identify new challenges to address, and respond to the unique contexts and needs of the children and families of the communities where they teach" (Blumenreich & Falk, 2015, p. 50). This concept is revealed through the practice of progress-monitoring and running records. As teachers take time to reflect on the data presented within the records, the decisions made become informed and altered to improve instructional practice (Gillett & Ellingson, 2017).

As professionals are able to freely make decisions with regard to their own practice; their level of empowerment increases, resulting in improved motivation and engagement (Blumenreich & Falk, 2015). Another positive influence or aspect of self-reflection is the ability to guide one's own professional development through the understanding of what needs to be improved. Educational leaders must "provide spaces and opportunities for reflection—for teachers to take control of their own development, to make it a norm in the profession that teachers are self-aware, critical, and reflective" (Anders, 2008, p. 357). As a result of the great amount of research conducted, reflective practice was included within teacher professional development (Lupinski, Jenkins, Beard, & Jones, 2012; McGarr & McCormack, 2015). These programs integrated activities that "promote reflection and engage teachers in the reflective process: interviews, reflective journaling, lesson plan design, instruction tools, videotaped lessons, professional portfolios, skill mastery projects, simulations/role playing, and action research" (Lupinski et al., 2012, p. 89). Training strategies had also incorporated the concept of peer sharing and collaboration surrounding the topic being reflected upon. This concept enforced the idea that learning should be a social activity. When reflection and learning become part of the social structure, positive impacts can be observed within the organization (Connell, 2013).

Judgment Defined

Webster's dictionary contains a myriad of definitions regarding the term judgment. For the purpose of this study it is necessary to articulate which one applies to the decisional capital framework. Upon initial investigation of Hargreaves' (2015) concept of judgment, it was implied that judgment closely aligns with Webster's second

definition: “the capacity for discernment” (Conexus Education, 2015; Judgment, n.d.). It was defined as “the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure” (Judgment, n.d.). Yet another definition described discernment “as the ability to notice the fine-point details, the ability to judge something well or the ability to understand and comprehend” (Judgment, n.d.). While these definitions most certainly applied to the concept of decisional capital, the term judgment was still difficult to define as applied to Hargreaves’s intent. Hargreaves very nearly described judgment as a decision, much like in a court of law (Conexus Education, 2015). Therefore, it could be assumed Hargreaves’ definition of judgement may be more closely related to Webster’s fourth definition, “a formal decision given by court” (Judgment, n.d.).

Judges have to judge because the facts of the case do not speak for themselves.

How do judges learn to judge? By dealing with many cases over many years, by themselves, with other people, in the courtroom, out of the courtroom reflectively, alone introspectively, and collectively with their colleagues. (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 38)

Finally, Webster’s fifth definition speaks of judgment in Biblical terms: “A final judging of humankind by God or a divine sentence or decision” (Judgment, n.d.). This definition is similar to the prior as it involves a decisional component. However, it bestows an ordination of power with the decision, which may have investigative implications as well. The term judgment as it relates to this study consists of both the concept of perception and the act of decision making. As a result of the articulated definition, the researcher used the terms judgment and decision interchangeably as well as the terms judgment ability, decision-making, judgment experience, and decisional experiences.

Teacher Judgment

Historical Research and Background

The exploration of teacher decision-making has been a focus of research for some time. The researcher discovered literature spanning the latter half of the 20th century. However, the prevalence of literature was not as prolific until the early 1980s. With increased accountability, the need for consistent and effective decision-making had grown during that time (Byers & Evans, 1980; Yinger & Clark, 1982). As implied previously, much of the investigative work focused on judgment as a perceptual element. In other words, the focus of research was on how teachers perceived student performance. This research revealed discrepancies both in terms of the perceptions of teachers and the decisions made as a result (Byers & Evans, 1980; Yinger & Clark, 1982). Implied and emerging evidence suggested these perceptions and decisions were a result of the past lived experiences of the teachers themselves (Yinger & Clark, 1982). This topic will be explored in greater detail in the discussion chapter of this study.

As the need for accountability increased as a result of NCLB, investigation continued to move forward in the 1990s and early 21st century (Case, 1993; Elhoweris, 2008; Klimczak, Balli, & Wedman, 1995; Laak, Goede, & Brugman, 2001; Schultz, 1998). However, the topic focus began to broaden to include teacher empowerment, teacher autonomy, data-based decision-making, as well as judgment accuracy (Laak et al., 2001; Case, 1993; Elhoweris, 2008; Klimczak et al., 1995; Schultz, 1998). Very little investigative work surrounded the concepts or questions with regard to the elements or experiences that lead to effective decision-making.

Yinger and Clark's (1982) investigation sought to utilize a process-tracing analysis to explore the elements and decisional-experiences of teachers. Their study "provided a description of how the teachers defined and modified the judgement task and drew upon their own professional experiences to comprehend, edit, and evaluate the activity descriptions" (p. 1). This particular study had the greatest application to the researcher's investigation and provided great insight into the investigative practices guiding the research. A study later conducted by Yinger (1983) suggested much more investigation should be done surrounding the judgment experiences of teachers. Among conclusions reached were the following:

1. Teachers as judges may have better insight into their own decision processes than researchers usually give them credit for. Closer attention should be paid to differences in language and level of detail offered by the various methods and to what kind of data are used to evaluate the validity of verbal reports.
2. Better models of the tasks in which judgment is being examined should be developed.
3. More should be known about how experience influences judgment.
4. Multi-method approaches will probably provide more accurate results.

(Yinger, 1983, p. 1)

Schultz's (1998) work, *The Dynamics of Pedagogic Judgment in Teaching*, also provided the researcher with guidance and information pertaining to the judgment experiences of teachers. It was within this work that the concept of student-centered, empathetic judgment motivation was revealed as a core investigative element (Schultz,

1998). Both the Yinger and Clark's (1982) and Schultz's works will be further discussed in Chapter V of the study.

Accuracy

In education, the ability for teachers to make sound judgments is vital to the success of the student (McGill, 2018; Shackelton & Campbell, 2014; Tobisch & Dresel, 2017). However, the process of using judgment is far from linear in nature. Teachers are immersed in an environment in which they must make constant judgments about student performance and behavior (Walker et al., 2015). There are many variables that affect teachers' ability to make sound decisions (Conexus Education, 2015). With little exception, literature was vague and non-prescriptive in terms of the ability to improve the judgment capacity of teachers (Adie, Klenowski, & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Begeny, Krouse, Brown, & Mann, 2011; Biesta, 2015; Martin & Shapiro, 2011). Even so, Sudkamp, Kaiser, and Moller (2012) suggested a model for judgment accuracy. This model did not suggest actions to be taken; rather, it addressed the characteristics that affect the accuracy of the judgments made by teachers. Sudkamp et al. (2012) provided an explicit illustration of empirical findings that place teacher judgement accuracy at the center of the model.

While models of judgment accuracy lean toward a better understanding of the processes involved in decision-making, teacher judgment in terms of perception has shown a potential to be inaccurate and detrimental to the educational environment when unsupported (Flowers & Rose, 2014; McGill, 2018; Shackelton & Campbell, 2014; Tobisch & Dresel, 2017). In particular, teacher bias was examined and found to have a highly detrimental impact on student achievement as the potential for inaccuracy

increased (Shackelton & Campbell, 2014; Tobisch & Dresel, 2017). This concept has demanded further investigation in order to produce judgment capacity theories or structures for the purpose of improving student outcomes both academically and socially (Marksteiner, Ask, Reinhard, & Dickhäuser, 2015). Theorists and researchers have developed structures for specific subject matter and environments in pursuit of building judgment capacity (Urhahne, 2011; Walker et al., 2015; Zhou & Urhahne, 2013). To reiterate, rather than focusing on factors or experiences that culminate in a decision or judgment being made, investigations continued to rely upon the output or accuracy of the decisions being made to determine suggestions (Cate, Krolak-Schwerdt, & Glock, 2015; Praetorius, Berner, Zeinz, Scheunpflug, & Dresel, 2013). Judgment accuracy is considered an important aspect of informed teaching practice (Praetorius et al., 2013). The absence of supporting literature surrounding factors leading to accuracy has led the researcher to further investigate the judgment experiences of teachers.

Experiences

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study will be used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools. Emerging research seemingly reinforced the structures presented within Fullan and Hargreaves's investigations in terms of human, social, and decisional capital elements (Smith, Parker, McKinney, & Grigg, 2018; Tucker, 2018). Yet, accurately representing the decisional experiences of teachers proved to be elusive and inconclusive within literature (Siuty, Leko, & Knackstedt, 2016).

Social Capital Interplay

Social capital has been shown to connect with the decision-making practices of teachers (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012; Sheridan & Tindall-Ford, 2018; Tucker, 2018). As teachers, working in collaboration with others may produce positive results through evaluating the judgments of peers (Biesta, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2015).

Furthermore, relational conditions, such as a culture of teamwork and building trusting relationships were instrumental. Empowerment conditions, such as leaders trusting teachers and valuing their input, as well as providing them opportunities for decision-making and leadership, also supported the development of social and decisional capital. (Visone, 2018, p. 1)

Teacher Autonomy

The interaction between the curriculum and teacher suggests an emphasis on subject-matter immersion and accurate reflection in order to accurately determine teaching practice (Ormond, 2016; Siuty et al., 2016). The ability to freely move within their subject matter in order to make informed decisions regarding practice is favorable within literature (Ormond, 2016). The concept of teacher autonomy emerged within the literature as an element of judgment experience. In terms of curriculum, decision-making, and teacher autonomy, researchers suggest more research is necessary to better understand the decision-making experiences of teachers (Lande & Mesa, 2015).

Data-Based Decision-Making

The terms data-based or evidence-based decision-making emerged within literature as a concept desirable within the process of making informed judgments (Baarends et al., 2017; Bosch, Espin, Chung, & Saab, 2017; Martin & Shapiro, 2011).

However, this concept was proven beneficial only if teachers were adequately trained in data-mining practices (Baarends et al., 2017). Without such training, while teachers could attest to utilizing data to guide instructional decisions, they could not describe how they did so (Wagner, Coolong-Chaffin, & Deris, 2017). Over time, training in such practices has improved.

With the advancement of differentiated instructional practices, teachers utilize data to provide focused interventions and instruction based on progress-monitoring and running records (Watts-Taffe et al., 2012). While deemed effective in terms of practice, these concepts were not an accurate predictor of student performance; rather, when teachers directed their instruction through data-based practices, student growth was noted while teachers themselves could not accurately predict the ultimate outcome of these practices, often overinflating the outcome (Martin & Shapiro, 2011). The concept of perceptual results will be addressed further in chapter V of this study.

Motivation

Throughout the review of literature, the concept of judgment as result of past experiences has been implied. Literature supported this concept, particularly with regard to personally established morals, values, and beliefs guiding decisions made by educators (Gill, 2015; Shelina & Mitina, 2015). This concept is present within the structures of sexual health and education in public schools. Evidence supported teachers' discourse as a factor that influenced decision-making within the science and health classrooms (Gill, 2015). Teachers often altered decisions based on their own personal beliefs or moral compass (Gill, 2015).

In addition to the past experiences of teachers, shared or otherwise, the ethic of practicality guides the decision-making practice (Doyle & Ponder, 2016). The practicality ethic consists of three categories or “drivers” in the decision-making process:

1. Instrumentality: Teachers must, at minimum, be provided specific procedures and methods in order for a decision to be deemed practical.
2. Congruence: Teachers also make decisions in terms of the extent to which a proposed procedure is congruent with perceptions of their own situations.
3. Cost: Cost may be conceptualized as a ratio between amount of return and amount of investment. It refers primarily to the ease with which a procedure can be implemented and the potential return for adopting an innovation.

(Doyle & Ponder, 2016, pp. 6-8)

The practicality ethic when combined with the ecological components of teacher judgment may present an accurate representation of their decisional processes (Doyle & Ponder, 2016).

Perceptually, a connection could be implied between the concept of the practicality ethic and teachers’ caution in terms of workload. Evidence suggests aside from being practical in nature, decisions with regard to practice, curriculum selection, and student interventions were often made with caution in order to limit workload (Burgess et al., 2010). This concept may, in fact, align with the definition of practicality (Doyle & Ponder, 2016).

Teachers’ view of standards implementation mirrors the concept of the practicality ethic. The moderation of standards use has been positively received among teachers. The belief was if standards were used in moderation, improved judgment

consistency could be achieved (Connolly, Klenowski, & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). In addition, “context was identified as an important influential factor in teachers’ judgments and it was concluded that teachers’ assessment beliefs, attitudes, and practices impact on their perceptions of the value of moderation practice and the extent to which consistency can be achieved” (Connolly et al., 2012, p. 1). This sentiment was consistent with the elements present with the practicality ethic, that is, instrumentality, congruence, and cost (Doyle & Ponder, 2016).

Within the great quantity of literature investigated, two elements of interest to the researcher were seemingly absent or represented minimally: motivational factors and intuition. As an experienced educator and investigator, the researcher was intrigued by lack of information about motivation and intuition. It could be implied through the existing evidence that teacher motivation is largely due to external factors, that is, administrative directive, standard-based instruction, curriculum design, etc. However, throughout the vast amount of investigated literature, the researcher discovered only one resource that explicitly articulates intuition as a factor of decision-making (Boschman, Mckenney, & Voogt, 2014). This concept will be further explored within the discussion chapter of the study.

Summary

Much of the investigation of literature revealed information pertaining to teachers’ perceptions, particularly in terms of curriculum design and selection (Cate et al., 2015; Praetorius et al., 2013). Throughout the review of literature, the concepts, ideas, and phenomena that influence the decisions of teachers were explored.

Following a brief exploration of the role of literature in a grounded theory study, an investigation of the historical with regard to the judgment experiences of teachers was presented. An examination of literature pertaining to the elements of decisional capital, the emerging theoretical framework of this study, specifically teacher reflection and teacher judgment, was then presented. A comprehensive definition of the term judgment was also articulated. Finally, the researcher presented an extensive investigation of current literature with regard to the judgment experiences of teachers according to the following elements: judgment accuracy, judgment and social capital interplay, teacher autonomy, data-based decision making, and judgment motivation. It is the opinion of the researcher that there is tremendous potential to yield applicable results in terms of guiding leadership strategies and investment. With very few exceptions, investigated literature with regard to the judgment or decisional experience of teachers, as well as the opinion and research of Hargreaves (2015), suggests the need to further study the ethnographical nature of teacher judgment.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

In Chapter II, the review of current and past research established the need for this study. Chapter III provides the rationale for study design. It consists of information regarding topic and participant selection along with a detailed outline of the interview methods used with teachers in rural northern Minnesota schools. The chapter then illustrates the data analysis methods used for the study. A discussion of measures to ensure data validity and ethical research practices concludes the chapter.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study will be used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools. The researcher chose qualitative research methods to investigate the lived judgment experiences of teachers. Grounded theory methodology was determined to be the most useful vehicle to more deeply understand these lived experiences. Charmaz (1996), a qualitative research expert, expressed that:

Good qualitative research results from hard work and systematic approaches. That means gathering enough data, synthesizing them and making analytic sense of them. Grounded theory methods provide a set of strategies for conducting rigorous qualitative research. These methods make the strategies of gifted qualitative researchers explicit and available to any diligent novice. Using

grounded theory methods expedites your research, enables you to develop a cogent analysis and stimulates your excitement about and enjoyment of doing research. (p. 27)

Through recursive analysis of data as a result of open-ended interviews, the researcher utilized the Grounded Theory process to investigate the judgment experiences of teachers.

Topic Selection

Several topics were explored during the inception of this study. The topic of greatest interest, however, the judgment experiences of teachers, derived from the researcher's own experiences as a teacher and administrator.

From the moment the researcher first took the reins as a music educator something was not right. There was a feeling of helplessness and distress as he looked upon the eager faces of the young boys and girls sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of him as he began his first lesson as an elementary music specialist. There, sitting in the lap of each child, was a torn, tattered, 20-year-old music book filled with the scribbles and marks of the past. He stood there, eager to get started but discouraged by the sight of a piano leaning to one side as a result of a broken caster, glockenspiels and percussion instruments that had seen years of abuse, and the record player he had rewired just to get it to produce sound. In the corner was a bucket, slowly filling with water as a result of the leak in the ceiling of his room. His eagerness soon turned to heartache for the children sitting before him. He knew that if he did not do something about the current state of the music department, the children would never have the opportunity to experience the impact of an authentic music education in their lives. It was up to him to

deliver the best possible education for these students within the climate he was given. Over the coming months, he repaired instruments using his own hard-earned money, spent countless hours after everyone had left tuning the piano and repairing texts, and created a developmentally appropriate curriculum rich with holistic educational experiences. By the time he left his position, the feeling at his school had changed. Other teachers noticed the improvements within his program and, most importantly, in their students' success. The climate within the organization had been altered. A relatively dismal situation had turned into an environment rich with opportunity.

