

Exploratory study of adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain

by

Megan Coberly

B.S., Friends University, 2011
M.S., Emporia State University, 2018

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain with elementary teachers and principals. Grounded in Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the research examined how teachers and principals from varying levels of adult cognitive development perceived teacher resource loss and gain. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals currently employed in elementary schools in Kansas. Data was thematically analyzed, with attention to patterns shaped by participants' Ways of Knowing.

This study found that teachers' Ways of Knowing influenced the way they viewed work stress in relation to resource loss and gain support and influenced how principals chose to provide support to their teachers. Another important finding was the misalignment that occurred when teachers' Ways of Knowing did not align with their principals' way of providing support. When this occurred, teachers' stress increased and their capacity to do their jobs began to deplete. Conversely, teachers felt supported when their principals provided them with support that aligned with their cognitive development. This study emphasized the COR theory assumption that resources are deeply personal and vary in production and value among different individuals. Each participants Way of Knowing was clearly exemplified in the way they experienced stress and support in the workplace.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Royce Ann Collins

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Dedication

For Chaz, my biggest supporter and best friend.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of adult cognitive development and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as a lens for understanding the dynamics between employer and employee. As learners, adults engage in differing Ways of Knowing which influence how they make meaning of their experiences (Drago-Severson, 2009). Drago-Severson's adult cognitive development theory has been applied specifically to teachers and principals. To investigate COR theory and Ways of Knowing, this research used the adult population of teachers and principals.

Adult Cognitive Development

Cognitive development has been studied for more than 45 years in studies about how individuals learn and develop across the span of their lives (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Researchers like William Perry and Robert Kegan expanded adolescent cognitive development research into adulthood. Perry's theory has nine schematic positions divided into five categories that develop during young adulthood. The categories are hierarchal and develop from the first where individuals see situations as only right and wrong, to the middle categories where individuals begin to accept uncertainty but still believe in fundamental truths, all the way to the last category where individuals are finally able to engage in metacognition to examine their own thinking (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Kegan followed Perry's research by creating an adult cognitive developmental theory called the Constructive Development Theory (CDT), which uses cognitive, social-emotional development as elements in meaning making development and growth (Love & Guthrie, 1999). In CDT, cognitive development refers to how much adults can see and manage and how much they cannot see or have perspective on (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). This

theory is also hierarchal in that individuals' perspective grow as they grow cognitively. In the first stages, individuals are concerned with only their perspectives. As they develop through the stages, they are more able to see the world from multiple perspectives, including being able to reflect on their own perspectives.

Ways of Knowing

Eleanor Drago-Severson applied Kegan's adult cognitive development theory-to the population of teachers and educational leaders. Drago-Severson (2009) focused on the four most common Ways of Knowing in adults. This theory is also hierarchal in that an adult can move through the levels, gaining perspective as they grow. The first stage is instrumental, the next, socializing, next is self-authoring, and the final stage is self-transforming. Ways of Knowing are how adults make meaning. They also offer a lens to view developmentally appropriate supports and challenges. This cognitive developmental theory is a constructivist theory in that it assumes how humans make sense of experiences differs from person to person. It is a developmental theory in that it assumes our meaning making systems can grow and develop over time. The system centers around what individuals can have perspective on and what they are unable to see about themselves or others (Drago-Severson, 2016). The more perspective a person can have, the better they are able to manage the complexity of relationships and learning.

As learners, adults engage in differing Ways of Knowing which influence how they make meaning of their experiences. The four most common Ways of Knowing in adulthood are instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming (Drago-Severson, 2009). Adults engaged in the first stage, the instrumental Way of Knowing are most interested in following set rules and may have the inability to see situations from another's perspective yet (Drago-Severson, 2016). The next stage is Socializing. Socializing knowers gain more perspective than

instrumental knowers, but highly value acceptance from others and often view interpersonal conflict as a threat to the self. Adults within the next stage, the self-authoring Way of Knowing, develop more of a sense of self and operate based on their own values. They have gained more perspective and often welcome opportunities to express their opinions. The final stage is self-transforming. Adults engaged in the self-transforming Way of Knowing can reflect on others' perspectives as well as on their own perspectives and thrive on collaboration, are committed to self-exploration, and view feedback to enhance their own thinking (Drago-Severson, 2016).

According to Drago-Severson et al. (2013b), the way individuals lead is also influenced by their Way of Knowing. An instrumental leader assumes that if policies are followed, learners will be successful. They may have difficulty identifying with teachers' perspectives. A leader engaged in the socializing Way of Knowing can be preoccupied with earning the praise of their supervisors and may have difficulty making policy decisions or dealing with teacher conflict on their own. Self-authoring leaders are concerned primarily with their own competence and values and may not yet have the capacity to understand perspectives that differ from their own. Leaders who are self-transforming look at leadership challenges as open opportunities for growth, although they may have trouble recognizing when certain teachers prefer a more direct approach. As leaders develop in their Ways of Knowing, they may be more equipped to adapt to the interpersonal challenges of leadership (Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Drago-Severson suggests a developmental approach to supporting teachers through professional learning, considering teachers' different Ways of Knowing. Understanding the Ways of Knowing may assist leaders in not labeling teachers based solely on their behaviors (Drago-Severson, 2009) and may help them to understand their perspectives on their experiences. What a leader may view as an effective supportive strategy may feel overwhelming

to a learner (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). A socializing teacher may not yet have the developmental capacity to implement new policies without feeling the approval of their leader, but with gentle guidance and an awareness of developmental diversity, that teacher can learn and grow. Leaders who meet teachers where they are developmentally can offer appropriate support that can affect teachers as learners and the overall culture of a building (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Occupational Retention

When leaders do not meet employee needs in the workplace, employees can become stressed and may choose to leave their place of employment (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Fontes, 2020; McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Leaders strive to support their employees in the workplace to improve job satisfaction and increase motivation to stay employed at their organization (Parfyonova et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Satisfied employees tend to work harder and stay longer in their place of employment (Jungert et al., 2022). This section provides an overview of occupational burnout, employee needs, and how leaders are attempting to support their employees and retain employees in their organizations.

Occupational Burnout

Formal studies of burnout began in the 1970's and the definition of burnout has evolved throughout the years. Freudenberger, the first man to formally study occupational burnout, used his personal observations in the work environment to define burnout as a decrease in enthusiasm for one's work as well as fatigue or exhaustion (Chiarelli-Helminiak, 2014). He created the psychological sphere in which to understand burnout, but was limited to his own experience and observations working in a volunteer center, serving individuals with mental health issues (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Years later, Maslach reformulated the concept of burnout and introduced the research into the scientific community (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach

supported Freudenberg's observations, highlighting the impact burnout can have on client care in a social service environment. Maslach then defined occupational burnout as the depletion of resources when striving to meet work-related demands. This manifests into a psychological syndrome consisting of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization or cynicism, and reduced accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This research on occupational burnout is still being cited in many studies (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Fontes, 2020; McGeary & McGeary, 2012).

Occupational burnout can affect an employee's mental and physical health, as well as affect an organization. Maslach and Jackson (1981) state that as an employee's resources deplete, they may feel that they are no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level. If this burnout continues for some time, it may result in the worker developing poor physical and psychological health brought on by exhaustion and helpless feelings (Passmore et al., 2020). These consequences are not only serious for the individual worker, but for the organization where the worker is employed. The effects of burnout can be felt by staff, clients, and leaders (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). For example, the burnout experienced by leaders not only affects themselves, but their employees as well. One sign of burnout in a leader is the loss of charisma (Fontes, 2020). This likely disappoints employees, who have certain expectations of their leader. According to Bemiller and Williams (2011) burnout can also affect entire organizations. Effects may include increased absenteeism, low morale, inefficiency, and turnover.

Employee Need Satisfaction

Organizations run most efficiently when employees are professionally satisfied (Jungert et al., 2022; Parfyonova et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). According to Jungert et al. (2022), well-functioning employees are crucial for the success of organizations and psychological need

satisfaction of these workers is essential for this success. Organizations propose that the satisfaction for employee basic needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness underlie the mechanisms that create work engagement (Wang et al., 2020). In the work environment, there is an important distinction between independence and autonomy. Jungert et al. (2022) found that independent employees are not influenced by their leaders and instead spend their time working towards their own agenda. Conversely, employees who have their need for autonomy satisfied are more likely to follow through on requests from leaders deliberately because they feel psychologically free to approve the requests. When leaders grant employees autonomy, both the employee and the organization flourish. Parfyonova et al. (2019) found that autonomy-supportive management contributes to employee well-being and enhances employee motivation and performance.

Competence and relatedness are essential psychological needs for working professionals (Jungert et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2020). According to Jungert et al. (2022), when employees are engaged in challenging tasks to develop their skills and help them adapt to changing environments, their need for competence is satisfied. When workers feel cared for and connected to their leaders and have gratifying interactions with colleagues, their psychological need for relatedness will be met. Leader behavior can help to satisfy multiple psychological needs at once. As mentioned by Wang et al. (2020), when leaders recognize employee achievements by planning a celebratory event, different employee psychological needs are satisfied including competence and relatedness. Leaders can also negatively affect employee psychological need satisfaction. When leaders do not understand how to support employee psychological need satisfaction, employees become frustrated which can, in turn, negatively affect the organization as well (Jungert et al., 2022). To enhance employee well-being and organizational success, it is

essential for organizations to understand how to satisfy employees' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Wang et al., 2020).

Leadership Support

A leader can support employee needs by recognizing employee accomplishments, promoting autonomy, and monitoring employee well-being. A leader motivates employees by openly acknowledging their successes (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). This can increase motivation and feelings of value in employees which can increase an employee's self-efficacy. Leaders who involve their employees in decision making can also help meet employee needs. According to Fontes (2020), leaders should show that they trust their employees by sharing information with them and allowing them to work autonomously based on that information. These interactions give value to the workers who can then give attention and value to the people they serve. Leaders need to be aware of their employees' mental health. Edú-Valsania et al. (2022) found that this may include periodically conducting surveys meant to measure worker burnout levels. Keeping close track of employee health allows the leaders to put interventions in place to help meet the specific needs of each employee (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).

Teacher Retention

Teachers are helping professionals and often work in environments where stress and emotional depletion are common (Fontes, 2020). Teachers may leave their schools due to increased stress and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Principals provide support to teachers to increase teacher job satisfaction and motivation to stay (Rajendran et al., 2020). Teachers that feel supported by their principals are more satisfied with their jobs and are more motivated to stay in their teaching positions (Kun & Gadanecz, 2022). This section provides an overview of

teacher burnout, teacher needs, and how principals are providing support to retain teachers in their buildings.

Teacher Burnout

Researchers identify teachers as working in a helping profession where employees experience stress and emotional depletion in their work environments (Fontes, 2020; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). This depletion occurs more rapidly in professionals who give of themselves to others in their daily work (Fontes, 2020). People who work in these types of organizations demand much of themselves as the population they serve demands so much of them, often leaving them in a state of exhaustion (Fontes, 2020). This can cause the worker to become worn out and complacent. According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), individuals who help people in their line of work may suffer from emotional exhaustion and cynicism. These workers are employed in places where the needs of the population they serve are primary and their own needs become secondary. Fontes (2020) found that people who care for others in their profession may not realize that as they give to their charges, they are depleting themselves. This depletion is a potential factor for people in these types of serving professions to leave their jobs.

Teachers experiencing high amounts of stress are related to high absenteeism, retirement, and turnover rates (Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020). Skaalvik and Skaalvic (2020) found that emotional exhaustion was strongly associated with motivation to quit. When many teachers are motivated to quit, there are implications for the educational community. When there are not enough teachers to support the learning communities, teachers' stress levels rise, which can lead to those teachers leaving the profession as well (Rajendran et al., 2020). Attention to reducing

teachers' experienced demands may reduce their emotional exhaustion and intent to leave the profession (Rajendran et al., 2020).

Teacher Need Satisfaction

Satisfying psychological needs proves crucial in educational settings (Kun & Gadanez, 2022; Meng, 2022). According to Meng (2022), it is due to the high-stress environment of teaching that psychological need studies have been applied to this profession. Based on research by Kun and Gadanez (2022), the psychological capacities of teachers are an especially important part of understanding stress and burnout in an educational environment. Meng (2022) studied teachers at a college, highlighting the need for universities to create supportive working environments to fulfill teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness due to their impact on positive psychological and cognitive outcomes. Specifically, encouraging team collaboration and enabling teachers to make more of their own professional choices helped to satisfy teacher psychological needs and strengthen educational organizations (Meng, 2022). When teachers are psychologically satisfied, teacher well-being is fostered. Kun and Gadanez (2022) indicate that many studies have shown that overall teacher well-being in the workplace is highly beneficial for educational institutions. Research shows that psychologically healthy teachers tend to be able to cope with stressful work events better, foster more positive work relationships, and be overall more satisfied with their jobs (Kun & Gadanez, 2022) helping to create a positive, productive environment in their buildings.

Principal Support

Principals can provide early and specific interventions that have proven to be the most effective in combating teacher burnout. Research shows that interventions are most effective when they are specifically aligned to individual teachers' personal needs and administered early

in the stages of burnout (Pyhalto et al., 2020; Xie, et al., 2022). Pyhalto et al. (2020) revealed that nearly half of the teachers in a sample were at risk for burnout, implying that it is important to identify teachers at risk at the earliest possible stages of symptom onset. Pyhalto et al. (2020) stated that more emphasis needs to be placed on taking proactive measures to prevent burnout, by distinguishing specific teacher needs and improving individual coping strategies.

Perceived principal support is a significant factor in teachers choosing to leave schools or the teaching profession altogether (Church & Simmering, 2024; Nyguyen, 2019; Player et al., 2017). Nyguyen (2019) found that perceived high levels of principal support decrease the likelihood of attrition. From 2021 to 2023, Kansas saw a 12% increase in teachers being “disengaged” at their places of employment (Church & Simmering, 2024). Principals can have a significant effect on teacher engagement in the workplace and some Kansas teachers are choosing to stay or leave their schools based on the level of support from their principals (Nyguyen, 2017). Based on research by Player et al. (2017), certain principal behaviors such as recognizing stellar teacher performance and high levels of support can directly increase teacher retention. In a survey of Kansas teachers, being heard and having their opinions valued by principals remained one of the lowest rated items and quality of principal was identified in the challenges and concerns area (Church & Simmering, 2024). The teachers that participated in the survey doubted if the survey was truly an honest effort to address future concerns, further identifying the teachers’ feelings about their lack of value. Player et al. (2017) found that strong principal leadership can have a strong effect on teacher retention even in areas where turnover is more likely.