Fast forward several years: Serving as an elementary music specialist in a much larger district with many more students, the freedom he had once experienced was all at once robbed; he had an administrator who seemingly took joy in the control he had, or rather, his ability to say "no" to each and every request regardless of educational or financial viability. The researcher was faced with a student population with many more needs while having even less curriculum and fewer materials to work with. As a budding leader within his district, he began to feel the stress and helplessness of being in a position of not being able to make the impact he so longed for on the lives and education of students. This inability to do what he believed was right contributed to the decision to move on and become a high school band and choral director.

It was during his time as a band and choral director that the researcher committed fully to becoming an administrator. The education and experiences he gained as a leader truly opened his eyes to different leadership styles and the correlated impact potential each administrator has on the stakeholders of the educational environment. More importantly, having once again gained a fair amount of autonomy, he felt empowered to

do what he knew was best for students. Within a short amount of time, the research experienced great leaps with regard to student success and wellbeing in his classroom. A decade and a half later, he found himself wondering what would have happened had he not had the freedom to fix the instruments, repair or replace the textbooks, or even develop the curriculum. Would the students have been as successful? Would he have loved his job as much as he did? Would the climate of the organization have improved in the manner which it did? Without the trust and support of the principal and colleagues, he felt he would have made little difference within the school.

As a practicing elementary principal, the researcher found great value in personal and professional reflection. When looking back on his career as an educator, as well as his own education and leadership experiences, he began to wonder if other educators and leaders had similar experiences. The more empowered the researcher was to make the right choices regarding practice, technique, and vision for his program, the more successful he perceived himself as a teacher.

Study Purpose

The researcher's experiences have led to research that could have a profound impact on the practice of leadership within the educational organization. As mentioned previously, the work of Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) is of high interest to the researcher. Each theorist has had a profound impact in the area of educational leadership specifically with regard to organizational change and building of professional capital. Decisional capital, a facet of professional capital, was articulated within the review of literature. As previously discussed, decisional capital is defined by Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) as the ability to make judgments, reflect on practice, gain knowledge through experience,

practice new skills, and be challenged and stretched in order to grow as a professional. These areas resonate with the researcher and aid in understanding his own experiences as a leader. It is for this reason he selected the emergent concept of decisional capital as a theoretical framework to guide this qualitative grounded theory study. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study will be used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools.

Researching the Topic

After the topic was selected, the researcher conducted a thorough review of current literature, the purpose of which was to provide a deep understanding of the background of the topic.

A literature review is central to the research process and can help refine a research question through determining inconsistencies in a body of knowledge. Similarly, it can help inspire new research innovations and ideas while creating greater understanding about a topic. It can enable a novice researcher to gain insight into suitable designs for a future study, as well as providing information on data collection and analysis tools. (Coughlin, Cronin, & Ryan, 2008, p. 43)

Information from the literature review was used to gain insight into the current research available regarding the judgment experiences of teachers. The culminating knowledge was then used not only to determine the gaps in the current body of literature but to define the parameters of the study.

The research design was refined during the researcher's educational experience at the University of North Dakota within the field of educational leadership. Discussions

with colleagues and professors within research classes led the researcher through the development and design of the study. In addition, a pilot study was determined to be necessary during the dissertation proposal meeting with the research committee in order to refine the study methodology. The pilot study purpose and resulting information will be discussed further within the chapter.

Developing the Topic

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to investigate how rural northern Minnesota teachers' perceive their decisional experiences within the classroom. Results from this study will be used to better understand decisional capital and its place within schools. The main question guiding this study was as follows:

- What are northern Minnesota teachers' perceptions of the basis of their decisional experiences in rural school setting?

In order to answer this question, interview questions were established. The pilot study was used to develop questions to provide the most meaningful responses.

Participant Selection

Recruitment Process

For the purpose of this study anyone serving as a public school teacher was a potential participant. Invitations were sent via email to school administrators within five school districts in rural northern Minnesota. Initially, only two teachers responded to email invitations. In order to connect with participants, it was necessary for relationships to be built between the researcher and building administrators. In some cases, it was necessary to forgo phone calls and email communications entirely and personally visit the building administrators. This involved a great deal of traveling. This was a huge

undertaking demonstrating a genuine commitment to the research process. During this process, administrators became more deeply interested in the purpose and development of the study. Connecting participant to researcher based on email communication had proven to be ineffective. It could be assumed it was necessary to build trust with the “gatekeepers” of the participant teachers in order for the researcher to gain access to the participants. Once trust was earned, administrators freely and openly connected participants with the researcher; allowing participants to be interviewed during work hours, providing interview spaces, and aiding in the selection of participants through theoretical sampling. As a result, each participant was contacted personally to set up interviews. A total of two participants were contacted via phone and 10 via face-to-face communication and introduction by the building administrator. All interviews were conducted through face-to-face discussion. The process to complete interviews utilizing this strategy began in May 2018 and was completed in December 2018.

Following the Grounded Theory approach and theoretical sampling, the total number of participants was not initially determined until the data had been analyzed and reached saturation. A total of 10 ($n = 10$) participants contributed to the formal study.

Sampling Process

According to Grounded Theory, the total numbers in order to reach a conclusion are not known at the beginning of the study. This is known as non-probability sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Cutcliffe, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 2009). As mentioned previously, theoretical sampling is a sampling method utilized within GTM. This method is in contrast to purposive sampling. The broad scope of this study utilized an approach

in which only minor adjustments were necessary in sampling method in order to produce the most robust data and thus could be deemed lightly theoretical in nature.

Early in the study and as a result of evaluating preliminary data, it became evident it was necessary to discuss with building administrators the importance of connecting the researcher with participants who would produce rich and meaningful answers. While interview adaptation and skill development elicited a wealth of data, it was necessary to ensure that this continued throughout the process. Thus, administrators were asked to connect the researcher to participants who would most likely provide complex responses. Other than this adjustment, no major sampling changes were made as it was not observed to be necessary in the developing themes and categories produced by the data.

Participant Profiles

All participants were practicing teachers within rural northern Minnesota school districts. Table 1 reveals the demographic information gathered within each interview.

Table 1

Participant Sample Profiles with Pseudonym, Years of Experience and Subject Area

Teacher Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Subject Area
Paul	7	Industrial Tech
Sarah	28	Music
Veronica	16	SPED/Business
Edward	8	Art
Sharon	6	General Elementary
Suzanne	12	General Elementary
Sherri	6	General Elementary
June	20	General Elementary
Richard	17	General Elementary
Martha	22	Special Education

As participant selection was based on availability and willingness, the profiles varied greatly. Each participant presented a unique picture of his or her experiences within education. These variations proved to be important to the creation of the developed themes and categories. As each story was different, the commonalities regarding decisional experiences became more meaningful to the conclusion of the study. Once data-saturation had been reached the researcher stopped recruiting participants.

Pilot Study Purpose

In order to ensure quality and productivity, a pilot study was conducted within an organization outside the scope of the desired formal study. Interviews were conducted with two (n=2) teachers within the organization. Questions were asked with the goal of eliciting the most robust responses surrounding the decisional experiences of the

participants. Questions were then refined and subsequently utilized during the formal study (see Appendices B for Interview Protocol). In addition, interviews were transcribed and coded to aid in refining the research practice. This process resulted in focused interview questions surrounding the following content:

1. Demographic information (years of experience, content area, student population served, etc.).
2. Past life and educational experiences leading toward the teaching profession.
3. General classroom environment including student/teacher relational dynamic, teacher/student interaction, and physical environment.
4. Specific past experiences involving decisions that affect student well-being and success.
5. Internal drive behind decision-making.

Methods of Data Collection

Interviews

Initially, it was determined that information was to be gathered on an individual basis to observe possible variations in information. Supported by grounded theory literature, individual interviews were chosen as the primary means of data collection (e.g., Charmaz, 2006; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Each interview was conducted in a mutually agreed upon setting and was face-to-face. This process yielded rich and meaningful perspectives of each individual surrounding the same topic.

Each interview began with an approach that was purposefully unstructured in nature. This process allowed the researcher to follow the direction of the conversation presented by the participant. It also minimized the chances of leading the interview in a

specific direction. Leading questioning in this way would have been detrimental to the study and possibly increased the risk of missing vital perceptual information (Minichiello, Madisen, Hays, & Parmenter, 2004; Vaus, 2004).

After introductions, each interview began with direct questions that were demographic in nature (e.g., “What do you teach? How long have you been teaching? How many students do you serve?). Questions were then open-ended in nature and followed the answers each participant provided. However, several questions never wavered within each interview. In addition, several other topics were explored in order to focus interviews towards the study purpose. Topics included specific experiences requiring decisions and judgments in the classroom, definition of successful teaching, student success, etc., as well as general self-perception. The following questions provided the framework to each interview:

1. How did you prepare to be a teacher?
2. If I were to observe your classroom, what would I see?
3. What governs your ability to make decisions in your classroom regarding student well-being and success?
4. How do you define student success?
5. What role do your colleagues play in your decision-making?
6. How do you use self-reflection in your teaching practice?
7. What role does administration play in your decision-making?

These questions elicited further inquiry around perceptions of student and teacher success, teacher effectiveness, and administrative oversight. This information is presented in the data analysis section of the study.

Normally, with GTM, there is a very close relationship between sample selection and the data that are revealed (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). While this approach was true with this study, the main goal was to produce as much meaningful data as possible, not to observe whether other sample factors produced different data. The only qualifying factor desired was that each participant be a practicing teacher, a concept that did not fluctuate during the study. As previously mentioned, early evaluation of data presented an importance in selecting participants who were known to be fully vested in the process in order to produce rich and meaningful data.

Process of Data Collection

Interviews took place in various locations based on participant availability and comfort. It was paramount to create an atmosphere in which each participant felt safe to confide in the researcher. The process of doing so started well before the actual interview began. Personal introductions were given either face-to-face or via telephone. During these conversations, the researcher made every attempt to connect with the participant in order to build trust. Before each interview, it was vital to assure the participant that interview data would be kept private and names would not be used in this study. This was another step to create trust. Interviews were purposefully informal in nature in order to continue a trusted environment. This trusted relationship produced rich and meaningful data.

Each interview was recorded for the purpose of being transcribed at a later time. Recording interviews proved to be vital in terms of capturing the data for later analysis. It allowed the researcher to focus field notes around observation and key details, rather than attempting to transcribe each word in the moment. Doing so resulted in a much

more detailed picture of each participant's experience. Recording interviews also reduced the chances of pushing bias into the data (Charmaz, 2006) by relying on memory.

The transcribed information allowed the researcher to dive deeply into the data in order to gain the greatest insight into what was occurring. It also provided the researcher many opportunities to return to the data as phenomena were identified, staying true to the iterative nature of GTM.

Data Collection

“Data analysis in qualitative research manages words, language and the meanings they imply” (Myrick & Walker, 2006, p. 549). GTM's robust capacity to develop a deep understanding of social interaction provides a highly useful tool for the qualitative researcher. Through coding, the researcher looked at data in pieces while evaluating them in a continuing fashion for commonalities and differences. The data were then refined and sorted into categories utilizing qualitative analysis software. The software used for this study was ATLAS.ti GmbH, version 7.1.0. Theories were then generated based on the presence of the emerging categories and theoretical saturation (Myrick & Walker, 2006). This process of data collection and analysis occurred in alternating sequences. The intent behind creating this iterative cycle was to constantly compare previous and new data through induction and deduction. The data produced then guided the researcher forward in the discovery of a well-developed theory. The data collection methods used during this study are explained in detail in the section, Methods of Collecting Data.

Through the use of GTM, the researcher was able to move fluidly and interact with the data in a flexible manner. This type of flexibility is contrary to other research methods that demand a more rigid approach to data collection and analysis. For the purpose of this study, interviews were selected as the sole means of data collection.

Memo Writing

Memo writing was vital to the research process within GMT. It served as the foundation in which the relationship between the researcher and the data was formed. “Memo writing is the methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 245).

It was during the memo writing process that the analytical process began. The researcher scrutinized all forms of data in order to observe patterns that emerged. However, “memos were not intended to describe the social worlds of the researcher’s data, instead, they conceptualized the data in narrative form” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p.245).

For me, memo writing is the dynamic, intellectually energized process that captures ideas in synergistic engagement with one another and, through naming, explicating, and synthesizing them, ultimately renders them accessible to wider audiences. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 245)

Corbin and Strauss (2015) illustrated three suggestions for those who have conducted memo writing. Throughout the research process, it was necessary to evaluate all memos and field notes and test them against the theory for validity. The theory must hold up against any scrutiny done in the comparison. All memos linked directly back to the field notes from which they came. Next, memos were categorized and broken down further

into subcategories. These subcategories were then turned into dimensions and properties. This process developed a structure with regard to research findings within Chapter IV. Finally, memos were referred to once again for primary details. Direct quotations and cases were then linked back to the major points of the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Data Analysis

Clustering

Charmaz (2006) suggested that clustering can provide a linear, visual approach to observe how phenomena relate to each other. The researcher found this process to be incredibly valuable to this study. Through diagramming, phenomena were revealed in meaningful ways. This process is not unlike the conceptual mapping illustrated within grounded theory (Clarke, 2005).

Comparative Analysis

The cornerstone of GTM is comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). During the analysis process, each piece of information was constantly compared to previously gathered data to discover differences and similarities in order to form concepts and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Coding

Charmaz (2012) contends that all GTM coding differs from other qualitative coding in the following aspects:

- Is for social and social psychological processes, not for topics
- Emphasizes actions with actions embedded in the codes
- Uses gerunds
- Makes coding processes iterative

- Aims for specificity
- Allows for imaginative interpretations, with less concern with accuracy
- Compares data with data
- Prompts researcher to remain active in the process
- Rejects requirements for agreement among coders

Within the GTM coding, the researcher moved naturally through several phases: initial, axial, and selective. The initial phase involved the transcription of essential elements or data. Within this initial phase, the researcher reviewed preliminary data for the existence of broad ideas for the purpose of guiding further data collection practices. Throughout the initial coding process, the researcher remained as objective as possible and open to all emergent theories. The researcher took the necessary steps to avoid the tendency to filter the findings through his own experiences. The vision or purpose of the initial coding process was to guide the researcher in the learning process and to gain as well-rounded a picture as possible. This foundation provided an avenue for data analysis rich in discovery to occur, the ultimate goal of which was to gain an accurate depiction of every aspect of the participants' point of view and account.

Coding began with the data collection method selected by the researcher. Most applicable are the concepts of interviewing and creating memos. As previously indicated, interviewing allowed the researcher to gain insight into the experiences of participants. It provided a perspective of first-hand accounts when otherwise not possible. In addition, through interviewing, the researcher gained an understanding of internal experiences. Thoughts, emotions, and internal meanings illustrated a depth of data not gained through other methods of data collection (Gubrium, 2012).

Open Coding

GTM coding rests on the concept of open coding. Open coding involves the process of analyzing each piece of data to reveal the phenomena. “Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). The framework established through grounded theory coding became the foundation of analysis (see C for coding example). Two essential elements came together within the coding process: theoretical statements and contextual analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

Axial Coding

Axial coding involved identifying codes related to each other through deductive and inductive reasoning. Specifically, the process of identifying causal relationships moved into a basic framework of generalized relationships (Borgatti, 2015). This framework consisted of the following elements, as suggested by Borgatti (2015):

- **Phenomenon:** This is what in schema theory might be called the name of the schema or frame. It is the concept that holds the bits together. In grounded theory it is sometimes the outcome of interest, or it can be the subject.
- **Causal conditions:** These are the events or variables that lead to the occurrence or development of the phenomenon. It is a set of causes and their properties.
- **Context:** This is hard to distinguish from the causal conditions. It is the specific locations (values) of background variables. It is a set of conditions influencing the action or strategy. Researchers often make a quaint distinction

between active variables (causes) and background variables (context). It has more to do with what the researcher finds interesting (causes) and less interesting (context) than with distinctions out in nature.