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Noted psychologist Stevan Hobfoll (2025), an expert on stress regarding health and organizations, created the COR theory as a new way to conceptualize stress. Since then, COR theory was officially adopted as a basis for the U.S. Marine Corp's stress manual for their understanding of stress and resilience in the U.S. Forces (Hobfoll, 2025). Since the conception of the COR theory, researchers have applied it to studies on occupational stress, burnout, and resilience (Bettini et al., 2020; Brown & Roloff, 2011; Ntim et al., 2023). COR theory begins with the assumption that humans try to gain, retain, and protect that which they value (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998). Individuals strive to live in a way that will maintain and enhance their resources. COR theory proposes that individuals seek to create circumstances that will protect and promote the integrity of the individual, nested in the community (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). When faced with the choice of sharing or conserving resources, the individual will choose to conserve. This theory functions under two main assumptions. One assumption is that resource loss is more powerful than resource gain. The other is that resources must be invested to gain resources or prevent their future loss (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). This theory is considered one of the prominent theories in the study of stress and individual well-being (Ntim et al., 2023). It provides a theoretical model for preventing resource loss, maintaining existing resources, and gaining resources necessary for engaging in healthy behaviors and future resource gain (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000).

Resources can be anything perceived by individuals to help them in pursuit of their goals (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000) and can be material, social, or psychological in nature (Ntim et al., 2023). Each resource helps individuals attain their goals or help them gain more resources to be used toward the goals in some way. If individuals have a large number of resources in their

reservoir, they will view potentially threatening situations in a less threatening manner, reducing the amount of stress they feel about the situation. Resources such as self-efficacy, and social support are the building blocks of resilience and can aid in kickstarting a resource gain spiral. These pivotal resources aid in the process of coping with stress in either the objective or perceived environments of the individual (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Conversely, if individuals have a low number of resources in their reservoir or they feel that their resources are threatened, their stress increases, making it more difficult to gain future resources. The architecture of the COR theory provides an understanding of how work-related resources interact with an individual's resources to affect work-related stress and resilience.

Research Problem

Adult cognitive development influences the way adults learn and perceive interactions with others (Drago-Severson, 2009). Understanding how the cognitive development level of employees can help leaders support them and potentially decrease occupational burnout (Bemiller & Williams, 2011). A leader can support employee needs by recognizing employee accomplishments, promoting autonomy, and monitoring employee well-being (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). A contained leader and employee organization is a school. Principals are implementing interventions to support teachers and reduce their stress, but teachers are still leaving the profession at a rapid rate (Walker, 2022). As the leader of the school, principals may benefit from understanding how teachers' cognitive developments are influencing their perceptions of support as well as how that perception influences their resource losses and gains so that they may support their teachers as adult learners.

Principals can support teachers by helping them learn and grow in their profession. In educational settings, teachers are at a high risk for motivation to leave (Madigan & Kim, 2021;

Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020; Tsang et al., 2022) and principal leadership styles and behavior may have a large impact on meeting teacher needs (Beames et al., 2023; Pyhalto et al., 2020; Tikkanen et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2022). Research has yet to explore the ways in which teacher's adult cognitive developments influence the way they perceive support from their principals. Exploring teacher and principal perceptions of teacher resource loss and gain may help to highlight how varying Ways of Knowing influence perceptions of teacher stress dynamics. COR theory has been used to study occupational stress for many years (Bettini et al., 2020; Brown & Roloff, 2011; Ntim et al., 2023) and may illuminate what happens to teachers' resources when they feel stressed due to a lack of perceived principal support and what happens to their resources when they feel supported by their principals. Studies have explored which specific resources are needed to compensate for previous loss and to rebuild resources through the lens of the COR theory but are limited to studies in the medical field (Eder & Meyer, 2022; Jain et al., 2021; Naseer et al., 2024; Yildirim, & Bulut, 2022) and have not taken adult cognitive development into account when looking at perceptions of resource loss and gain. In this study, through the lens of the Ways of Knowing and COR theory, data was gathered to gain a deeper understanding of adult cognitive development and the experience of employees (elementary school teacher) resource loss and gain in relation to their leader (principal) support.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do elementary school teachers from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perceived resource loss and gain in relation to principal's support?

RQ 2: How do elementary school principals from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perception of teacher's resource loss and gain?

Theoretical Framework

Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing (2009) and COR theory (Hobfoll, 2000) were utilized as lenses to interpret how teachers and principals are perceiving teacher resource loss and gain due to their various Ways of Knowing. Together, these frameworks provide a dual interpretive lens that attends both to the developmental processes through which individuals construct meaning and to the contextual dynamics that shape stress dynamics.

Drago-Severson's (2009) Ways of Knowing describes how adults make sense of themselves, others, and their experiences through different orientations: instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming. Applying this framework enabled the analysis of not only what participants share but also how they interpreted and organized their experiences of principal support and challenges. It provided a structure for understanding variations in professional meaning-making among teachers and principals, illuminating the developmental underpinnings of perspectives. COR theory (Hobfoll, 2000) was used to explore participants' perspectives of their resource gain, loss, and conservation dynamics. By employing COR theory, this study interpreted participants' accounts in relation to the resources they perceive as threatened, depleted, or strengthened within their professional contexts.

Together, Ways of Knowing and COR theory offered a comprehensive interpretive framework. Drago-Severson's (2009) Ways of Knowing illuminated the developmental structures through which participants construct meaning, while COR theory (Hobfoll, 2000)

highlighted the stress dynamics that influenced teacher and principal workplace experiences. Using these frameworks in tandem strengthened the study's interpretive capacity, connecting individual meaning-making processes to broader organizational and contextual realities.

Research Design

The research design of this study was a descriptive qualitative study. The purpose of descriptive qualitative research is to explore how individuals perceive the reality around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research explored adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. According to Ellis and Hart (2023), a descriptive qualitative method is useful when exploring individuals' beliefs and perceptions about their external experiences, distinguishing it from other methods. The study aimed to understand teachers' and principals' cognitive development and how that influenced their perceptions regarding teacher resource loss and gain.

Percy et al. (2015) indicate that descriptive qualitative inquiry investigates individuals' subjective perceptions of their experiences in their world. The teachers in this study were asked about their perceptions of what kind of principal support helped them gain resources in the workplace and what kinds of support lead to a loss of resources. Principals were asked to describe what they believe teachers need in the workplace. Descriptive qualitative studies aim to obtain a rich description of the experience of the individuals (Kahlke, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were utilized to obtain rich descriptions of teacher perceptions of principal support as well as principal perceptions of teacher stress dynamics. Kahlke (2014) found that methods within descriptive qualitative approaches are generally inductive and thematic analysis are most common. This research utilized inductive coding to discover emerging themes regarding adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain.