- Interviewing conditions: This is similar to context. One could identify context with moderating variables and intervening conditions with mediating variables. But it is not clear that grounded theorists cleanly distinguish between these two.
- Action strategies: These are the purposeful, goal-oriented activities that agents perform in response to the phenomenon and intervening conditions.
- Consequences: These are the consequences of the action strategies, intended and unintended.

Selective coding involved choosing a core category. The core category then became the foundation to which all other categories are related (Borgatti, 2015).

Categories to Code

Focusing the coded data allowed the researcher to initialize analysis. The developed codes were used as beginning categories, which urged the researcher to evaluate and compare them. The constant comparison filtered solid category material from non-pertinent information. The resulting categories were then moved on to further scrutiny (Charmaz, 2014). Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggested that researchers must be highly investigative when analyzing data, asking what, when, where, why, and how. Doing so focused the vast amount of data and formed categories into a developed pattern. The following format suggested by Corbin and Strauss seeks to ask and answer inquiries with regard to the category:

- What is the category?
- When does the category occur?
- Where does the category occur?
- Why does the category occur?
- How does the category occur?
- With what consequences does the category occur or is the category understood? (Corbin & Straus, 2015)

These questions were used as a framework when coding interviews.

Once coding of interviews was completed, the identification of phenomena began. These phenomena became the basis of the grounded theory. It should be noted that phenomena can only be determined by frequency. The presence of frequency with regard to the phenomena resulted in the core category.

Validity

Joppe (2000) offered an explanation of validation's place within qualitative research stating:

Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it is intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit the "bull's eye" of your research object? Researchers generally determine validity by asking a series of questions and will often look for the answers in the research of others. (p. 1)

This statement most certainly rings true with the focus of this study. The words of each participant were a direct reflection of the focus of the research. The questions mentioned previously in this chapter allowed participants to produce meaningful data that pertain to

the goal of this study, which was to gain an understanding of teacher judgment experiences. Although the results produced a great deal more information, the perceptions of the judgment and decision-making practices of teachers were extrapolated with a laser-like focus through the iterative cycle.

Member Checking

One of the main methods of ensuring validity within a GTM study is to utilize member checking, otherwise known as respondent or participant validation. This is the process in which the data, results, and interview transcriptions are returned to participants for the purpose of checking accuracy (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). With regard to this study, each interview was transcribed, coded, and returned to the corresponding participant. Each participant was then given the opportunity to share discrepancies and feedback.

Validation Applied

Specifically, validation was achieved by means of two assurances within this study: data saturation and member checking. Data saturation was indicated when participant responses could be replicated utilizing the same interview style. This was evident within the coding and theoretical sampling process.

As mentioned previously, participant data and transcripts were returned to each individual for the purpose of cross-checking for accuracy. No participant provided correction or feedback in terms of accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher completed training through the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board (IRB) before commencing this study. In order to obtain permission from the IRB, the researcher completed the human subject's review form upon committee approval.

Institutional review boards (IRBs) or research ethics committees provide a core protection for human research participants through advance and periodic independent review of the ethical acceptability of proposals for human research. (Grady, 2015, p. 1)

The researcher demonstrated to the IRB that the study would be conducted in an ethical manner and utmost care would be given to the participants.

In order to preserve the ethical integrity of the study, the researcher implemented the following strategies. Permission was asked of each participating district's superintendent. Accompanying the permission request was a letter detailing the strategies and purpose of the study. A signed permission letter was received by the researcher from each participating district indicating an understanding of the purpose of and methods used for the study.

Before each interview, the researcher provided each participant with a consent form. Each participant was given an opportunity to ask questions. Participants were also reminded participation was voluntary and they would not have any negative consequences if they chose not to participate. Each participant was then given a signed copy of the consent form.

The participant consent form included the purpose of the study, the start and ending dates of the study, the researcher's advisor and researcher's names and contact information, the role of the participant in the study, any potential benefits or risks of participating in the study, and protocol that protects the participants' identity. The signed consent forms were kept in a locked file cabinet in the school office of the researcher separate from participant data. The consent forms will be held for three years following completion of the study. The only individuals with access to the data are the researcher, the researcher's advisor, and the University of North Dakota IRB audit personnel (see Appendices C for consent form example).

The utmost care was given to each participant throughout the research process. The researcher dedicated careful attention to answering questions in order to ensure each participant had a firm understanding of the research process and participant rights. Each participant was given a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. These pseudonyms were used in transcripts, data analysis, and within this manuscript. This allowed the participants full opportunity to be open with interview responses (Glesne, 2016).

Upon conclusion of this study, the researcher will maintain research materials for three years as required by law. Audio recordings and transcripts were and continue to be held within a password protected, cloud-based data storage account. Other than the consent forms, participant identity was not included on any documentation or materials. Only pseudonyms were used throughout each step as participant identity was not significant to the purpose of the study.

All data were presented within the findings of this study, including data that were contrary to the researcher's impressions or ideas. Data were not changed or manipulated to demonstrate a case or position.

Summary

Chapter III illustrated the overall structure and qualitative nature of the study. The chapter provided information regarding topic and participant selection along with a detailed outline of the interview methods used with teachers in rural northern Minnesota schools. The chapter then illustrated the data analysis methods used for the study. A discussion of data validity and ethical research practices concluded the chapter.

Chapter IV will provide the developed categories and theme as a result of detailed analysis of teacher interviews regarding their judgment experiences. Chapter V will consist of discussion and implications resulting from the study. Recommendations for educational leadership practices and teacher decisional capacity will also be included.

CHAPTER IV
DATA ANALYSIS

Phase 1

For this study, practicing public school teachers in rural northern Minnesota schools were asked to participate. Study participants were selected based on their willingness and availability. Ten teachers (N=10) from three school districts were interviewed. Data were gathered until saturation had been reached and a valid conclusion could be made as a result of complete and thorough analysis. Phase 1 of analysis presents an examination of each participant response presented in chronological order. This style of organization was chosen as it captured the essence of each participant's experience apart from each other. This concept is supported as a valid organizational style within qualitative research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). Cohen et al. (2017) suggested organization by "temporal sequence" and "key participants" as two of 14 variations within qualitative research studies. In order to fully assess the experiences of the participants for common themes and elements and as a result of limited participation, a second phase of analysis was conducted and will be presented. In order to protect identity, participants were given a pseudonym.

Teacher Profiles and Textural Descriptions

Paul

Paul was an industrial technology teacher with seven years of experience in the teaching field. He felt most comfortable conducting the interview within his classroom, which was heavily outfitted with an attached multimedia fabrication lab. Paul was a very excitable individual. His voice inflections were jubilant and facial expressions conveyed a feeling of happiness and joy. The manner in which he conducted himself suggested a certain passion for the position he held as teacher. Paul constantly used his hands to express himself and a smile was observed throughout the interview.

Paul expressed a passion for his teaching as directly a result of the passion for the subject area he taught, stating, “I like working with my hands. I liked shop in high school. So I’d lean that way not necessarily only in the teaching field. That’s why I went to machine school first. Teaching actually became a secondary thought or idea.”

According to Paul, he continued this concept of passion within his teaching practice. He believed all students should have an opportunity to select and pursue areas in which they are passionate or interested. When responding to the prompt, “So, as you interact with students what does that look like when you interact with them? The day-to-day goings on in your classroom, what does that look like?” he articulated:

So the trick that I find is picking or finding their interests first, then guiding to what I think they might like. You know I mean obviously getting to know their interests; you got to try and get them. That’s my usual hope. In our classroom, there are so many variables of the things they can make so I say, okay, what do you like? Pick one, something you like. You like hunting? You like sports?

What do you enjoy reading? And then you pick projects or help them, guide them into projects.

Through analysis of the memos conducted before and after the interview as well as the words spoken, it was interpreted that Paul taught in this way as it mirrored his own passion-oriented personality.

Paul was very motivated by the relationships he had with his students. He believed relationships were foundational to the progress of student learning: “The almost number one goal for teachers should be to get the relationship down because that’s where you get the respect and other soft skills stuff that they will hopefully build off of and then trust.” He continued to describe his desire to create a relational classroom where students trusted the teacher. This practice was very motivating for teacher Paul. He perceived this concept as the element or vehicle to ensure the greatest opportunity for student success and achievement. This foundational relationship was the lens through which all decisions were made within Paul’s classroom. He believed relationships were the priority as “that’s where you get the respect and the other soft skills that they will hopefully build off of and then trust” (Paul).

Student progress was also a motivator for Paul. He was driven for students to have an “ah -ha!” moment in which they finally achieved a growth moment or a moment of success was observed. He articulated his desire to see students connect with their work a meaningful way, with pride and a desire to demonstrate ability.

Paul was particularly interested in speaking of an initiative given to him by his superintendent. Together with Edward, the fourth teacher interviewed within School District A, this initiative became the core of their curriculum. By bestowing the

responsibility of creating, designing, and implementing the initiative, the superintendent had empowered Paul and Edward with the responsibility of executing a vision created by administration and the district's board of education. They developed a fabrication lab or "fab lab" in order to work toward a student-driven, project-based curriculum. The fab lab's main attraction was a computerized plasma cutter. According to Paul, the teachers involved in creating the fab lab were given the freedom to develop the curriculum, purchase the necessary equipment, and move in curricular direction based on the passion and interests of the students. Paul believed that without the freedom to do so, the fab lab would not have had the level of impact on student learning as what had occurred.

Sarah

Sarah was a 28-year veteran in the area of music education. She was a shared teacher between two districts, as a result of declining enrollment between both districts. Teacher Sarah elected to conduct the interview within her classroom.

Sarah enjoyed observing student progress and growth, stating, "I love to see the kids' progress and have so much fun as a band director, to be able to see their growth both musically and personally from fifth grade all the way through graduates and beyond." This statement also implied a goal of life-long well-being with regard to her motivation. Sarah often referred to the long-term success and well-being of the students as being an ultimate goal or impact of her influence. This sentiment was consistent as a decisional element throughout her teaching practice.

Sarah also believed in a strong teacher-student relationship as foundational in her teaching practice, articulating:

Personal relationships are just the key to all of us . . . relationships are the most important. That's the biggest thing, and sometimes as a teacher I find myself needing to take a deep breath and be flexible because sometimes students might come in and they might be excited about getting right to work and conquering something that's challenging or difficult and other times they might be in a kind of humorous mood. And, so as teachers we just have to adapt. We have to be able to try and go with it for a little bit . . . But the relationships are the most important.

Sarah stated that the relational concept evolved over her time as a teacher as she discovered its impact on student learning. She described the process of growth she had experienced as a teacher to perform with the students' best interests in mind in order to reach them and provide opportunities for them to grow and achieve. She stated:

That's been something that had to evolve over my career. And thankfully, I am getting a bit better at reading kids and knowing what it is that's going to promote success. I like to try not to make circumstances of fear for them and I'm thinking about this past year. We had an ensemble contest and one of my goals was to encourage more kids to participate in that. So I had kids sign up if they were interested and I said up front that they don't have to commit but let's try it and see where it takes us. And so we can dive into with that sort of frame of mind rather than 'you will do this.' Give them some say in it and let them have time to try it out.

Veronica

Veronica was a business teacher who also taught in the area of special education under the specific learning disabilities category. She was in her 16th year of teaching.

Veronica selected a conference room as the venue for her interview.

Veronica's body language indicated that she was nervous and of the recorder and therefore careful about what she revealed during her interview. Body language and tone of voice were noted to be somewhat reserved. The researcher took special care to build a comfortable rapport with Veronica as she appeared apprehensive but willing to participate in the interview. With hindsight, the opportunity for a second interview to explore further details with regard to her judgment or decisional experiences could have yielded more information.

Veronica believed students to need stimulation in order to achieve learning goals:

In the special education classes you would see me hound them to work because they don't want to. What drives me is their willingness to do something, to do their work and if they're not willing then I have to put on a tough act, and I have to make them do it. And sometimes that doesn't even work. And so we end up being sent to the principal's office. I can't let them sit there doing nothing especially if they've got work to do.

Veronica expressed a desire for students to have a happy and successful life in the long term. She alluded to this as being the core of her decision-making practices within her classroom, yet she could not describe a single decisional practice originated by her. Veronica was in a difficult circumstance in which she was required to transition from teaching her specialist subject to one in which she was much less confident and in which

she had less autonomy. It was not her choice according to Veronica. She described how the curriculum and instructional decisions were either inherited from previous teachers or given to her by administration. Even so, Veronica had a positive outlook towards administration and felt she had the freedom to make effective decisions within her classroom.

Edward

Edward was a K-12 art teacher with eight years of teaching experience. Edward and Paul often taught classes together. Edward elected to have his interview within his office at the school. Edward was highly motivated by the subject of art. Eye contact was maintained and hand-gestures were exaggerated and used to reinforce his points and ideas. Voice inflection varied both in pitch and in volume. These observations suggested a feeling of passion for the discussion topic.

Edward was highly interested in the concept of what he termed “design thinking.” He defined this thinking as:

an overarching goal for students to be able to start with some idea and explore how other people have looked at it. And try to build upon, make prototypes, evaluate those prototypes, given them to people, and have them give feedback and eventually have come up with something that is shareable.

Of particular interest to Edward was the concept of Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW). AIW was selected by administration of the school district. The superintendent, in collaboration with the board of education, had selected AIW as a method to be utilized. AIW was supported by a district-wide grant according to Edward. Edward’s perception

of AIW was positive and contrary to the “traditional” way of teaching that was not as effective according to teacher Edward.

The whole focus of AIW is to teach conceptually. So instead of knowing just the content of what you’re teaching like let’s say you’re teaching *War and Peace* or something. You’re not teaching *War and Peace*. You’re teaching about power or some sort of underlying concept that goes beyond the content. And so if I’m teaching with scratchboards, I’m teaching contrasts, not to scratchboards necessarily.

Edward articulated the concept of AIW as teacher-based in terms of decision-making. While it was handed down by administration, it was designed, implemented, and established by teachers through Professional Learning Communities and staff development opportunities.

Edward desired for his students to establish independence and problem-solving skills in order to have a successful life. He stated that wanted students to develop “problems solving and independence and their own ability to research and solve their own problems.” In addition, he described student success as having fulfillment in life, stating:

I think if they know themselves and they find an avenue for fulfillment.

Economic fulfillment and meaning fulfillment are the two big ones. And those can contradict themselves especially after I talk to the kids about what they can find in art and the kind of meaning it has. It may not have a lot of economic fulfillment but a lot of meaning.

This concept of personal fulfillment was an added foundational element to the decision practices of Edward. He did not explicitly define fulfillment. However, he described a desire for students to reach their own personal goals and interests. The researcher stopped short of defining this as fulfillment but acknowledges a plausible connection.

Edward then articulated his vision or orientation explicitly regarding his decisional practices:

I've identified it as empathy because empathy is actually the heart of design. You don't often think about empathy as the first stage of design but if you see somebody you know using a tool or think about them using a tool or interacting with a piece of artwork you have to get in their head and you have to understand who they are and how they work and you understand how everybody interacts with things. That's what I think the common connection with teaching is. It's not going to look exactly the same for every student. I might actually help a student in a situation a lot more than I would have based on ability based on experience. And the kids see that but they kind of understand that I'm making those decisions based on empathy and equity, like the kids understand that equal doesn't mean fair.

According to Edward, empathy was the central belief guiding decisions within his classroom.

Sharon

Sharon was a third-grade elementary teacher with six years of teaching experience. She elected to conduct her interview in a conference room within her school.

Sharon articulated she had always wanted to become a teacher growing up. She believed teaching fulfilled her life.

Sharon described her classroom as having high expectations with regard to academic rigor and student behavior. She also expressed how she believed relationships are important to student success. She felt that relationships allow the teacher to observe student behavior and subsequently make decisions based on what they needed in order to be successful. Sharon established boundaries to her description of the teacher-student relationship, articulating that positive relationships do not “coddle” students. She spoke of establishing high expectations while having empathy for the students.