Participants

To study adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain according to COR theory, the participants in this study were elementary school classroom teachers and principals currently employed at a public school in Kansas. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2024), there are 37,885 teachers and 1,355 principals currently employed in public elementary schools in Kansas. Participants were recruited through purposive and criterion sampling. The teachers were currently teaching at a public elementary school in Kansas and were currently in their 1st-5th years of teaching and the principals had been employed at a Kansas public school for at least one year and were currently serving as principal. This study excluded individuals who did not speak English, who did not want their voice recorded, and who worked in the district where the researcher is currently employed. I recruited participants by emailing Kansas principals and teachers asking them to participate in the study. I recruited a total of eight teachers and eight principals.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected for this study through semi-structured interviews. Teacher interviews were used to gather data on teachers' perspectives of their resource loss and gain due to principal support. Interviews were conducted with the eight principal participants exploring their perception of teacher resource loss and gain. To help triangulate the data, in addition to interviews, a questionnaire was used for participants to self-assess their Way of Knowing. While Drago-Severson (2009) states that no questionnaire alone should be used to determine an individual's Way of Knowing, the intent of adding this questionnaire was just to gather information to compare to the analysis of their responses. I first looked at each participant's answers to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire to see which Way of Knowing each participant

felt they best aligned. I then analyzed each participant's individual transcripts and codes to analyze which Ways of Knowing their responses to the interview questions best aligned.

Coding was informed by a priori concepts derived from COR Theory and Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing while remaining open to inductively emerging codes. A priori codes were developed based on the research questions and the theoretical framework. In this study, during the first cycle of coding, the participant responses were analyzed based on COR theory's resource losses and gains. The raw data from interview transcripts progressed toward the identification of overarching themes that captured the participants' work experiences through the lens of the COR theory. During this first coding cycle, In vivo coding and descriptive coding were utilized. A reflective journal was kept in a separate document as the categories were being developed from the initial codes. According to Saldaña (2021) as researchers progress into the second cycle of coding, they might rearrange and reclassify coded data into different and even new categories. In this study, during the second cycle of coding, the codes were separated into the varying Ways of Knowing to analyze participant experience of resource loss and gain. LeCompte (2000) indicates that categories can be made by grouping codes together in meaningful ways and by noticing frequent codes within the data. These codes were synthesized into categories and conceptualized into themes. These important precautions helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the study itself.

Significance of Study

Each adult in the workforce is functioning at a varying level of cognitive development. According to Drago-Severson (2009) these varying modes of cognitive development influence the way in which adults learn and perceive interactions with others. According to COR theory, these learning experiences and social interactions can cause individuals to gain or lose resources

with resource gain contributing to motivation and resource loss contributing to ongoing stress. This research expands the discussion of adult cognitive development and specifically combined with COR theory, this research may suggest further ways how cognitive development knowledge may influence employees' perceived leader support and may help leaders understand how employees are perceiving their support based on their cognitive development.

Research Limitations

Kahlke (2014) concludes that a descriptive qualitative approach to research does not possess consistent theoretical assumptions so researchers are forced to make choices about what theoretical perspectives will inform their work. Although, descriptive qualitative studies can use established methodologies while maintaining flexibility (Ellis & Hart, 2023). To mitigate this limitation, I aligned my methodology, theoretical perspective, and theoretical framework. I qualified my choice of a descriptive qualitative methodology by citing multiple studies that have been informed by a descriptive qualitative methodology and a constructivist lens (Hølge-Hazelton et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2021).

According to Ellis and Hart (2023), qualitative research is subjective, as humans make meaning of their experiences. To help mitigate this limitation, I kept a journal reflection of thoughts throughout the study to help to keep bias from infiltrating the data interpretation. LeCompte (2000) concludes that understanding ourselves as researchers is crucial to understanding our own bias that may affect the trustworthiness of the data. This journal helped me understand my role as a researcher and will act as a barrier to bias during the analysis of the data.

Delimitations

This study is limited in that it only captured the perspectives of educators in elementary school buildings and did not yield data from the perspectives of employees and employers from other occupations. The teachers in this study were in their first five years of teaching, so this study did not reflect the perspectives of veteran teachers. This study was also full conducted with participants residing in the state of Kansas and lacked a geographically diverse perspective.

Operational Definitions

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory—The assumption that humans try to gain, retain, and protect that which they value and strive to live in a way that will maintain and enhance their resources. Resources do not occur separately but instead tend to aggregate and create and sustain one another (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998)

Instrumental Knowers—Adults who are most interested in following set rules and may have the inability to see situations from another’s perspective (Drago-Severson, 2016)

Psychological Stress—“A reaction to the environment in which there is threat of net loss of resources, actual net loss of resources, or lack of resource gain following the investment of resources” (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000, p. 287)

Resource—Anything perceived by individuals to help them in pursuit of their goals (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000)

Self-Authoring Knowers—Adults who operate based on their own values and often welcome opportunities to express their opinions (Drago-Severson, 2016)

Self-Transforming Knowers—Adults who thrive on collaboration, are committed to self-exploration, and view feedback to enhance their own thinking (Drago-Severson, 2016)

Socializing Knowers—Adults who highly value acceptance from others and often view interpersonal conflict as a threat to the self (Drago-Severson, 2016)

Ways of Knowing—The ways in which adults make meaning of their experiences based on their cognitive development (Drago-Severson et al., 2016)

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. The Ways of Knowing provided a lens to explore teachers as adult learners operating from varying levels of cognitive development. These Ways of Knowing highlighted how cognitive development influences perceptions of work experiences as stress relieving or stress inducing. The COR theory provided a framework for understanding how perceived principal support aids in the prevention of resource loss, maintains existing resources, or helps teachers in gaining resources necessary for engaging in healthy behaviors in the workplace (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). The participants in this study were teachers and principals who are currently employed at a public school in Kansas.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter includes a review of the literature that informs and supports an exploration of adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain. This chapter first introduces the concepts of adult cognitive theory, beginning with William Perry's Nine Schematic Positions, then to Kegan's Constructive Development Theory, and finally to Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing. These adult cognitive development theories provide a lens for exploring how adults' varying cognitive developments influence the way they experience learning and interactions with others. The next section includes background information on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and current studies that have utilized the theory to explore workplace stress. This theory was used as a lens for understanding teachers' experience of workplace stress and principal support and how those experiences influence them to either lose or gain resources in the workplace. The chapter continues with an overview of reasons why teachers are leaving the teaching profession, what kinds of support they report needing from their principals, and what kinds of support principals are currently providing them.

By bringing together scholarship and theories, this chapter establishes the foundation for the study's theoretical approach and highlights the significance of understanding teacher learning through an adult cognitive, constructive lens. The chapter concludes by highlighting the existing gap in the literature and positions this study as a timely contribution and response in a time of high teacher turnover in Kansas.

Cognitive-Development Theory

Cognitive development has been studied for more than 45 years in studies about how individuals learn and develop across the span of their lives (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). While Piaget focused on the cognitive development of children, researchers like William

Perry and Robert Kegan expanded this research into adulthood. These hierarchical, developmental theories focus on the stages in which an individual develops their perspectives on the world and how they transition between these stages. Each cognitive theory has a different number of stages, varying specific descriptions of each stage, but they all focus on how each individual thinks about the world.

Perry's Nine Schematic Positions

Perry built on Piaget's work on child cognitive development by applying it to young adults. His research was largely based around his students at Harvard University (Love & Guthrie, 1999). His theory mentions nine different schematic positions, typically divided into five categories, as an adolescent develops into a young adult. In its full range, the scheme begins with the simplest forms in which a person views the world in right and wrong, good and bad, and ends with a person being able to view a complex world in which that person has contingent knowledge and relative values (Perry, 1970). The positions illustrate individuals' journeys in extending their power to make meaning in succession. Each position in the developmental process presents a challenge to individuals' previous assumptions and requires the redefinition of their roles in an increasingly complex and uncertain world (Perry, 1970).

The structure of the positions represent progressive cross sections to illustrate the development of an individual. In position one, basic dualism, the individual sees only right and wrong as the world is divided into absolutes. In position two, multiplicity prelegitimate, the individual starts seeing that others may have different opinions and beliefs than that of their own. During multiplicity legitimate, the individual begins to accept the concept of uncertainty, but still believes in fundamental truths as uncertainty is temporary. In position four, late multiplicity, individuals are less concerned with truths and more concerned with providing evidence based on

what they, as individuals, think. The last position is relativism where the individual is finally able to engage in metacognition to examine their own thinking (Love & Guthrie, 1999). As individuals move through the positions, their view of themselves and the world around them widens as they develop more cognitive capabilities.

Kegan's Constructive Development Theory

Robert Kegan, also a Harvard graduate, built on Perry's research to come up with his own theory of cognitive development also known as Kegan's Constructive Development Theory (CDT). CDT builds off Piaget and Perry's work on child and young adult cognitive development and extends these ideas into adulthood (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). This theory includes cognitive, social, and emotional development as elements in meaning making formation and growth (Love & Guthrie, 1999). CDT's principles center around constructivism and developmentalism. CDT is a hierarchical, developmental theory in which individuals construct their own realities based on the meaning they make from their experiences and those constructions expand and evolve over time (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016).

CDT involves five orders of consciousness and highlights the relationship between a person's developmental capacity and interaction with other individuals and society (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). The orders describe individuals' journeys from the lowest level of consciousness where the world is a simple place to the highest order where the individuals learn that the world is complex and their role is complex within it. The first order occurs in childhood where the individual is only concerned with their perception of objects in front of them. In the second and third orders, individuals enter adulthood and begin to develop their own point of view and desires and can also understand that others are also constructing their own points of view. Individuals in order four obtain self-authorship and the ability to construct

abstract thoughts and generalizations about the world. Order five is the rarest order and involves individuals realizing that humans are not a single form and are in fact, incomplete (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Kegan's theory focused on how adults interact with the world while engaged in each level of consciousness. Subject-object balance is a core part of CDT and refers to how much adults can see and manage and how much they can't see or have a perspective on (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Subject refers to adults' Ways of Knowing that are embedded in them and that they are unable to control or even see. Object refers to adults' elements of knowing that can be seen, controlled, and reflected upon (Love & Guthrie, 1999). This theory is hierarchical in that adults develop, subjects become objects as they gain greater internal capacities that bring more perspective to the way they view themselves and others (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016).

According to CDT, adults engaged in each order of consciousness have varying mental capacities to handle interactions with others. This can create a misalignment between what is being asked of an adult and that adult's mental capacity to handle it (Love & Guthrie, 1999). To aid in this, Kegan suggests creating a holding environment. Donald Winnicott originally used this term in reference to care and challenges in infant support. Just as Winnicott believed that environments need to be responsive to a child's rapidly changing needs, Kegan believed that environments need to be equally as responsive to an adult's developing needs in relation to support and challenges (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). Adults must be met with support where they are developmentally and gently challenged to grow further.

Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing

Recently, Elenor Drago-Severson applied Kegan's CDT to the population of teachers and school administrators. Based on Kegan's orders of cognitive development, she focuses on the four most common Ways of Knowing in adults and renames the ways as instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). These stages are hierarchal and move from the first Way of Knowing, instrumental, where humans understand their experiences as being right or wrong and move all the way to self-transforming where humans gain the capacity to reflect on complex relationships and on their own views as well. She used this lens to look at how leaders can best support professional learning and adult internal capacity in educational settings (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Teachers are adults who make meaning in different ways and feel supported and challenged by different leadership support. Leaders can understand Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing to meet teachers where they are in their current Way of Knowing and gently challenge them to develop their mental capacities and broaden their perspectives (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). This will create alignment between teachers' mental capabilities and what leaders are asking of them (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). This alignment will allow a leader to best support a teacher's practices as it makes the support more relevant and actionable to the teacher.

Drago-Severson brought Kegan's orders of cognitive development to K-12 education by focusing on the four most common Ways of Knowing in adults which are instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). These Ways of Knowing impact how an adult thinks, hears, and understands information and influences the way adult learners orient themselves as teachers, leaders, and learners (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Teachers and principals are adult learners who have various Ways of

Knowing. Principals are attempting to help teachers with the support they need and to challenge them to grow professionally. Teachers engaged in each Way of Knowing have made meaning of principal support in different ways and may become frustrated when they do not personally feel supported (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a).

Adults who are engaged in the first Way of Knowing, instrumental, operate from a place of self-interest, wanting their needs met and not having the capacity to think in generalizations from one context to another (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Teachers engaged in this Way of Knowing see situations as right or wrong and do not want to get caught not following the rules. Principals can best support these learners by making concrete suggestions and step-by-step guidelines for improving practices. These teachers can become frustrated when principals ask them to make decisions when there is no clear answer (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). To help these teachers grow, principals can encourage them to look beyond the right answers and toward new ways of thinking (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016).

The next Way of Knowing is socializing. The socializing adult learner has gained more perspective than the instrumental learner, but greatly values acceptance and approval from others. They can understand that their desires differ from others, but also feel responsible for others' feelings and hold others responsible for their own (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). Teachers residing in this Way of Knowing seek the approval of their principals and want to feel validated in their feelings. Principals can support these teachers by acknowledging their accomplishments and applauding their efforts to grow. These teachers become frustrated when a principal asks them to share their opinion on a subject without first knowing the principal's views on the topic (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Principals can help these

teachers grow by gently encouraging them to share their own thoughts and feelings without judgement (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a).

The next Way of Knowing is self-authoring. Self-authoring adult learners can see the perspectives of others while developing their own innate sense of what they believe. They are influenced by internal standards and are primarily concerned with their own competence and performance (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). These teachers feel supported when they are engaged in discussions of their own ideals and when their expertise is recognized. Principals can provide support to these teachers by inviting them to make their own decisions and collaborate on initiatives. Self-authoring teachers feel frustrated when principals enforce rules and procedures that they personally disagree with or when their competency comes into question (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). Principals can help these teachers grow by encouraging them to look beyond their own beliefs and to investigate a wider range of theories and ways of teaching (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016).

The final developmental Way of Knowing is self-transforming. The self-transforming adult learner refers to an adult who vies relationships and experiences as complex and is committed to self-exploration and views feedback and conflict to enhance their own thinking (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Teachers like this feel supported when principals collaborate with them on enhancing their practice and exploring new ways of teaching. They may feel frustrated when they are not included in the feedback process or decision making. Principals can help these teachers grow by appreciating a slower rate of change and reminding them that not every teacher is as readily open to growth (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a).

Principals are also adult learners engaged in their own Ways of Knowing. Their Ways of Knowing influence the way they are most comfortable providing support to teachers (Drago-

Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). A principal in the instrumental Way of Knowing believes there are “right” and “wrong” ways to address challenges and does not yet have the internal capacity for abstract thinking (Drago-Severson et al., 2013b). These principals may tell teachers what they have done correctly or incorrectly and provides specific ways to improve teaching practices. A socializing principal seeks colleagues’ acceptance when deciding how to manage challenges and does not yet have the internal capacity to look inside themselves for best path forward (Drago-Severson et al., 2013b). They may be focused on teacher feelings and offer high amounts of praise and recognition of their teachers as a primary form of support.