Like previous participants, Sharon’s decisional evidence suggested a desire to support students and to observe their progression. She wanted to observe students taking note of their own progression as well. Sharon applied the concept of progression both in terms of academic and personal improvement. She also applied it to her own self-reflection, expressing a desire to progress personally and professionally. She often employed strategies where students could track their own success and reflect upon their work. Sharon adopted a long-term orientation to her decisional practices. She desired for her students to “realize they can do anything.” This was evident through the strategies she used in the classroom to set goals that stretched and pushed their ability.

Suzanne

Suzanne was a fourth-grade elementary teacher with 12 years of teaching experience. She chose to conduct her interview within the school conference room. Her experience was non-traditional in nature as she waited to go into the teaching profession until later life, having been in theatre a number of years before teaching.

Suzanne was observed to be highly energetic and positive in nature. She demonstrated her enthusiasm for teaching both verbally and physically. Through observation and evident within memos, a physical manifestation of passion was most notable in Suzanne's body language, hand gestures, posture, and facial expressions. The researcher noted these physical attributes, as they were particularly acute compared to other participants.

Like previous interview participants, Suzanne established a goal of life-long well-being as a root of her decision making within the classroom. She had established the goal of building confidence among her students in order for them to continue to grow throughout life. She articulated that this was achieved through setting high expectations both academically and behaviorally. In addition, she emphasized the importance of communicating expectations clearly in order for students to understand purpose and orientation within the classroom, stating:

Classroom management is sort of my forte and it comes across in modeling and clear instruction at the beginning and then just reinforcement of expectations. I think the kids end up feeling more confident because they know what's expected of them. So there isn't any question about what they should do. What would be more fun at the moment? Do what they're supposed to do and then they would get to have more fun.

Confidence was also established by allowing students to experience success and achievement, according to Suzanne.

Suzanne had defined her motivation for decision making as a desire to not leave students behind, to keep them moving in successful progression. In addition, she

explicitly articulated a desire for students not to have the same experience she had growing up. She stated she did not have a very good life growing up and would like her students to have better.

This teacher demonstrated a tendency to reflect on experience in order to inform practices. Suzanne spoke highly of her interactions with her colleagues and their influence on her practice of reflection. She stated the interaction with her peers was vital to her practice. They often shared strategies and ideas based on what Suzanne observed within her classroom.

Both Sharon and Suzanne noted a strong relationship with their administrator. Suzanne illustrated how the building administrator empowered teachers to implement best practice and new ideas into their teaching instruction. She was particularly passionate about an initiative she pioneered in which she brought in a local playwright and a music teacher for the purpose of producing a thematic musical. This process could not have happened without the support of her administrator, according to Suzanne.

Sherri

Sherri was a fifth-grade elementary teacher and instructional coach with six years of teaching experience. Her added position of instructional coach involved providing mentorship to her colleagues with regard to pedagogy and intervention practices. Her interview took place within the school library. Sherri came from a family of teachers and was motivated to become a teacher based on her experiences within her mother's classroom growing up. She was most influenced by her mother to become a teacher. Sherri's responses were defined by her outlook towards student well-being:

I think a great teacher is somebody who has their student's needs in mind all the time and a teacher who can gauge when a student needs something different, not only academically, but maybe it's just they need an extra hug that day or need that extra smile to get them through the day. And when I think back through all of my education and even teaching now, those are the teachers that I really remember having the connection with. Those teachers who I felt knew me as a person and not necessarily that they dug into every little thing about my life but they had learned enough about me to know when something was wrong or to know that I was really enjoying something. They could just tell. They could read me. And I was a really quiet kid. So for a teacher to be able to pick up those things about me and my personality and to be able to really push me and challenge me showed me that they knew a lot about me.

Sherri's student-centered mindset was infused throughout her responses. Her statement articulated the root of this mindset as being her own past experiences.

Sherri also described her classroom as an environment in which students know what is expected of them both in terms of academic and behavioral expectations. She went a step further to associate the impact of expectation clarity to the components of social and emotional well-being. She believed that if students knew their expectations, it was easier for them to transition throughout the day with fewer social and emotional disruptions. This concept was consistent with Sherri's student-centered decisional practice.

Sherri stated that her decisional practice was student-centered, noting:

My brain kind of naturally goes to what students need. I think to some extent it's not even that I have to remind myself of what is right for students. It just kind of comes. This is what they need right now. This is what we need to do. And I don't necessarily think that comes naturally to everyone. I think it's something that we need to figure out.

This statement conveyed an almost intuitional element to her decision-making practices.

Sherri also had a goal of life-long well-being for her students. While not explicitly tying it to her decisional practices, long-term success, achievement, and well-being were at the center of what she defined as the result of successful experience in the classroom. She differentiated this concept as one that is not the same for every student. In other words, individual success and achievement were different based on the desires of the individual student.

Reflective practice appeared also to be a key component of Sherri's decisional practices. It was in the area of math instruction where she observed the greatest impact of reflective practices. She believed when she accurately reflected upon the previous success of her math instruction, she was able to make informed decisions with regard to her instructional practice and incorporated new ideas.

June

June was a first-grade elementary teacher with over 20 years of experience within education. She selected the school library as the location for her interview. June's situation was unique when compared to the experiences of other participants. She originally had chosen nursing as her passion but had difficulty with seeing blood. She alternatively chose teaching as her grandmother, who was also a teacher, encouraged her.

June's experience as a teacher was not positive as result of her lack of interest in the subject area, illustrated by the following:

I didn't really feel like I was where I was supposed to be. As a result I really didn't feel really confident of what I was doing and didn't feel like I was in the right place. These were very difficult years. Quite a few years into my teaching career I felt like this was not what I wanted to do. I thought, 'I don't want to do this.'

June's mindset shifted with one workshop she attended. She articulated how she began to look at the students for the first time rather than herself. She had found a new outlook and began to enjoy and find passion for her profession. June stated that she started to look towards establishing relationships. The relational component of teaching became important to her teaching practice. However, she emphasized the importance of instilling purpose as the most important element. June stated:

Establishing of course those relationships [is important] but also I think even more important is helping kids, even at first grade level, to know that they have a purpose and they all have a gift, and they all have a reason for being who they are. And . . . to be really proud of that.

In addition, June spoke of how important it was that she instilled a sense of community within her students. She desired for them to know the importance of working together to achieve a goal. These statements share the common goal with other participants. Like others, June desired to make decisions establishing the life-long well-being of the child.

June explicitly articulated the positive roles her colleagues played in her professional practice. She viewed her peers as not only a resource in terms of teaching practice but as an emotional foundation as well. She viewed her peers as being crucial to her emotional fortitude and support. She believed them to be especially helpful when making difficult decisions within the classroom. They aided in her decision-making as well as her reflection processes.

June's statement regarding effective teachers defined a crucial element to her teaching practice:

They have their conditions identified. They have routines in place. They have positive relationships with their students. They're consistent. They implement some good instructional best practice strategies but they also know what they are. They have to. They take the time to do some research behind what they're doing as well, and they understand the practices that they're implementing. I think they're team players. They're listeners for colleagues. They share ideas. They're not afraid to fail.

Each of these qualities was defined framework in which June based her decisions within the classroom. This was evident throughout her responses.

Richard

Richard was an art teacher who served in a public high school within an American Indian reservation. He had 17 years of experience in education. Richard chose to be interviewed in his classroom during the school day within his preparation time.

He shared his childhood experiences related to the experiences of the children he taught. He spoke of the positive influence others had on him, which led him to the teaching profession. His responses were much more “story like” in nature.

Richard’s foundation for decision-making was most similar to that of teachers Paul and Edward, especially with regard to making decisions based on the interests of the students. Richard articulated a desire to get to know what students are passionate about and to guide them to their strength. He told a story of when his principal came to him and praised him for assisting a student with finding their passion for art. The principal credited Richard with aiding in the emotional stability of that student. In addition, Richard included not only the students but also the community in the decision-making process. He focused on the experience he had in selecting beading as a primary medium within his classroom. He spoke of how he reached out to the community to identify their needs. The community described a need to keep the traditional beading alive. Richard decided to learn and implement beading within his curriculum. This concept of stakeholder involvement in decision-making, outside of the classroom, was unique within the study.

Richard’s teaching style was relational in nature. This was consistent with previous participant responses. He believed teaching must have a relational element in order to be successful, in order to build trust. He conveyed his belief that without trust, students would not listen or apply anything teachers say.

Richard shared the common long-term orientation as other participants. During the interview, he spoke of his vision for students’ life-long success and established that

well-being was the foundation of his teaching practice. Much of his interview revolved around this concept:

I want them to have a happy life. Have a healthy and happy life and find somebody to live with or mate or something. You hope they have a good family and raise them with the values they have picked up along the way and practice those values.

This orientation came from a place of empathy within Richard's mindset. Empathy was also central his decisional practices. This was often at a cost to Richard's well-being. He spoke of a time where he exchanged art supplies with a neighboring school because they were in need and the children depended on those supplies. In the midst of reprimand, he stood up for the children and quit his position. The administrator issued an apology and actually praised him for his actions and he was rehired, according to Richard. Richard was not afraid to challenge those who threatened the well-being of students, regardless of status. He told a story about a teacher who lost control with a child in the hallway, causing shame and humiliation. Richard made it known to the offending teacher how wrong it was to do so and demanded restoration. Richard articulated these reactions as being from a place of empathy. He believed good teachers to be ones who showed empathy to their students and functioned based on student needs, not on the needs of the teacher.

Martha

Teacher Martha was the final teacher interviewed for this study. She chose a local coffee shop as the venue for her interview. Martha was a special education teacher with over 22 years of experience within a variety of special education categorical

settings. She also taught in a public high school within an American Indian reservation. Her specialty area, as well as area of interest, was serving students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Teacher Martha was an energetic individual focused on the goal of helping students with special needs.

Her desire to serve students with special needs originated from her past experiences as a sister to a brother with special needs. According to Martha, his struggles became her motivation to help others with similar needs.

Teacher Martha's decisional practices focused on the individual needs of her students. Her goal, like other participants, was to give student the foundational skills to be successful in society. The strategies she utilized within the classroom focused on social skills and relationship building, embracing a whole-child philosophy. Naturally, the desire to have a positive relationship with her students guided the decisional practices of Martha as well.

Martha focused on a particular time in her teaching career where administration did not approve of her approach. She stated she often would take in other general education students who were in trouble or roaming the hallways unsupervised. She would build relationships with them and allow them to interact with her special education students for the purpose of building the social skills necessary to function. Administrators viewed her as "harboring fugitives" according to Martha and thus did not approve of this strategy.

Martha believed decisional practices should be oriented by the needs of the students. This was congruent with the majority of participant responses. She described how students' basic needs must be met in order for them to learn, referring to Maslow's

hierarchy of needs. Conversely, she believed low quality teachers were those who focused on their own needs before the students', stating:

I see some teachers stick to their needs, like 'this what I wanted to teach. So this is what we will teach today. Whether you're awake or whether you're engaged, whether you are hungry, tired, whatever.' I've seen teachers teach to a room where half the kids are asleep, heads on the tables. Are you really accomplishing anything?

Phase 2

Each participant's story presented independent experiences with common categories. The next section will present the secondary level of analysis, providing results based on a final examination of the data. Resulting codes and categories will establish the foundation for a common emerging theme among participant responses. Figure 1 presents a map of the theme development supported by four prevailing categories with accompanying codes. Figure 2 illustrates the process of axial coding leading to a student-centric decisional mindset as the common theme supported by the four prevailing categories of empathy, goal of life-long well-being, relationship, and student interest.

CODING MAP

Theme

Student-Centric
Decisional Mindset

Categories

Empathy	Goal of Lifelong Well-being	Relationship	Student Interest
Codes:	Codes:	Codes:	Codes:
Goal of Lifelong Well-Being Personal Growth Student Need-Satisfaction Reassurance Do No Harm Intrinsic Motivation Reflection of Self Relationship Impact of Relationship Student-centric Potential Interest Based Teaching Strategy Accommodation Student Resiliency Teacher Selfless Act Differentiation Trust	Student-centric Empathy Personal Growth Curricular Goal Reason to Be Judgment Motivation Educational Purpose Academic Growth Relationship Teaching Strategy Reflective Practice Hope Factor of Success Potential Interest Based	Impact of Relationship Student-centric Empathy Student Needs Satisfied Acknowledgment of Being Teaching Strategy Student Autonomy Judgment Motivation Goal of Lifelong Well-Being Intrinsic Motivation Educational Purpose Potential Student Resiliency Good Teacher Past Experience Teacher Selfless Act Trust	Student-centric Empathy Reflective Practice Empowered by Administration Project-Based Learning Intrinsic Motivation Judgment Motivation Goal of Lifelong Well-Being Relationship Factors of Success Academic Growth Trust Student Autonomy Curricular Purpose Curricular Goal Teaching Strategy Teacher Selfless Act
Frequency - 166	Frequency - 165	Frequency -168	Frequency - 189

Figure 1. Code Map, Categories, and Theme (Student-Centric Decisional Mindset)

AXIAL CODING DIAGRAM 1

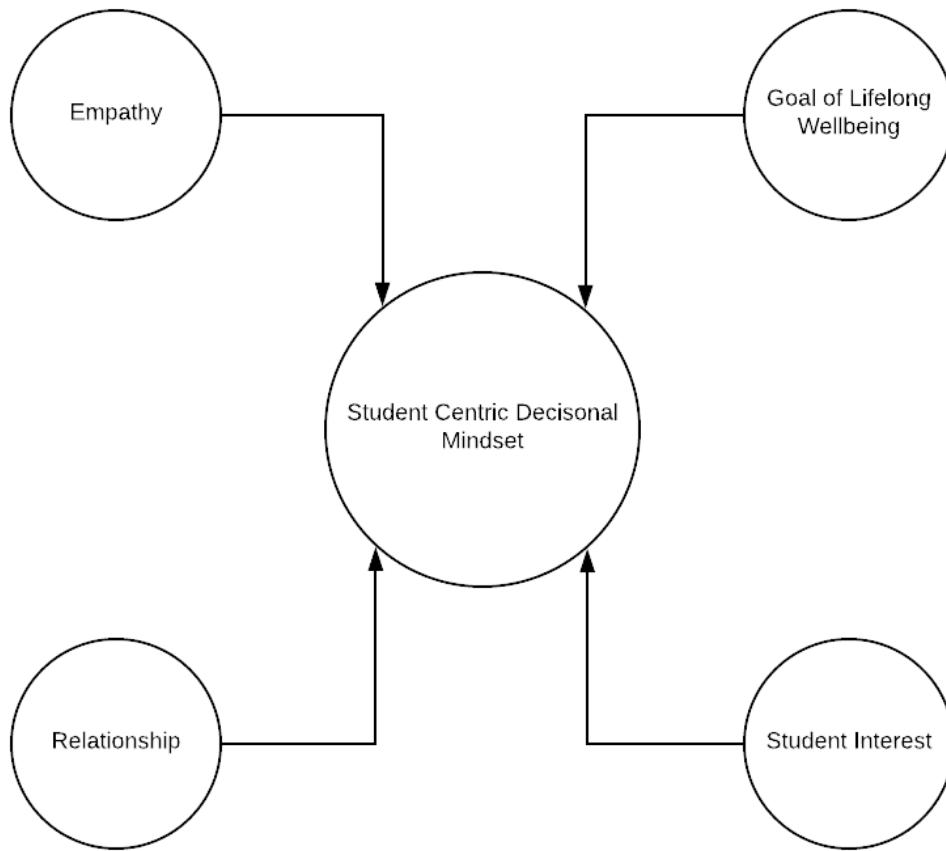


Figure 2. Initial Axial Coding Diagram of Foundational Categories Related to a Student-Centric Decisional Mindset (Created by Author).

Each category was selected based on frequency, application to judgment or decisional practice, and participant tendency to remain on the categorical topic for a greater duration relative to other topics during interviews. Other elements were identified as potential influential elements with regard to the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers. However, their frequency was not as high as those associated with the four core categories connected with the student-centric decisional mindset.

Empathy

For the purposes of this study, empathy was defined as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feeling, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner” (Empathy, n.d.). Codes, elements, and ideas were aligned through this definition.

Consistent with an “action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to” (Empathy, n.d.), participants spoke of the need to meet the needs of their students. Sherri said:

I think a great teacher is somebody who has their students’ needs in mind all the time and a teacher who can gauge when a student need something different. Not only academically but maybe it’s just you know they need an extra hug that day or need that extra smile to get them through the day.