Self-authoring principals operate based on their own internal values. They evaluate challenges based on their inner judgment and have not yet developed the capacity to reflect on their own value system (Drago-Severson et al., 2013b). They will often have strong beliefs about how to support and improve teacher practices and will make suggestions to teachers based on their own beliefs (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). A self-transforming principal seeks constantly to grow internal systems and may need support managing the slow pace of change (Drago-Severson et al., 2013b). They lead with collaboration and often hold open ended discussions with teachers as a means of support (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016).

Teachers can become frustrated when the support they are receiving from principals does not align with their Way of Knowing. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) found that a mismatch occurs when the match between what is asked of teachers and what the teachers are internally capable of does not align. To create alignment, leaders can provide an environment where the teachers feel welcome and acknowledged in their current Way of Knowing while the leaders are also guiding the teachers on their paths to developing new Ways of Knowing. A misalignment will occur if a leader expects a teacher to immediately view the world in a new

way or by asking more of the teacher than the teacher is mentally capable of handling (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Leaders can also fail to support teachers if they neglect to gently challenge teachers to expand their Ways of Knowing. Using Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing, leaders can build a bridge between a teacher's current perspective and a broader perspective and way of viewing the world (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing are important to understand when conceptualizing how teachers learn from leaders as it highlights the value of creating leaders that acknowledge teachers' current ways of meaning making while at the same time promoting the development of the next higher order of knowing (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). Leaders need to shape their buildings as holding environments to best support teachers and help them grow. This helps leaders remember that teachers are adults with different preferences and needs in relation to leadership support. Through the lens of the Ways of Knowing, leaders can gain a deeper understanding of teacher attitudes and behaviors as well as understand how to support growth for teachers with different Ways of Knowing (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a).

Drago-Severson has written numerous books and conducted many research studies on the application of her Ways of Knowing to teachers and school leaders. She has applied it to professional development and feedback for teachers. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) explore how leaders can provide feedback to teachers in meaningful, growth-oriented ways. Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) emphasize tailoring feedback to individuals' Ways of Knowing and offers practical strategies for supporting adult learning among educators in schools. Drago-Severson et al (2013a) explores how leaders can support professional growth at individual, team, and organizational levels. These publications highlight how leaders can think

about how adults in their building are learning to be able to provide the support they need to learn and grow as teachers.

Ways of Knowing have also been utilized to explore educational leaders' and teachers' internal capacities in multiple studies. Drago-Severson et al. (2023) asked 131 educational leaders about how they make sense of the challenges they face in helping teachers manage change. The study highlighted the internal capacities that leaders need to manage the complex aspects of leadership. Looking at the leaders through their Ways of Knowing linked their internal capacities to how they supported teachers and reflected on their practices and highlighted the need for principals to learn more about adult developmental theory to create systems to support teachers' different Ways of Knowing (Drago-Severson et al., 2023). In alignment with this study, Drago-Severson et al. (2013d) explored how a university course on leadership for adult development influenced leaders' thinking and practices after completing the course. The study found that the course informed leadership practice in meaningful ways including the leaders initiating activities aimed at supporting adult growth through teaming and mentoring. The study offered insight into how shifting from providing managerial training to leaders to providing courses on adult development may help leaders build school structures that support the diverse needs of their teachers (Drago-Severson et al., 2013d).

Another study examined how school leaders' cognitive development underlie their priorities and leadership practices (Drago-Severson, 2002). Data from the interviews showed that while almost all principals discussed the importance of building a positive school climate, they had different ways of working to create that positive climate for teachers. The findings highlighted the value of leaders being able to reflect on how their developmental principles may affect their priorities and the ways they support the teachers in their buildings (Drago-Severson,

2002). More specifically, a study highlighted how principals' Ways of Knowing influenced the way they supported and led their teachers. A 2020 study by Drago-Severson et al. interviewed principals to explore how their Ways of Knowing influenced how they helped teachers grow. The study found that principals who were engaged in the socializing Way of Knowing were hesitant to confront teachers about their growth even when they viewed it as necessary because of the empathy they felt for the teachers. These principals found it necessary to build trust with the teachers before asking them to change and grow (Drago-Severson et al., 2020). Self-authoring principals were better able to see the bigger picture of how personal visions did or did not align with the institutional values and were also able to take full responsibility for the way they handled challenging teachers in their buildings (Drago-Severson et al., 2020).

Another study explored how educational leaders' Ways of Knowing influence the way they support social justice and change in their institutions (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). The study found that principals' different Ways of Knowing did influence their thinking about leading their teachers through social change. Principals in the instrumental Way of Knowing were effective in finding resources for teachers but were not as successful in learning about others' ideas and experiences. Socializing principals valued others' diverse backgrounds, but often sought affirmation and validation in the progress they were making with the initiative. Self-authoring principals took strong stands on behalf of the initiative but often did not include their teachers in their vision. Self-transforming principals were able to see the interconnected pieces of implementing change but could benefit from self-reflection and acknowledgment that social justice is an ongoing process (Drag-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019).

According to Drago-Severson (2009), Ways of Knowing are developmental levels that greatly influence how humans make sense of their experiences and interactions with others. As

an adult progresses from the instrumental Way of Knowing to the socializing Way of Knowing, they develop perspective and can handle more complex relationships and learning opportunities. The same is true for adults who develop from the self-authoring Way of Knowing to the self-transforming Way of Knowing. As adults move through these developmental Ways of Knowing, they become more equipped to handle interactions with others in a more complex world. This concept applies to education because Ways of Knowing shape how teachers think about what makes an effective principal and how principals view their responsibilities as leaders. This developmental perspective provided a lens to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' attitudes and behaviors and can offer insight into how best to support each individual learner (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Noted Psychologist Stevan Hobfoll, an expert on stress regarding health and organizations, created Conservation of Resource (COR) theory as a new way to conceptualize stress (Hobfoll, 2025). Since then, COR theory has been officially adopted as a basis for the U.S. Marine Corp's stress manual for their understanding of stress and resilience in the U.S. Armed Forces (Hobfoll, 2025). Hobfoll has led workshops on stress and resilience in the wake of mass shootings and other traumatic events. After the 2009 terrorist attack on Fort Hood, Dr. Hobfoll was hired by the Army as a consultant for recovery and resiliency in the surrounding community (Hobfoll, 2025). Since the conception of the COR theory, researchers have applied the theory to occupational stress, burnout, and resilience (Bettini et al., 2020; Brown & Roloff, 2011; Ntim et al., 2023).

COR theory begins with the assumption that humans try to gain, retain, and protect that which they value (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998). This theory functions under two main assumptions.

One assumption is that resource loss is more powerful than resource gain. The other is that resources must be invested to gain resources or prevent their loss (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Resources do not occur separately but instead tend to aggregate and create and sustain one another (Chen et al., 2015). Environmental conditions heavily influence resource losses and gains. These conditions can support and enrich the resources of an individual, helping the individual protect and gain resources. Conversely, environmental conditions may obstruct or impoverish an individual's resource reservoir (Chen et al., 2015). In alignment with COR theory, if environmental conditions are rich, and the individual already has a strong resource reservoir, the individual will experience a resource gain spiral. Initial resource gain begets future gain, thus generating gain spirals (Chen et al., 2015).