This concept was illustrated across participant responses. The tendency for teachers to lean toward meeting the social, emotional, and physical needs of students was greater than the academic needs in most cases. When speaking of the children he serves, Richard said, “The poverty on reservations is rampant. It is a whole different thing in other schools. Poverty is something we have to deal with compassionately, be sensitive to our children. They’ve gone through a lot at a young age.” Teachers appeared to be consistently concerned about the physical and emotional well-being of their students when they made decisions with regard to practice and day-to-day interactions with students. Sharon said, “A lot of students don’t have a ‘normal’ family life where they

have two parents in the home and a lot of them are even in foster care and they're really looking for a good adult role model.”

Several participants demonstrated empathetic decisional practices as being a result of their own lived experiences growing up. Teachers presented stories reinforcing the need to be empathetic within their teaching practice. Richard spoke of how every year he tells his seniors, before they graduate, about his story growing up, how he persevered through a past filled with bullying, poor academic success, and low motivation. It could be interpreted that this story was an effort to help kids understand the level of success attained through effort and determination. These stories often were derivative of the reason teachers chose their career. Martha, a special education teacher, spoke of her brother, who had significant learning disabilities, as being the reason she chose her career. She said:

I have a brother with a severe learning disability. He was a 10th grade drop out.

He had a lot of support but not really. Not really back then. He was in a separate room. He was thought of as the ‘dumb kid.’

This story illustrated her drive to become a teacher in order to give her students a better opportunity than her brother, according to Martha.

An empathetic orientation was present, at some level, across all participant responses. The recursive process of data-analysis within this study revealed a natural interplay between each of the common categories. The concept of empathy moved naturally and was relatable to the next category, the goal of life-long well-being.

Goal of Life-Long Well-Being

Teachers focused on goals such as independence, career and college readiness, and happiness. Richard stated, “I want them to have a happy life. Have a healthy and happy life.” This sentiment was a shared value among participants. Teaching practices among participants shared the vision of creating activities and lessons that lead to the preparation for real-world application and life-long personal satisfaction. This concept was closely related to the concept of empathy as being central to the decision-making process. In fact, like other participants, Edward established goals for students related to life-long well-being. These goals often influenced his decisional practices. As stated in the previous section, Edward’s focus for his teaching practice revolved around the desire to find “an avenue for economic and meaning fulfillment.” This concept was interpreted as a desire for students to be satisfied both in terms of economic status and establishment of personal value once they leave school. Edward also conveyed a desire for his students to learn problem solving and independence in order solve their own problems throughout life.

Teachers also desired for students to realize their potential for success. Sharon said:

I want them to realize they can do anything. I know it sounds clichéd but maybe somebody in their family didn’t graduate or they never had the conversation about going to college or their parents are drug-dealers. I mean I just want them to know they’re definitely smart enough to do what they want. I want them to have confidence to be able to do what they want.

June said, “I think helping kids, even at the first-grade level, to know they have a purpose and that they have a gift and they have a reason for being who they are.” This statement captures an intent shared among many of the participants in terms of establishing a goal of life-long well-being. Teachers desired for students to realize their purpose in life through the recognition of potential. June also wanted her students to recognize their “value and their contributions are important. When they do, their confidence grows, their self-esteem grows, their self-value raises. I think they just believe in themselves and what they do.” This idea recognizes both purpose and also the impact of instilling purpose within students, resulting in confidence and growth in self-esteem and self-value.

Through analysis, connections became established between the goal of life-long well-being and empathy. The desire for students to have success in life connected closely to the empathetic orientation. According to participants, the well-being of students was a primary focus of their decisional practices.

Relationship

The importance of relationship with regard to the student-teacher dynamic was infused across participants’ responses. This concept wasn’t compartmentalized only to the teachers’ decision-making practices. It was a main factor in creating the impact necessary for student achievement. Sarah said, “Personal relationships are just the key to all of us...relationships are the most important.” Teachers believed the establishment of meaningful relationships was priority. They believed these relationships created a foundation for trust. Sharon pointed out, “I think the first thing I think it [relationship] does is build trust.”

The impact of relationship was perceived to be one of connection. Connection served the purpose of motivating students, to keep them engaged in the learning process. Paul conveyed the impact of connection, referring to relationships, "...it's also the meaningful part that hopefully you can connect, to keep them here, to keep them interested. That's the biggest part of learning I would say." Connection also served the purpose of identifying student needs. Sherri illustrated this idea through her definition of a good teacher:

I think a great teacher is somebody who has their student needs in mind all the time and a teacher who can gauge when a student needs something, not only academically but maybe it's that they need an extra hug that day or need that extra smile to get them through the day. And when I think back through all of my education and even teaching, now those are the teachers that I really remember having the connection with . . . Those teachers who I felt knew me as a person and, not necessarily that they dug into every little thing about my life, but they had learned enough about me to know when something was wrong or to know that I was really enjoying something. They could just tell; they could read me.

Referring to past relationships emerged as an element among several participants as the reason relationships were part of their decisional practice. Richard referred to a story about his hardships as a student with an emotional disability. In the context of student-teacher relationships, he spoke of his teacher and the positive relationship he had with him. He recalled, "He really inspired me. He was a good teacher."

While a connection between relationships and decisional practice among teachers was not clearly defined, there appeared to be an association between the establishment of

positive relationships being at the core or beginning of the decisional or judgment experiences. Like other categorical elements, the importance of relationship within the decision-making practice of teachers appeared to be connected with other categories. Ideas, quotes, and codes overlapped consistently between categories, suggesting this connection.

Student Interest

Student-interest based decisions were common among participant responses. Paul said, “So the trick that I find is picking or finding their interests first and then guiding to what I think they might like.” Both Paul and Edward co-taught within a fabrications lab. The curriculum they taught was created based on student interests, according to Edward. This concept of creating curriculum or establishing teaching practices based on student interest was shared among specialist educators. While this concept was implicit among many participants, the art teachers, music teacher, and special education teacher all explicitly explained how their classrooms and curricula were highly impacted by student interests. Sarah articulated how she allowed students to choose music they were interested in during music contest time, in order to keep them involved and engaged. Richard described how he often chose art medium based on the interests of students. Martha, the special education teacher, described how she created relationships with students by providing opportunities for them to perform based on their interests.

Student-interest based decisions appeared to be related both to the motivation of the students and the relationship with their teachers. Specialist teachers articulated a desire to make decisions based on the interests of students to keep them motivated and engaged within their classroom. Generally, most participants suggested interest-based

practices as a strategy to build relationships with students. These concepts again suggested an interplay or relationship between categorical elements pertaining to the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers.

Student-Centric Decisional Mindset

The categories selected as a result of the secondary analysis suggest a dynamic relationship resulting in a shared mindset among rural these northern Minnesota teachers. The researcher referred to this mindset as student-centric in nature. For this study, the researcher used the terms *student-centric* and *student-centered* interchangeably. This term is not to be confused with the theoretical approach of student-centered learning or instruction, present within educational reform. Student-centered learning “is one where the focus of instruction is shifted from the teacher to the student, with the end goal of developing students who are autonomous and independent, by placing the responsibility in the hands of the students” (Loveless, 2019). While this concept is most certainly related to the results of this study, it was not the intent of the researcher to refer to this theoretical framework. For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined a student-centric decisional mindset simply as a frame of mind where decisions or judgments are based on the best interests of the students.

The results of this study suggested four core elements at the heart of the student-centric decisional mindset: empathy, goal of life-long well-being, relationship, and student interest. Each of the four elements suggested a decisional or judgment motivation that was student-centric in nature. Participants, regardless of subject area, experience, and setting, all presented concepts consistent with a student-centric decisional mindset. It should be noted, while many other codes and elements were related to the concept of a

student-centric decisional mindset, they were not as prevalent as empathy, goal of life-long well-being, relationship, and student interest, nor did they present as dynamic a relationship. Figure 3 presents an axial diagram formulated to illustrate the interplay between the four core categories and the prevailing theme present within participant responses.

AXIAL CODING DIAGRAM 2

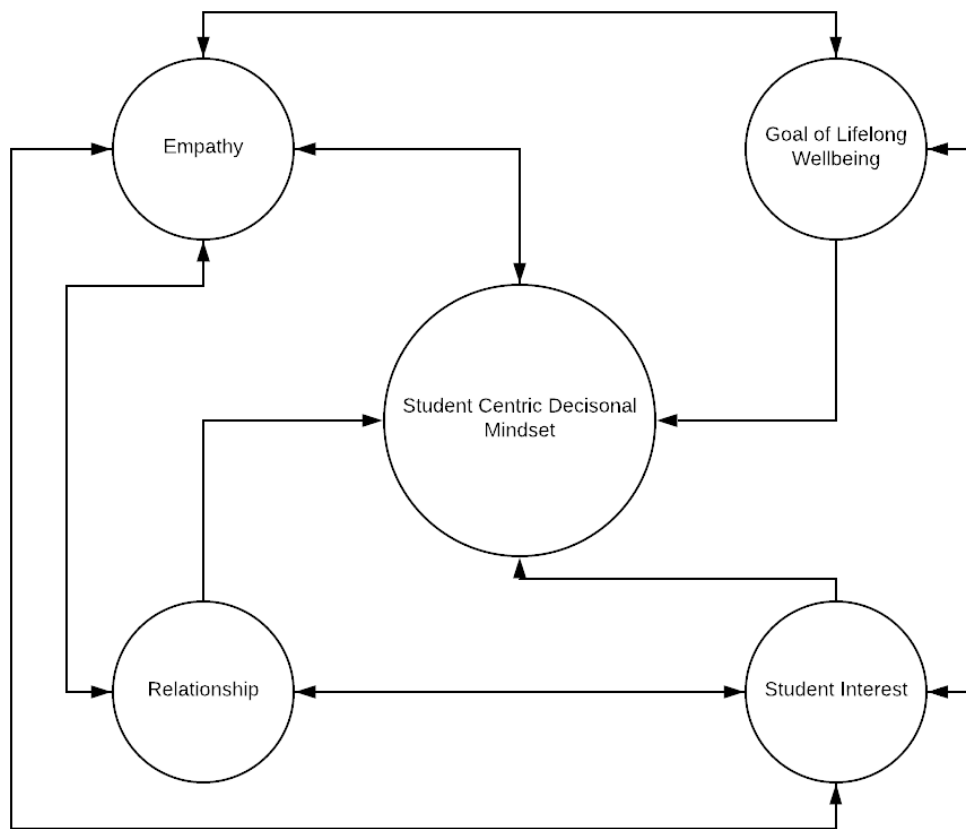


Figure 3. Axial Coding Diagram of Foundational Categories Related to Each Other (Created by Author).

Other Influencing Factors

Other factors were present within the data influencing the decisional or judgment experiences of individual teachers. Table 2 presents a list of codes associated with the core elements above, by participant.

Table 2

Additional Codes by Participant. Order Randomized to Preserve Anonymity.

1	2	3	4	5
Codes:	Codes:	Codes:	Codes:	Codes:
Veteran Community Driven Negative Motivational Strategy Specialist Admin Relationship Motivated by Past Experience	Veteran Teacher Centered Negative Motivational Strategy Autonomy - Lack of	Veteran Impact of teacher - Autonomy Autonomy Teacher Empowerment Admin Relationship Role of Peers Reflective Practice Specialist	Mid-Level Experience Passion Teacher-Indirect Career Pathway Major Initiative Initiative Acceptance Admin Relationship Teacher Empowerment Reflective Practice Initiative Success Autonomy Specialist	Veteran Apprehension Passion Mindset Shift Role of Peers Disincentive
6	7	8	9	10
Codes:	Codes:	Codes:	Codes:	Codes:
Mid-Level Experience Passion Influence of Others High-Level Expectation Autonomy Admin Relationship Reflective Practice Role of Peers	Veteran Motivated by Past Experience Influence of Others Intuition Articulated Initiative Success Reflective Practice Passion	Novice High-Level Expectation Admin Relationship Admin Turnover Passion	Novice High-Level Expectation Admin Relationship Admin Turnover Passion Disincentive Limited Autonomy Shared Purpose Admin-Driven Major Initiative Role of Peers Collaboration Initiative Acceptance Admin Relationship Teacher Empowerment Initiative Success Specialist	Veteran Motivated by Past Experience Specialist Teacher Defiance Teacher Burnout Autonomy - Lack of Admin Relationship

The additional codes were examined for commonality among participant responses. As a result, additional factors influencing the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers were identified. Figure 4 presents the final axial diagram demonstrating the complexities of the decisional or judgment experiences of rural northern Minnesota teachers. The researcher took care not to assume these as equally weighted due to the infrequency and lack of uniform distribution among participant responses.

AXIAL DIAGRAM OF THE COMPLEXITY OF DECISIONAL/JUDGMENT EXPERIENCES

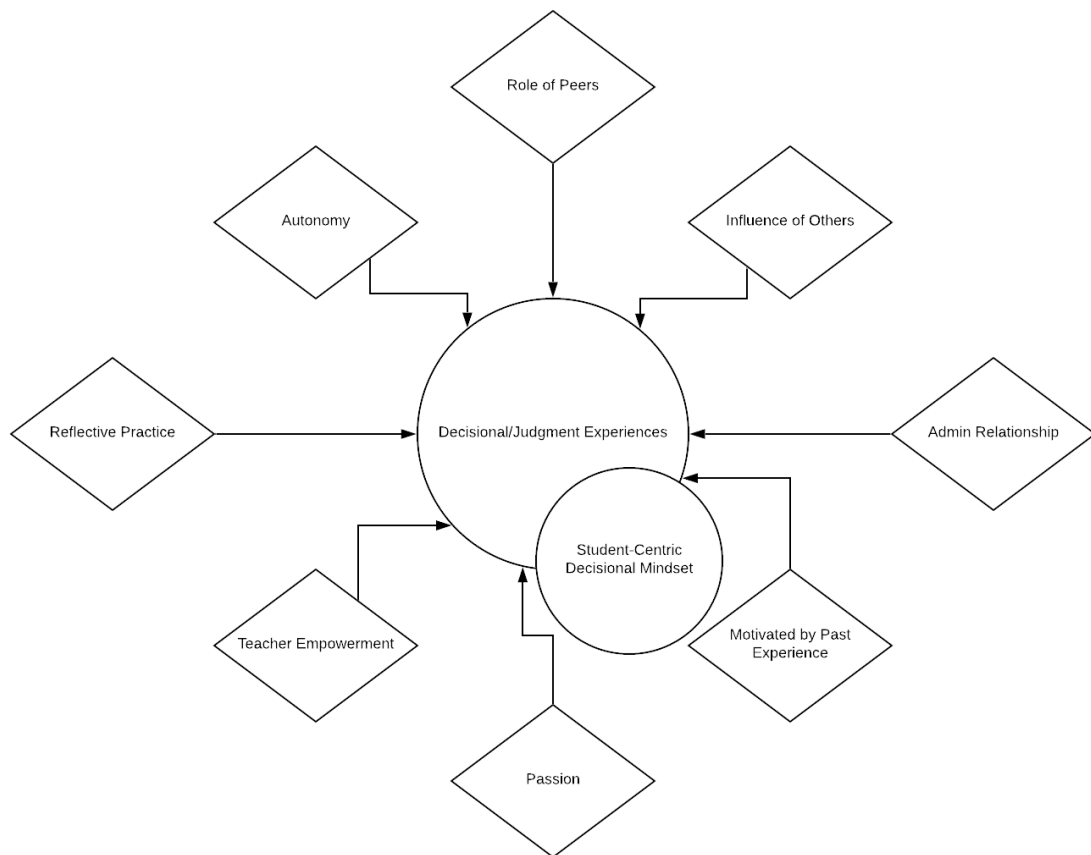


Figure 4. Final Axial Coding Diagram Demonstrating Complexity of Participant Decisional or Judgment Experiences (Created by Author)

Each of the elements included in Figure 6, when combined, demonstrate the level of complexity involved in the decision-making process. In addition to the student-centric decisional mindset articulated in the prior section, these elements included:

- Reflective Practice
- Autonomy
- Role of Peers
- Influence of Others
- Administrative Relationship
- Motivated by Past Experience
- Passion
- Teacher Empowerment

Reflective Practice

This study was reflective in nature as it asked teachers to look back on their decisional or judgment experiences. As a result, the concept of reflective practice was implicit throughout participant responses. However, four teachers made statements that were highly reflective in nature when referring to their decisional practices. Sarah, Edward, Suzanne, and Sherri all believed reflective practice played a role in the judgments they made within the classrooms. Sarah said, “I guess it started as you know, you look inward when you start out as a teacher. What helped me? What shaped me? What am I lucky to have had or heard or experienced in my life that has put me where I am and how can I give that to these children who are maybe so different than I was?” This statement captures the essence of the reflective nature of decisions shared among participants.