Resources are anything perceived by the individual to help them in pursuit of their goals and typically fall into four categories: object, conditions, personal, or energy (McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Object resources are tangible items that a worker uses to facilitate work activity. A condition resource is a condition of life that humans seek such as social support or status in their organization. Personal characteristics are resources that individuals possess internally and that generally aid in stress resistance (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Examples of personal characteristic resources could be optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy that help motivate a worker. The last category, energies, aid in the acquisition of other resources. These are various resources that may be expended in service to work completion, like time or money (McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Each individual values specific things, but these categories represent what the theory deems as shared resources that tend to hold wide acceptance as being important to people (Hobfoll, 1998).

COR theory looks at stress and resilience through the lens of loss and gain spirals, making it an effective theory for understanding the process of developing stress as well as gaining coping strategies (Hobfoll, 1998). Because this theory involves both the loss and gain of resources, it can help to explain the effects of stress and the healthy impacts of coping effectively. It can interpret and predict both positive and negative impacts of resource loss, as well as the resilience process (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Due to the versatile lens of the theory, it has been used to study work-related stress, resilience, and burnout (Chen et al., 2015). The architecture of the COR theory provides an understanding of how work-related environmental resources interact with an individual's resources to affect work-related stress and resilience.

COR theory bridges cognitive and environmental viewpoints. Unlike transactional models, COR theory emphasizes the environment in the coping process foremost and person-centered variables secondarily (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). This makes it an important theory in understanding occupational stress. In alignment with COR theory, the factors of stress are the resources available to the individual and group and the fit of those resources to situational demands (Chen et al., 2015). The more resources a work environment has available to the individual and the group, the less stress will be developed by the worker. Furthermore, the resources must fit the situational demands of the specific workplace. Resources that do not align with the work environment will not aid in reducing employee stress (Chen et al., 2015). While interacting with a work environment that lacks resources, individuals must invest time and energy to acquire individual resources and to acquire the reservoirs needed for buffering future resource loss (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). The more individual resource energy used, the more work-related stress is likely to occur.

This section will depict how the COR theory has been applied to both quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitatively, resource loss and gain has been studied regarding occupational stress in employees including teachers as well as leadership support that attempts to replenish and build resources in employees, including teachers. Qualitative studies of employee and leader resource loss and gain have been primarily applied to the medical profession. These qualitative studies highlight specific resources that employees feel are most essential for success in the workplace as well as what resources leaders feel are most important for employee success. The COR theory has yet to be applied to a qualitative study of resource loss and gain from the perspective of teachers and principals. This study aimed to explore the perception of specific resource loss and gain perceptions from the perspectives of both teachers and principals to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers are perceiving their resource loss and gain in relation to principal support.

COR theory and Occupational Stress

According to COR theory, the work environment provides the foundation for individual resource gain or loss, leading the individual on either a path to stress and burnout or a path to coping and resilience (McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Researchers have studied occupational stress through the lens of the COR theory (Junça Silva & Lopes, 2023; Shih et al., 2023). A study of hospital nurses explored occupational stress regarding abusive supervision and psychological well-being of employees (Shih et al., 2023). Abusive supervision can include hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors perceived by the employees. The study found that occupational stress was negatively associated with the psychological well-being of the nurses and that abusive supervision was positively associated with occupational stress (Shih et al., 2023). In line with

COR theory, this type of supervision was causing the nurses' internal resources to deplete which caused occupational stress and decreased their psychological well-being.

Junça Silva and Lopes (2023) explored work engagement as an employee resource regarding how it affected occupational stress. The study found that work engagement decreased perceived occupational stress in employees (Junça Silva & Lopes, 2023). Under the COR theory, work engagement is a valuable resource that is not predetermined, but rather organizationally scripted. Organizational leaders play a key role in whether employees choose to invest or not invest in a given resource such as work engagement. If an organization emphasizes that being engaged will lead to increased success and reduced stress levels, employees may regard their work engagement as a more valuable means and try to maintain and develop that resource more fully, leading to reduced occupational stress and increased employee performance (Junça Silva & Lopes, 2023).

A study by Bettini et al. (2020), analyzed a national survey using the COR theory to conceptualize how working conditions interact with one another to predict intent to stay in one's work environment. The research showed that when demands and resources are balanced, employees feel able to manage responsibilities. These employees also felt a higher level of motivation in their job, making them more likely to stay in their current position (Bettini et al., 2020). Some of these resources could be internal such as knowledge and skills and may support employees in managing job demands. Conversely, high demands and low resources were found to reduce motivation, increasing intention to leave (Bettini et al., 2020). The COR theory highlighted the trajectory from intention to stay in the profession to intention to leave the profession.

Occupational stress is often psychological. Psychological stress is a precursor to resource loss spirals that can lead to burnout (Hsieh et al., 2021). Psychological stress is defined as “a reaction to the environment in which there is threat of net loss of resources, actual net loss of resources, or lack of resource gain following the investment of resources” (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000, p. 287). In COR theory, in response to such stress, individuals preserve their current resources and at the same time, pursue new ones. These resources can include anything individuals find personally valuable in their work environment. Whether successful or not, their attempts would be resource-depleting and emotionally taxing (Hsieh et al., 2021). According to McGeary and McGeary (2012), if demands exceed resources, individuals are likely to experience negative consequences leading to emotional exhaustion, the key component of burnout.

According to COR theory, burnout is viewed as the psychosocial strain that results from depletion of personal coping resources in the workplace (McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Once employees are emotionally exhausted, they are less likely to reinvest their remaining resources. Instead, they become defensive to protect the small number of resources that they have left. This can have consequences in the work environment. Employee quality of work may decline as the individual may become focused only on engaging in the most necessary of tasks in hopes of resource protection (McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Burnout is even more likely to occur when the individual or the work-environment are not rich in resources. According to Hobfoll and Shirom (2000), loss spirals are a force that is evident in environments already lacking resources. Conversely, those working in an environment with ample resources will have more opportunity for resource gain.

These studies of occupational stress reveal that when employees’ resources are depleted, stress increases, which can lead to burnout, but they do not reveal which specific resources are

most valuable for employees to protect them from occupational stress. This qualitative study explored the specific resources teachers deemed valuable and how support may increase their resources and protect them from future resource loss.

COR theory and Leader Support

Researchers have recently studied leadership and resource loss and gain through the lens of the COR theory (Fatima et al., 2018; Geibel et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022a; Wang et al., 2022b; Yao, et al., 2021). One study found that leaders who promote mental and physical health provide employees with resource gains that help them improve their well-being at work (Yao, et al., 2021). These types of leaders also help to lower employee health complaints. According to Westman et al. (2004), employees' resources are harnessed with the intention of building further resources, so organizational leaders believe that providing resources to their employees will benefit their employees and the future success of their companies. Based on COR theory, providing resources to employees not only increases employee resource pools but can also interrupt resource loss and create a gain cycle (Westman et al., 2004). In alignment with the COR theory, Yao et al. (2021) found the employees who received health resources improved their patterns of behavior regarding their health, triggering a gain spiral that ultimately created healthier employees and a healthier organization.