Autonomy

Autonomy speaks to the level of freedom teachers had to make the decisions they believed necessary within the classroom. Four teachers conveyed stories in which they were given the freedom to complete decisions. Paul, Sarah, Edward, and Suzanne spoke positively with regard to their situation and their ability to make decisions independently. Notably, both Veronica and Martha presented situations that were governed by administrative directive. Paul and Edward's involvement in the implementation of the fabrication lab of their school presented a situation in which they were given the freedom to create curricula in order to meet the interests of the children.

Role of Peers

Four teachers believed that peers played a role in the decisions made within the classroom. Paul, Sarah, Suzanne, and June conveyed this influence within their responses. Notably, Suzanne's illustration presented the complex nature of peer influence:

The fourth-grade team has lunch together every day. At a meeting once a week, we are helping each other and making sure each year, each quarter, each month, each day, that we are covering as much as we can and that we share strategies every day.

This statement suggested a supportive element within peer influence. The four teachers presented illustrations such as this to support their view of the roles peers play in their decisional or judgment practices.

Influence of Others

The influence of others does not speak to the aforementioned role of peers, rather, to the past experiences teachers had and the people who helped shape their decisional mindset. This concept was often exemplified as people who impacted them throughout their life. Three teachers spoke of this influence in this manner. When speaking of this influence, Sherri said:

I would say it would be my mom and then her teacher friends because that was her core group of friends. That's who I was around. I was really lucky to have really great teachers all the way through elementary and high school. I think they all had an impact. I would just keep seeing my mom. That was the ultimate role model. I would just keep seeing these other great teachers and experiencing all of their teaching skills. It just kind of kept building.

Sherri's statement conveys a feeling or drive held among the three participants.

Administrative Relationship

Whether positive or negative, the relationship between teacher and administration was connected to the decisional or judgment experiences of seven participants. Largely through storytelling, participants illustrated how their decisional or judgment experiences were influenced by their relationship with their administrator. Five teachers spoke of the positive relationships they had with their administrator. Two teachers conveyed stories in which they were reprimanded by administrators for doing what they believed to be in the best interests of children. The concept of administrative relationship often overlapped the elements of autonomy and teacher empowerment.

Motivated by Past Experience

Three teachers conveyed stories of their past that motivated them to become teachers and influenced their decisional or judgment experiences. Most notably, Richard and Martha both presented stories that inspired them to make decisions based on the needs of their students. Richard's demonstration of perseverance and Martha's illustration of her brother's struggle as a student with special needs conveyed how their past experiences motivated their decisional or judgment experiences. This motivation was not only tied to participants' day to day experiences but often played a role in their reason to become a teacher as well. Sherri noted:

I grew up in a family of teachers. My mom's a retired teacher. I have aunts and uncles who are teachers, cousins who are teachers. So it was just kind of part of life. There were many summer days as a child that I was in my mom's classroom helping her do things.

This statement not only connects past experience to the choice to become a teacher but also illustrates a relationship to the influence of others.

Passion

Passion was an element consistent among six participants. For the purpose of analysis, passion was defined as "a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept" (Passion, n.d.). Passion was often associated with interest, both student and teacher. For students, the idea of passion often overlapped with the concept of student-interest, articulated within the student-centric decisional mindset. Teachers referred to their own passion as the root of their chosen subject area. Paul explained:

Most teachers are passionate about one thing. The teachers prior to me were passionate more about woodworking and that's why we have the setup we have here. I'm passionate about a bunch of things. I'm really passionate about being an industrial arts teacher.

Teacher Empowerment

As previously stated, the concepts of teacher empowerment and autonomy appeared to be related within the analysis of data. Within the confines of this study, teacher empowerment was defined as the impact of relinquishing previously held status or position to the educator. Paul, Sarah, and Edward all articulated experiences where administration empowered them to create and implement initiatives. Notably, all three shared the same administrator. According to the participants, this administrator often relinquished power to the teachers once an idea had been given to them. In the case of Paul and Edward, the fabrication lab was first conceived by the administrator then given to the teachers to make happen. The concept of teacher empowerment appeared to be connected to the administrative relationship as well. Paul, Sarah, and Edward all communicated that they had positive relationships with their administrator.

Summary

The eight additional elements of reflective practice, autonomy, role of peers, influence of others, administrative relationship, motivated by past experience, passion, and teacher empowerment were shown to have an impact on the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers to varying degrees. Data revealed the complexities involved when teachers moved through the decisional process. These elements, when combined

with the theme of student-centric decisional mindset, shaped the experiences of rural northern Minnesota teachers.

Chapter IV presented an examination of each participant response in chronological order. Ten teachers were interviewed with the purpose of evaluating their decisional or judgment experiences within their teaching practice. Participants revealed common elements and consistent themes. Teacher decisional or judgment experiences shared elements including empathy, goal of life-long well-being, relationship, and student interest. These elements revealed a common student-centric decisional mindset among teachers. Further analysis revealed other contributing factors to the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers. The eight additional elements of reflective practice, autonomy, role of peers, influence of others, administrative relationship, motivated by past experience, passion, and teacher empowerment revealed the complex nature of the decisional or judgment practices of rural northern Minnesota teachers. Chapter V will provide a discussion of results, implications, and recommendations for leadership practices within rural northern Minnesota schools and discuss recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

Chapter V includes a discussion of results, implications, and recommendations for administrators within rural northern Minnesota public schools, and recommendations for further studies. The discussion of results includes two subsections: validity and results. The implications section focuses on the concept of empathetic decisional orientation. The recommendations for school leaders section include three subsections: recognition of the student-centric decisional mindset, the multi-dimensional approach to decisional capital investment, and leadership by role-modeling and example. In addition, recommendations for further research are discussed.

Discussion of Results

The first subsection of the discussion reviews the steps the researcher took to ensure validity. This section presents subsections with regard to venue, format, and participant focus of discussion. In the next subsection, the participants' years of experience and subject area are reviewed to explore the unexpected nature of experience and a seemingly low impact on the decisions or judgments made by teachers. In addition, the section presents the subject area of each teacher and takes note of similarities and differences among responses. Finally, the Results section includes a discussion with regard to the complex nature of the decisional or judgment experience of teachers and

how those experiences led to the discovery of additional elements affecting the decisions of teachers.

Validity

It is important to note the perceptual nature of this study. The responses gathered through the interview process were all based on the perceptions of the experiences of the individuals. The conclusions of this study are based on those perceptions. These results illustrated the illusiveness of discovery with regard to the elements necessary to make accurate and informed decisions within the classroom. The researcher made every effort to accurately represent the decisional or judgment experiences of participants in a meaningful way. An intense effort was made by the researcher to remove his perceptions from the resulting data. Charmaz (1996) asserted that the grounded theory researcher can never be removed completely from the study and thus a truly objective point of view cannot be achieved. For this reason, the researcher took necessary steps to ensure study validity.

Interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. Venue varied for interviews. Each participant was given the choice of where and when to conduct interviews. Three interviews were conducted within the teachers' classroom. Two interviews were conducted within a school library. Three interviews occurred within the school conference room. One interview took place within the participant's school office. One participant elected to conduct the interview within a coffee shop.

Format. The qualitative nature of this study proved to be highly valuable. The researcher was able to evaluate participant verbal responses, observe participant body language and behavior, and listen to the voice inflection of each person in order to get to

the very foundation of decisional or judgment experiences of participants. Quantitative research methods would not have been able to pull the breadth, depth, and quality of information necessary to satisfy the purpose of this study. The researcher took great care in interpreting all aspects of the observed behavior and responses in order to accurately portray the decisional or judgment experiences of participants. The qualitative nature of this study allowed participants to tell their stories in meaningful ways. Follow-up interviews were not conducted although doing so could have produced more meaningful data by allowing participants to expand their stories and provide more evidence to reinforce developed categories. However, the two-phase analysis of the interview data provided a deep interpretation of the data.

Participant focus. Although the researcher attempted to ask questions that would evoke responses regarding their experiences surrounding instructional decisions, participants inevitably returned to “big picture” ideas. Staying true to the grounded theory nature of the study, the researcher followed participant responses in order to gain the greatest understanding of their stories or experiences. Participants were allowed the latitude to interpret the question and respond in a manner that had meaning for them. It is in this way the researcher took steps to avoid impacting the outcome of the study. Although the researcher attempted to prompt the participants with questions that he assumed would produce a focus on decisions with regard to instructional practice, participants consistently focused on the motivations of their decisions rather than describing specific elements that led to their instructional decisions. Participants felt a great desire to qualify the “place” where decisions came from. This motivation was consistently student-centered in orientation. This concept was most support in Edward’s

response with regard to “fulfillment.” In the context of decisional or judgment practice, Edward was asked to define student success. Rather than focusing on academic achievement or strategies that lead to academic success, Edward spoke of desire to have students “know themselves and find an avenue of fulfillment.” This sentiment was similar across participant responses.

Participant years of experience. Participant length of service ranged from six to 28 years. Hargreaves believed decisional capital was a function of time (Conexus Education, 2015). The results show little variation in perspective. While Hargreaves (2015) claimed decisional capital to be a function of time, the result of this study does not support this thesis. An explicit example of this concept was the comparison between Sharon who had six years of teaching experience and Sarah, who had been a teacher for over 28 years. Both teachers had a decisional or judgment mindset driven by their relationships with students. Sharon believed in having an “open relationships” with her students. These relationships built trust and aided in ability to clearly communicate expectations in her classroom according to Sharon. Sarah believed relations as “being the key to all of us” and that relationships are the most important in her classroom, referring to the relationships between herself and students. However, it is important to note that while Sharon established this relational mindset early in her career, Sarah articulated that this belief in relationship’s importance developed over time. This concept suggests that Sarah’s point of view had changed as she gained experience in her classroom. Even so, both Sharon and Sarah shared a similar student-central decisional mindset. This shared mindset was congruent among all participants. Hargreaves’s assertion of the impact of

years of experience and the decisional practices of teachers was not explicitly supported by the results of this study.

Results

This study revealed one prevailing theme among participant responses: the student-centric decisional mindset. Predominant categories supported this concept. Evidence produced by this study suggested the categories of empathy, goal of lifelong well-being, relationship, and student interest as foundational elements to the larger concept of the student-centric decisional mindset. The researcher recognized the unusual nature of having only one prevailing theme. As the evidence emerged, the researcher returned to literature. He searched for specific terms that emerged from participant responses. Empathetic decision-making, relationships, student-centric decision-making, and other terms specific to the results were investigated. Upon investigation, evidence within literature supported the results of this study.

Results from a study conducted by Griffith and Groulx in 2014 seemingly mirrored the results of this study. Griffith and Groulx (2014) conducted a quantitative study to capture the practices and beliefs related to the decision-making of teachers. The researchers utilized a survey to gather information. “The Profile for Teacher Decision Making Survey included 30 questions related to teachers’ beliefs with 10 questions related to student-centered beliefs (SCB), 10 questions related to standards-based beliefs (SBB), and 10 questions related to curriculum-based beliefs (CBB)” (Griffith & Groulx, 2014, p. 105). Griffith and Groulx’s findings illustrated that, regardless of subject area or pressures from outside the classroom such as administrative directive, standards-based initiatives or implementations, teachers were more concerned with teaching the “whole”

child rather than following a directive or adopting a standards-based decisional mindset (Griffith & Groulx, 2014). Griffith and Groulx’s study results were consistent with those of this study. While the Griffith and Groulx study certainly supported the results of this study, the quantitative nature did not reveal the level of complexity when compared to the results of this study.

While the student-centric decisional mindset established the foundation or motivation of the decisional or judgment experiences of participants, this study identified several other factors influencing these experiences. Once again, Figure 5 illustrates the identified factors of influence.

AXIAL DIAGRAM OF THE COMPLEXITY OF DECISIONAL/JUDGMENT EXPERIENCES

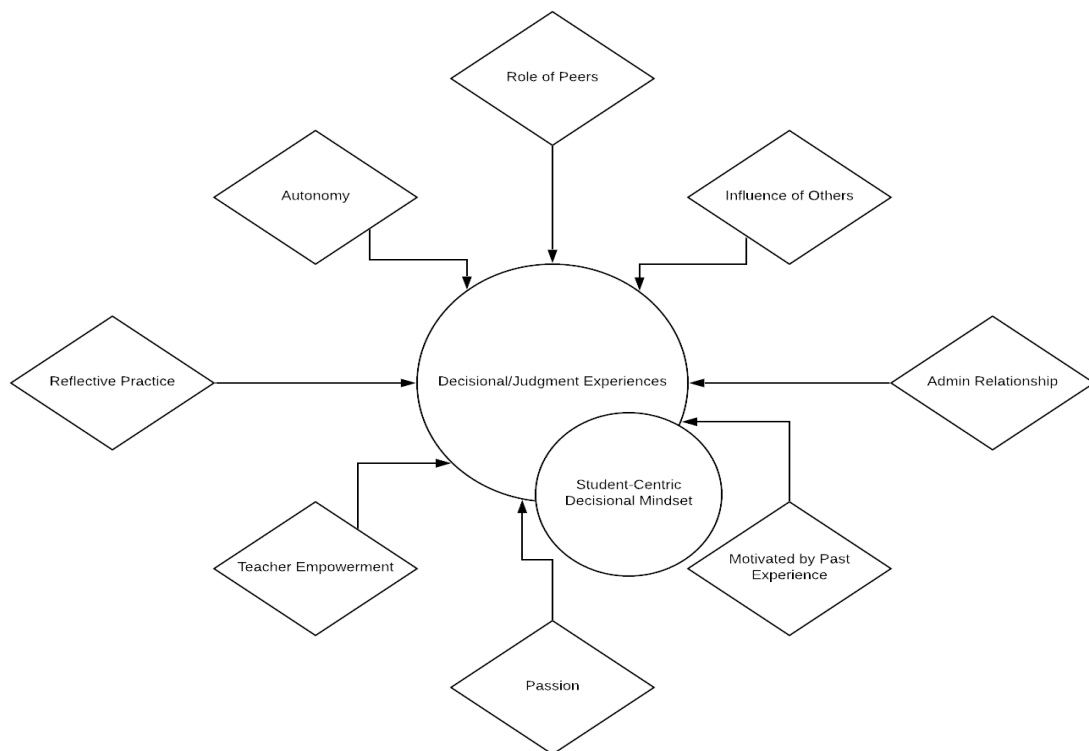


Figure 5. Axial Coding Diagram Demonstrating Complexity of Participant Decisional or Judgment Experiences (Created by Author).

Individually, these factors were not uniformly consistent among participant responses. However, when combining and applying them to create the “picture” of the decisional or judgment experiences of rural northern Minnesota teachers, a highly complex system emerged. These experiences, while motivated by what participants perceived to be in the best interest of students, were influenced by their ability to reflect on their practice, the freedom or lack thereof to execute decisions within their environment, peer support and example, other people who inspired and motivated them to make decisions, their relationship with administration, the past experiences they had, the passion they had for their subject area, and the power given to them by administration to make decisions. Table 3 illustrates the factors of influence present among participant responses.

Table 3

Number of Participants per Factor of Influence

Factor of Influence	Number of Participants Influenced n of 10
Reflective Practice	3
Autonomy (Freedom)	5
Peer Support/Influence	3
Influence of Others	3
Relationship with Administration	7
Past Experience	3
Passion for Subject Area	6
Teacher Empowerment	3

Implications

Participant responses suggest a complex interplay among formed categories. While the student-centric decisional mindset was the central theme among participant responses, their decisions appeared to come from a place of empathy. Figure 6 is a focused version of the foundational categories with regard to the student-centric decisional mindset. It provides an illustration of empathy's influence on the decisional or judgment experiences of participants. The relationship between the student-centric decisional mindset and empathy was dynamic and complex. While the best interests of their students uniformly motivated teacher decisions, it appeared that this motivation was a result of the empathy they had for their students. This perception begs the question of how empathy can be developed within teachers.

AXIAL DIAGRAM OF EMPATHY'S INFLUENCE

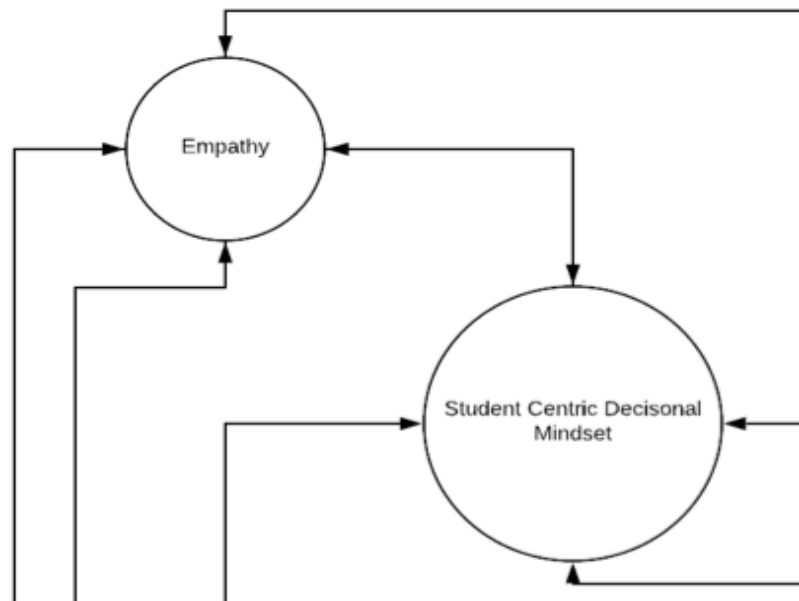


Figure 6. Empathy's Influence on Teacher Decisional or Judgment Experiences

Empathetic Decisional Orientation

Empathy is defined as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feeling thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner” (Empathy, n.d.). “The student-centered approach to teaching is defined as one that focuses on the needs, desires, interests, backgrounds, and aspirations of the student” (Partnership, 2014). It could be assumed that in order to have a student-centric decisional mindset, teachers must have empathy for their students. It is for this reason the researcher asserts that student-centered decision-making is an orientation in which empathy is central to the decisional practices of teachers. The researcher articulates this as an “empathetic decisional orientation.” This concept first explicitly emerged within the interview with Edward. He stated, “I believe empathy is the heart of design.” As the researcher analyzed the data, the concept of empathetic decisional orientation became a constant undercurrent within participant responses.

The idea of empathetic decisional orientation was most closely related to the research of Schultz in his 1998 study entitled *The Dynamics of Pedagogic Judgment in Teaching*. Schultz discussed the struggle teachers often have between what he called “sanctioned instructional behavior and their own judgment” (Schultz, 1998, p. 1). He asserted that teachers must have an attitude of advocacy combined with an empathetic orientation in order to make effective decisions. This concept emerged from an understanding of how great the weight pedagogical decisions carry when evaluating the possible outcomes. Schultz (1998) stated, “Pedagogic judgments carry the heaviest

weight of all—the weight of acting on behalf of the other, of taking the responsibility for the other onto yourself, of guiding students to recognize purpose” (p. 9). He illustrated how teachers’ decisions have a significant impact on the well-being of students. For this reason, he contended judgment as a moral action. Most profoundly, Schultz asserted teachers must act selflessly, with a student-centered or empathetic orientation in order to truly do what’s best for the student.

The effects of pedagogic judgment that arise from egocentric, or even casual behavior, may be the most destructive lessons taught. Attending to students requires an expansion to the inclusive, advocative self in the world outside cause and effects. Inquiry established a compelling recognition of moral in the beliefs, perceptions, reasoning, and actions that are associated with teacher judgment.

Pedagogic judgment happens when the moral dimensions of teaching are recognized and the relationship between teacher and student is enabled. (Schultz, 1998, p. 1)

This study reinforced the results of Schultz’s study.

While Schultz’s (1998) study provided valuable information with regard to the empathy and student-centric mindset of teachers, his work stopped short of providing a clear picture of the process of decision-making within the classroom. The quantitative nature of his study produced focused results involving the shared moral values of teachers. The researcher’s investigation was much more complex and thorough in terms of analysis and investigative practices. The qualitative methods used in this study produced more data and created a more well-rounded picture of the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers.

Recommendations for School Leaders

While a theory for educational leadership was not fully developed within this study, the findings and prior literature support the need to invest in the decisional or judgment practices of teachers. Fullan and Hargreaves (2013) articulated this need through the emergent theory of decisional capital. The results of this study suggest areas of which leaders must be aware as they pursue professional development for teachers in order to improve the decisional capacity within their organization. First, they must recognize that teachers often function with a student-centric decisional mindset. This mindset heavily influences the decisions made within their classroom. Second, the complex nature of the decisional process suggested a multidimensional approach to professional development, one in which administrators consider all aspects of the process as areas of investment. Finally, the evidence suggests a need to provide a leadership style that exemplifies an empathetic mindset.

Recognition of the Student-Centric Decisional Mindset

Leaders must understand that teachers often have a decisional mindset focused on what they believe is in the best interest of students. This belief is shaped by level of empathy, a goal of lifelong well-being, relationship with students, and student interest. Notably, the concept of academic achievement was not significant as a factor of influence across participant responses. This suggests the idea that teachers are more concerned about student social, emotional, and physical well-being than their academic achievement. This concept was supported by Griffith and Groulx's (2014) research. Schultz's (1998) study also supported this concept with his description of "sanctioned instructional behavior" versus "teacher judgment" (p. 1). For this reason, care should be

taken not to reduce the importance of academic achievement when focusing on a student-centric mindset as an area of decisional capital investment. Leaders should consider incorporating academic achievement as part of the student-centric concept.

Multidimensional Approach to Decisional Capital Investment

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) suggested that decisional capital is developed during a process in which professionals engage in five subcategories: experience, practice, challenging and stretching, reflection, and judgment. While the results from this study reinforce these categories, the researcher identified even more factors that influence the teachers' decisions. These factors of influence translate into strategies to be held by leaders. In order to fully invest in the decisional capital of teachers, findings suggest leaders should:

- Understand the role of reflective practice in decision-making.
- Consider the level of teacher autonomy.
- Evaluate the influence of peers.
- Know how others inspire teachers.
- Invest in positive relationships with teachers.
- Consider the past experiences that motivated or demotivated teachers.
- Understand where teachers' passion comes from.
- Understand the impact of teacher empowerment.
- Consider the position of teachers as role-models for their students.

Many of the above strategies focus on the role administrators play in getting to know who teachers are and what motivates their decisions. Due to the level of complexity involved, professional development for teachers, aimed at improving the

decisional or judgment practices of teachers, must be robust and executed with a laser-like focus in order to meet the individual needs of teachers. Such programs must take into account the needs of teachers through thorough investigation and observation in order to develop meaningful learning opportunities. Just as teachers have a student-centric mindset, the above strategies and supporting evidence suggest that leaders must adopt a teacher-centric mindset in order to meet the needs of the teachers in order to invest in decisional capital of the organization.

Leadership: Role-Modeling and Example

As a practicing administrator, the researcher has identified that not all people are naturally empathetic. For this reason, it is vital for administrators to cultivate this mindset in the teachers they serve through deliberate role-modeling and example. This strategy involves many of the strategies identified as being student-centric within the study. Administrators should first be empathetic towards all stakeholders. This demonstrates the desired character trait. They should then adopt a mindset that focuses on the lifelong well-being of teachers. The relationship between teacher and administrator should also be cultivated in order for the empathetic mindset to establish a foundation of trust. Finally, administrators should focus on putting teachers in positions that suit their interests. This parallels the student-interest based category observed within participant responses.

The researcher asserts that an empathetic leadership style, based on positive relationships with teachers, would result in an environment focused on trust. Trust would then build the capacity for autonomy. Autonomy would then move to teacher

empowerment. Figure 10 graphically illustrates the process leading to teacher empowerment.

EMPATHY TO TEACHER EMPOWERMENT FLOWCHART

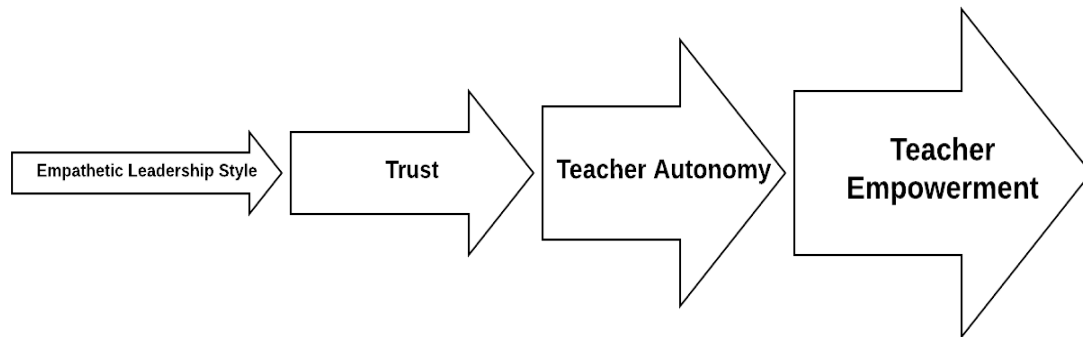


Figure 7. Empathy Leading to Teacher Empowerment Flowchart (Created by Author)

Teacher empowerment speaks to the ability of teachers to take charge of their decision-making within their classroom without being told what to do. This empowerment is defined as: “investing teachers with the right to participate in the determination of school goals and policies and to exercise professional judgment about what and how to teach” (Bolin, 1989, p. 82). This definition articulates how promoting teacher empowerment invests in the decisional capital of the organization. When leaders act with empathy towards their teachers they invest in the decision-making of their teachers.

Recommendations for Further Study

Upon completing this study, the researcher identified areas in which further research should be conducted. The more the researcher gained knowledge during this study, the greater the number of questions developed. Multiple questions are still left unanswered. However, three main areas exist in which the researcher clearly identifies

the need for further investigation: to better understand each factor of influence within the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers, to evaluate whether the student-centric decisional mindset correlates to student achievement and success, and to better gain understanding of the decisional or judgment experiences of administrators.

Evaluation of Each Factor Influence

The first area needing additional research pertains to each factor of influence with regard to the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers. The student-centric decisional mindset was established as a main theme among participants. However, more information is needed surrounding each factor of influence. While factors were present among multiple participants, they were not consistently evident among all teachers. They also did not emerge with the frequency necessary to clearly define their impact on the decisional or judgment practice of teachers. In order to further understand the depth of influence each factor has on the decisional or judgment experience of teachers, there is a need to conduct further qualitative research. Such research would provide the evidence necessary to truly understand the lived experiences surrounding each factor and their depth of impact on teacher decisional or judgment experiences.

Student-Centric Decisional Impact

The second area needing research is a quantitative study focused on the impact of the student-centric decisional impact on student achievement and success. This study did not evaluate the effectiveness of teacher instructional decisions. For this reason, further investigation is necessary to determine correlation between the student-centric decisional mindset and student achievement and success. The Griffith and Groulx (2014) study identified the mindsets of teachers as being student-centric in nature. The researcher

suggests utilizing similar quantitative methodology to determine the level of student-centric mindset among teachers in schools and evaluate student achievement level correlation. Such research would reveal whether leaders should or should not invest in strategies that promote the student-centric decisional mindset.

Decisional or Judgment Experiences of Administrators

The final area in need of further research is an investigation with regard to better understanding the decisional or judgment experiences of administrators. A mixed methodological study surrounding these experiences would reveal the elements needed in order for administrators to make meaningful decisions within the organization. Graduate institutions and superintendents could then use the identified elements to better prepare administrators for the decisions they face every day within the organization.

Summary

The grounded theory nature of this study invited the researcher to share in the experiences of the participants throughout the interview process resulting in meaningful application as a school administrator. As a practicing school principal, his desire to provide students what they need to be successful is at the center of his decision-making practices. This also translates to the teacher-centric mindset he has within his leadership style.

This study involving 10 rural northern Minnesota teachers not only adds to the current body of knowledge with regard to the decisional or judgment experiences of teachers, it provides a deep and meaning foundation in which further research can be developed. This study determined that additional research involving the factors that influence these experiences is still needed. In addition, it found that research should also

be conducted to investigate the impact of the student-centric decisional mindset on student achievement and success. With additional information, leaders could determine the strategies necessary to invest in the decisional capital of their organization. Finally, this study revealed that further understanding of the decisional or judgment experiences of administrators is needed in order to fully understand the supports needed for them to make meaningful decisions within their organization.

This study is focused on the needs of human beings. Meeting those needs is at the heart of the decision-making process within education. Educators and leaders must remember that they are in a human services industry. An effective human services organization is defined by the level of empathy its employees have for their stakeholders (Neukrug, Bayne, Dean-Nganga, & Pusateri, 2012). There is no greater commodity than the hearts and minds of young people. Educational organizations have an obligation to design a system of support for all stakeholders that cultivates empathy within all facets. After all, “empathy is the heart of design” (Edward).

As a leader within a rural northern Minnesota school, the researcher is now tasked with applying these results within his own organization. With care, diligence, and purpose, the researcher will strive for a system that supports a human-centered and empathetic mindset in order to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Coding Example

Josh: Why did you become a teacher?

Richard: I applied to colleges and went to American universities in Mexico. It was two years of program at the time. It was my father and another elder who directed me in that direction. They looked at my portfolio that I made in high school and he said yes; they really liked my work and he suggested I should go to art school. He directed me down that area. My father went to that school. So he recommended it. So I went down there. I just totally went to place where I didn't know anybody, where I've never been before. So I just kind of went the two years and came back. I met a lot of people like teachers who gave me directions about different things in life you know, not just my art but also that meant a lot in my life. They taught me just some basic things I can use in my daily decisions. So when I came back to Minneapolis College of Art and Design, I got my four-year my, BFA, bachelors of fine arts degree. I came back home here to the reservation. Why I became a teacher? Few factors I think. I started Headstart. I was the first male teacher here, me with only one other male teacher. After that I was also an IEIA in Indian Arts so we only have two up here so I was the first one outside. I decided when I got hired I didn't think I had a chance, but then again my confidence was built up by my friends and my father. He wasn't living at the time but my mother was. She raised funds for my life and has nothing to show for her teaching. I got up there. The aspect of Headstart, it was a matter of they asked me if I could bead, and I said no. I'd never beaded in my life and there were three elders. I thought there was no way I would get hired with experienced beadars. But I went in there and they asked questions. How do you? For me, they asked 30 hypothetical questions during the interview. After we got done, I was the first one to answer them all right. It was panel or committee of about twelve people.

-Teacher Area -Reason to Be -Past Experience
--

Josh: So do you remember some of those questions and what were they? Why wouldn't somebody else get them right?

Richard: Some of them got it right but I got them all right.

Josh: Good for you. Just basic questions?

Richard: Basic interview questions. You know when they're like five years old? I said go up to that child, of course at eye level, and sit down with that child and talk to them and I know what the problem was. I would contact their parents or guardians to let them know what's going on in the classroom.

-Student-Centric

Josh: It's good. I know some of the information you put down some information so I know what you teach. I know that you teach art but how many kids and what grade levels?

Richard: 9-12.

Josh: Okay. 9 Through 12.

Richard: We're going on my 17th year at the high school. Teaching subjects? Maybe art is painting advanced painting, beading, intro to drawing advanced drawing etc.

-Years of Experience
-Veteran

Josh: When you mentioned a lot of different genres I suppose mediums and things too. Who chose those? Is that something you had direction?

Richard: Yeah you get a chance to look at the kids. It was just different. For example I had a choice between poetry and beading. But we listened to the community and they wanted the kids to be more cultural.

-Student-Centric
-Community-Driven
-Judgment Motivation

Josh: Yep.

Richard: Awareness. Class that are being taught here. That wasn't a very easy decision because the cost of all classes, the medium just know how expenses are buying pottery and beads. It was one the community wanted, they wanted beading into the system.

-Community-Driven
-Judgment Motivation

Josh: One of the things that I have, a little bit more specific here, what are your goals for students?

Richard: Of course it's graduating, to make great decisions. We all make wrong decisions, but to learn from our wrong. I want them to have a happy life. Have a healthy and happy life and find somebody to live with or mate or something. You hope they had a good family and raise them with the values they have picked up while they both not just know about but practice those values. I wish they just have a happy life.

-Empathy
-Goal
-Personal Growth
-Potential
-Relationship
-Student-Centric

Josh: Very cool. I think I mean we definitely see eye to eye on that for sure. That's one of my main goals. Now we're going to talk about your classroom a little bit more and how you interact with kids. If I were to kind of be the fly on the wall or stand a corner and watch you interact with children what would I see in a given class?

Richard: One of the main things you won't find, you won't find me with my back turned towards you. I don't want kids to feel like they're being neglected but it's also for safety reasons. But I always and keep my body facing the kids in the classroom. If I'm working one on one I

-Empathy
-Relationship
-Student-Centric
-Teaching Strategy
-Interest-

still have my back further away. You know I'm not look away from the classroom. It's very important. That way you start gaining confidence in the kids and so they can start trusting you. It's building that trust with the student and when you do that they'll open up to you and there's many ways for that to happen. I mean you start asking questions: What's your dog's name? Do you have cats? But you get into to thinking that you're concerned not only in the classroom but you're also concerned what they do at home. Well you know do you have brothers or sisters? Their names? Most of that time, their brothers and sisters are past students. I've been here 17 years. Old elementary, middle school before that. It's a progression and possible head Headstart. Those kids are like 45-years-old with families. Yeah, it's a matter of you know, not to show that we're just academics here. Whatever is their passion, that's the most important the most important thing is to know what's going on at home. Building that trust. And the kids respond to you in a manner that they'll perform better in the classroom.

Josh: Actually one of the things that questions that have all been pretty consistent in asking is has there been something that you've really been passionate, about that you wanted to get started in your classroom? An idea a concept you talked about being in the community impacted that decision to go with that direction but has there been any other projects around the building that you kind of wanted to head up or get started?

Richard: Yes working with computers. Computer art and design. So many different programs are out there.

Josh: Why did you want to go computer?

Richard: I have students that are doing that at home.

Josh: OK.

Richard: Doing computer art and showing me what they can do. And it's really fantastic art. It's an art form. So really what happened here is something that will respond to what they want. You know I think that's not what the district wants but the kids want.

Josh: Any obstacles you can kind of see that you're already running into with it?

Richard: And we're just learning how. It just got onto a committee.

Josh: OK.

Richard: Continue the arts. Continue what we have at the middle school and continue into the high school. We want the arts involved in our career path in each subject in art, math, etc. So we can integrate it.

-Goal
-Interest-
Based
-Teaching
Strategy

-Student-
Centric
-Teaching
Strategy
-Curricular
Goal

Josh: A little bit of background more background myself I am a fine arts as well. I was a music major and choral band director for two years and then also an elementary music specialist. So I definitely have a passion for integrating arts into the curriculum and integrating the curriculum into the arts as well. So doing that is really important to me. So Richard, as you think about that, I'm going to start speaking directly towards decision-making and won't guide you. What is it that speaks to you when you have a choice that has to be made and the guides you into thinking, that's the right choice to make with that child?

Richard: It's their mental process. And here is this. It's such a high value to me. I know that for an example I had when I was at the elementary school. The principal took me to his office and I didn't know this but he is saying that there is a third grader and his mother came in and told him and the principal that she didn't want him anymore.

-Empathy
-Student-Centric
-Past Experience

Josh: Didn't want the child?

Richard: Didn't want the kid anymore. No home.

Josh: Wow!

Richard: The Principal was of there of course the principal said that . . . When I didn't know what do with him you know. His grades went down in school. I mean he didn't cry. He just shut down totally and he said well what happened was he took your class and he found something that he liked. And it wasn't very long after that. His grades started going back up. And it was because of art. He found something he liked. And the values that things he learned in art. He used that in his other classes the way he learned. So I thought that was very cool.

-Empathy
-Perseverance
-Student-Centric
-Student-Resiliency
-Judgment

Josh: That is really cool. Nice job.

Richard: To this day now I'm very cautious of students the ones that are really introverted you know. And again gaining that trust. I hope what you learn here and practice using it in your classes and passing. It's not just getting As and Bs in art. You can do the same thing in your other classes. Just set your mind to it and use those practices you do here. Use the same method other classes to get those grades also. Remember where their mental state is. Bring them out of that shell if they are in there or if there's something bothering them. I feel very confident and bring them out. Make phone calls at home to the guardian found out things.

-Trust
-Empathy
-Relationship

Josh: A great response. One of the questions I added for you because I've started looking at the data to drill down a little harder. When you compare what you believe to be a solid teacher a good teacher compared to what you believe to be a not so good teacher. What do you think the difference is in terms of their decision-making practices?

Richard: A good teacher will get the attention of a classroom. When I was teaching. I believe in 1:1 teaching. I'll stand up and talking on a certain issue and I'll simply grab something and hold it in my hand when I'm talking. It gets the kids' attention. They're wondering why I picked up an object. Maybe a drumstick or something... Yet I got their attention while I'm talking and I don't turn by back to them. I don't go like this you know or point to the board or look away. That's not that's not a good teacher. I know you're listening but yet I got your attention by simply having the object of my hand in keeping their interest what I'm talking about what I'm doing in motion.

-Student-Centric
-Teaching Strategy

Josh: Drawing their attention to you. OK.

Richard: So that's good teacher. I feel bad teachers...when they let kids pushed the buttons and they know that the kids know what buttons push for that teacher and they'll harp on them. They'll keep doing that. So you let your guard down and because when they push that button and your frustration raises and they're going to continue so you're going to have a breakdown. I've seen teachers yelling at young kids and just freak out and their voice is really about a yelling situation. You don't talk to anybody that way no matter what age they are, even adults you know? So who becomes in those moments? Who's most important? The teacher. I addressed that before in elementary school. I was waiting at the end of the hallway. A teacher took this kid out of the room and just yelled at him right in the hallway and after words I just told him: "That's not the proper way. To illustrate your point whatever you're trying to get into this kid's head." I said, "This is something that should be held in your office or not in public like this. You're making kid feel very bad. You're degrading them by yelling at them in public. The first thing, you shouldn't be yelling. If there is a situation that got you mad or something in a room, that should addressed one on one." I was really mad but I didn't want him to say anything yet. You know I've kept my composure. You just got to say you've got to figure out find out why he wasn't listening. You know there's something at home going on that you don't know. He might not have eaten in a few days. So much stress and things like that. You got give him the benefit of the doubt.

-Negative Motivational Strategy
-Not-Empathetic
-Teacher-Centric
-Loss of Control

Josh: That's a struggle. It's a struggle when I watch it because I see it quite often as an administrator.

Richard: The poverty on reservations is rampant. It is a whole different thing in other schools. You know, I think you know poverty is something that we have to deal with compassionately, be sensitive to our children and they've gone through a lot at a young age.

-Empathy
-Student-Centric
-Compassion
-Student Resiliency

Josh: We talk about the idea of setting our egos aside as teachers that we've got to make sure that we remind ourselves that the kids are most important, not us. So we do a lot of that reminding. So what do you think the impact if you get a teacher that's laying into that kid or you get a teacher that's making those kind of decisions in the way you teach. What is the impact of either scenario?

Richard: Yeah. Sometimes I use myself as an example of course what I've gone through. I've gone through a lot. To get where I am right now. I have advisory with seniors right now. I have had them since 10th grade. I know the kids we were in process of graduating and I like I tell them what I've gone through. In high school I went to a school with a student body of 2200 students. It had only three Native Americans in that school. So I had to fight them a lot as a senior and even as a freshman. I had to fight a lot. I got bullied a lot, I told the seniors. I barely graduated, I said. I didn't graduate with my class. I had to go to summer school in order to graduate in senior high. Now they're finding problems there when I was there they were the second highest in the state. Here, you have high expectations for students. I graduate that summer after. The principal wanted me to walk with my graduating class and get a blank diploma. I told him I did not want to do that because they'd have a Native American graduating. And I did not walk. I did not walk with my classes. I didn't go. I didn't want to give them the satisfaction I felt. After I got my diploma, I decided to go to college and I said I got a 4.0 on my GPA was 4.0 when I told them the difference. College is something that you want to go to. High school you are mandated to go. You know you go to college. That's a whole different story. I mean I had some really good friends in Santa Fe and Minneapolis. And the kids they drank and did drugs. I didn't do any of that. My first year in Santa Fe, I had some really good friends you know... Good artists. They partied, did college stuff you know. I didn't do anything. The second year I went back there they all got kicked out. They weren't there for the reason why you go to college... You go to college. You made a decision of what you want to do with your life. I said high school mandatory, college option. You make that optional choice. You're going to try the best you can and if you can, good things happen. What would things look like college and high school were similar? Instead of high school being mandatory. If you could direct yourself a little bit more you really could be more successful.

-Empathy
-Goal
-Personal Growth
-Potential
-Student-Centric
-Past

Josh: Choose what you want?

Richard: Teachers always told me I was very intelligent. I could do the work that was offered. But instead because of the constant bullying, when I was placed in one room all day long, I wasn't in the general population like above the cafeteria. They had one teacher going through all the subjects that would be taught in all the classrooms. My teacher would be so happy that I turned out to be a teacher. I have a classroom. You know he would probably flip out and he was one of my influences. So he really inspired me, I had him all day long. I mean he put up with me and built my confidence. That was a good teacher.

-Past
Experience
-Reason to Be
-Good Teacher
-Past
Experience
-Relationship

Josh: You had a good relationship with him? How important is that relationship with your students and what role does it play? Is there anything else you can tell me about how that interaction and relationship is with students?

Richard: What things have been taught in the classroom do I see it outside the classroom?

Josh: What is your belief of the role of relationships in education?

Richard: Well I'm not quite sure.

Josh: That's OK. I think you touched on it quite a bit like your teacher that inspired you.

Richard: I believe in education and you know I let the kids know that I believe in education so much. Of course our school is so driven to get our kids in college now. And I said even vocational school will work for you. All kids are not college material but we want to open up your eyes to the possibilities of different outlets to be successful in life.

-Goal
-Potential
-Interest-
Based
-Student-
Centric

Josh: So yeah there we go to all right. I'm just going to make sure I didn't miss any of my important questions.

Richard: I kind of tease them sometimes. That's that relationship that you have with your students. I don't want to see you at McDonalds. I said I'm not knocking that, but I want you to reach for want... To reach higher in your goals once you leave high school your life is going change so much. I mean you are wanting to be more independent that means you have to pay to keep the lights on and food on the table, clothes for your children once you do have children. This whole thing is going to change on you. You have to start thinking about those things. You provide these things for your kids or nephews your nieces or what have you.

-Empathy
-Goal
-Potential
-Relationship
-Student-
Centric

Josh: I think one of the last questions I want to ask you is, if you could reflect on all of the years that you've been teaching is there one time that you can kind of go back in your brain that you I don't want to go through

negatively but you feel like you blew it? That the decision you made wasn't the right direction? What was that?

Richard: There's one time I quit when I told my boss that I was quitting. A teacher in another district taught beading but didn't have any needles. I made a mistake and I sold her some needles. She wrote a check out to the program. But of course when my boss came to me. She just totally tore into me. I had no right selling materials from our program. She was right. She was right. But I could not tell artists no and she was teaching beading. I couldn't say no.

Josh: Who you're thinking about. You weren't thinking about yourself.

Richard: I was thinking about her kids that she had to teach. That was my purpose. It wasn't monetary, nothing for me it was for her to be successful, so she could teach beading. The administrator was down on me and I said I understand so I quit. I said I can't work here. You know you don't have that. If you can't have that feeling of helping people out at times... You know there are situations in life that will come up to you and if you're going to turn your back on something like this, I don't want to work here I quit.. Well, she apologized the next day and I got rehired. She'd seen it my way. You can see the reason I did this. Even though I told her I was wrong.

Josh: With kids you know I can see that. Well do you have any questions for me?

Richard: What got you into teaching?

Josh: What got me into teaching? I think the same way. I found a niche where I felt that I was finally good at. Something you know I didn't really know. Growing up I didn't feel like I was really good at a whole lot. I was good at mechanics. You know I could do that. But I knew I wasn't really passionate about it. It wasn't until I figured out that I had to use my voice to sing. And so I started doing that and then I figured out that I had a gift to teach others how to sing. That was kind of where it got me and then to get into administration... I got really frustrated with not being able to make the impact I wanted to make on kids and the way I wanted to do it. So I knew I needed to get it into administration so I could open kids' hearts and eyes. I want them to be the most successful. Well I don't have anything else.

-Student-Centric
-Empathy
-Self -Sacrifice
-Admin Relationship
-Teacher-Centered

-Empathetic Statement

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

The interviews for the study shall be limited to 45 minutes. However, as this is a Grounded Theory study in which the researcher aims to move questioning based on the responses of the participants, interview time may vary. Follow-up interviews may also be needed in order to yield rich and applicable data. As the proposed study will utilize classical grounded theory methodology, the goal of the interview questions is to produce answers that are deep and meaningful with regard to their Decisional Capital experiences. Decisional Capital is defined as “the ability to make accurate decisions through careful deliberation and consideration” (Hargreaves, 2012). Procedures for the interview process are as follows:

- 1- Introduction and Informed Consent explanation and signing (5 Minutes)
 - a. Inclusion of data privacy and confidentiality procedures
- 2- Interview content (40 Minutes)
 - a. Questions:
 - i. Please describe your professional self.
 1. Education
 2. Experience
 - ii. Please describe your classroom environment.
 1. What do you teach?
 2. How many students?
 3. How old are your students?
 - iii. What activities do you do to promote the learning and well-being of your students?
 1. Depending on responses, one or several of those activities will be pulled out and examined:
 - a. Why did you choose that activity or activities?
 - iv. How do you know what you are doing is successful?
 - v. How do you define success?
 - b. Follow-up questions will be provided based on the responses of teachers with the focus of yielding the richest information surrounding the judgment processes of teachers and the perceived impact of those decisions.
- 3- Conclusion (5 Minutes)
 - a. Procedures for data privacy and confidentiality reiterated.
 - b. Contact information provided
 - c. Demonstration of appreciation

Appendix C Participant Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA CONSENT TO PARTICIPAT IN RESEARCH

TITLE: A Grounded Theory Study on Teacher Decisional Capital Experiences

PROJECT DIRECTOR: Joshua S. Grover

PHONE: 701- 367-3995

DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to be in a research study about the decision-making experiences of teachers because you are a practicing educator. The research is exploring teachers' perceptions of how success, achievement, and well-being of students is nurtured through the judgments made within the classroom. The study ultimately hopes to evaluate elements of teacher effectiveness.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately *eighteen* people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in the study will last for the duration of the interview, which will be approximately forty-five minutes. It is possible that follow-up interviews will be conducted as needed. You will need to be interviewed in-person.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

You will be interviewed about your classroom decision-making experiences. The interview will be audio-recorded, and transcripts will be developed based on the audio recordings and analyzed for common themes.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

Some questions may be of a sensitive nature, and you may therefore become upset as a result. However, such risks are not viewed as being in excess of "minimal risk"

If, however, you become upset by questions, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer a question. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact your healthcare provider and inquire about counseling services available.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You may not benefit personally from being in this study. However, in the future other people may benefit from this study as the results have applications for educational practitioners in terms of building capacity for success. The themes derived from the results will hopefully produce a meaningful theory in which educators may utilize to increase the capacity to make effective decisions with regard to classroom instruction.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Your study record may be reviewed by Government agencies and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. As the researcher is a mandatory reporter: You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a coding system. Your name will be omitted and substituted with an alphanumeric code. No identifying information will be included in the data.

If I write a report or article about this study, I will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

You have the right to request or review the digital recordings of your interview. Audio recordings of interviews will be deleted upon completion of the study.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

If you decide to leave the study early, we ask that you please inform the project director, Joshua Grover, as soon as you are able.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Joshua S. Grover. You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Joshua Grover at (701) 367-3995 or Dr. Pauline Stonehouse at (701) 777-4163.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@research.UND.edu.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking “Information for Research Participants” on the web site:
<http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm>

I give consent to be audio recorded during this study.

Please initial: **Yes** **No**

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.

Please initial: **Yes** **No**

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject's Name: _____

Signature of Subject

Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

Date

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