Researchers have also studied participative and transformational leadership through the lens of the COR theory (Geibel et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022b). A participative leader involves employees in decision-making to enhance employees' sense of ownership in personal and organizational goals. Wang et al. (2022b) found that participative leadership empowers employees by increasing their psychological resources, triggering a resource gain. Similarly, transformational leaders motivate their subordinates by being stimulating, encouraging, and

supportive. Geibel et al. (2022) examined 267 leaders to explore the link between transformational leadership behavior and team performance. They found that this investment in employee resources created a significant positive effect between transformational leadership behavior and work engagement and overall team performance. Leaders who ask for employee opinions, encourage active participation in decision making, and support employee needs create a catalytic effect creating significant improvement in employee and overall organizational performance (Geibel et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022b).

Another type of leadership studied through the COR theory is servant leadership. According to Wang et al (2022a), servant leaders prioritize employee needs and provide their employees with job resources such as opportunities to develop skills, activate their individual talents, and empower their creativity. A study of 52 full-time employees explored the effects of servant leadership on employee well-being and found that this leadership style greatly affected employee behavior (Wang et al., 2022a). Creativity was enhanced in employees when servant leaders took the time to invest in the encouragement of the employees. Conversely, when the employees felt a lack of resources, that led to pressure and burnout as they were avoiding investing their limited resources into creativity (Wang et al., 2022a).

Just as positive leadership behaviors can affect resource gain in employees, negative leadership behaviors can cause resource loss in employees. Fatima et al. (2018) studied 321 employees working in service sector organizations to explore the effect of aversive leaders on employee resources through the lens of the COR theory. An aversive leader is an individual who abuses leadership power using strategies such as intimidation, reprimanding, and threats when interacting with employees (Fatima et al., 2018). The study found that aversive leadership leads to work alienation and decreased job performance. In alignment with COR theory, aversive

leadership causes resource loss in employees which causes employees to withdraw to work alienation to try to gain those resources back. This work alienation causes employees to feel powerlessness which further reduces job performance (Fatima et al., 2018).

COR Theory Research in School Settings

There are several research studies concerning teachers that have used COR Theory. Studies have been conducted to see how loss of teacher resources affects stress and burnout levels and how that affects the likelihood that they will leave their jobs. Other studies have focused on how perceived principal support affects teacher resource loss and gain in the areas of principal behavior and leadership styles.

Research with Teachers

Increased occupational stress in teachers often leads to teacher burnout (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). In COR theory, burnout occurs when there is an actual or perceived loss of resources, including energy to be used to maintain current and obtain new resources. A study of online teachers in China found that for teachers, extra workload due to this new way of delivering information was energy draining. The demand and resource correlation showed strong relationships with emotional exhaustion (Hsieh, et al., 2021). When these teachers did not have support or relief, their persistent efforts were predicted to eventually lead to burnout. Their resource depletion was predicted to lead them down the COR theory loss spiral unless they could gain the resources they needed to lead them back up the spiral, alleviating the effects of burnout.

A recent study of preschool teachers examined teacher burnout through the lens of the COR theory (Ntim et al., 2023). The study explored the influence of emotional labor on burnout by employing the COR theory to examine how preschool teachers' emotional labor in meeting educational goals can lead to burnout. Teachers invest resources such as time and effort to

perform emotional labor to meet preschools' expectations. For example, teachers invest these resources to inhabit negative and nurture positive emotions to obtain a quality level of classroom management (Ntim et al., 2023). These teachers are investing these resources in hopes of obtaining a repertoire of social, cognitive, and corporate benefits such as closer bonds with students and promotions from superiors. But if these benefits are not obtained or the emotional labor becomes too strenuous, burnout is likely. The study found that when employees have less resources in the face of high demands, they experience stress which can trigger a COR theory loss spiral (Ntim et al., 2023).

A study of high school teachers in the United States sought to examine the relationships between the three emotional labor strategies, teacher burnout, and turnover intention among physical education teachers using the COR theory (Lee, 2019). Mediation analysis showed that teacher burnout fully mediated the trajectory from emotional labor strategies to turnover intention (Lee, 2019). Emotional labor coping strategies are resources that teachers may have to prevent them from developing burnout. When emotional labor became stronger than the teachers' emotional labor resources, burnout was likely to develop which, in time, could lead to turnover intention as teacher burnout was positively associated with turnover intention (Lee, 2019).

A 2011 study in the U.S. examined burnout through the lens of COR theory (Brown & Roloff, 2011). The research used COR theory to analyze the relationship of extra role time (ERT) and burnout in teachers. The COR theory states that the generation of new resources can replenish individuals' resource reservoirs and offset the conditions that produce resource losses and the psychological distress that can follow (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Conversely, unsuccessful replenishment can result in negative emotional outcomes and diminishment of the invested

resources. The study found that when teachers participate in ERT (working outside the hours of the job), this infringes on the time necessary to invest in and replenish other valued resources. This can lead to negative consequences to their psychological well-being and ultimately lead to burnout as burnout is thought to follow from a stress condition of COR theory, lack of resource gain (Brown & Roloff, 2011). Teachers' time and energy depletion from lost opportunities to gain resources outside of work leads to a loss spiral, which in turn, can lead to teacher burnout and intention to leave.

These COR theory studies of teacher occupational stress found that teachers perceive stress when they do not have the resources to aid in coping with high workloads and emotional exhaustion, but do not explore the specific resources needed to cope with those work conditions that can be provided through principal support. This study, through the lens of the COR theory, explored the specific resources that teachers value most in protecting them from occupational stress and how principals perceived teacher resource loss and replenishment.

Research with Principals

Researchers have studied principal leadership styles and behavior through the COR theory to explore their effects of teacher and organizational resource loss and gain (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025; Liu et al., 2021; Hsieh et al., 2024). COR theory suggests that reactive coping in stressful situations will not trigger resource gain, but investing in resources will help an individual gain more resources in the future (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). This implies the importance of principals proactively investing resources in teachers so that they may become less vulnerable to resource loss in the future, creative stress prevention (Westman et al., 2004). When principals provide resources to teachers through organizational trust, distributed leadership, or professional development opportunities, teachers use those resources to gain even more

resources, helping to prevent future resource loss during their time working in the organization (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025; Hsieh et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021).

Studies show that emotionally intelligent, mindful principals can increase resources in teachers that affect the overall success of an educational organization. Hsieh et al. (2024) studied 521 elementary school teachers to explore how a principal's emotional intelligence affected teacher organizational trust and organizational behavior through the lens of the COR theory. The study found that emotionally intelligent principals increased teacher organizational trust and as a secondary resource gain, organizational behavior improved (Hsieh et al., 2024). When teachers perceive high emotional intelligence and social competencies in their principals, it enables them to build positive relationships and realize their full potential in the workplace, contributing to the overall well-being of the school community. Another study explored the influence of leader mindfulness on emotional exhaustion of university teachers (Liu et al., 2021). Mindful leaders are open, accepting, and present for their employees. In alignment with COR theory, mindfulness is considered an initial psychological resource that can help an individual gain future resources more effectively. The study found that leader mindfulness significantly reduced emotional exhaustion in university teachers (Liu et al., 2021). When teachers gain resources from principals, they feel a deeper commitment and fulfillment in their jobs which benefits the schools as well (Hsieh et al., 2024).

Principal management style and behavior that allow teachers to have more power in collaboration and decision making have been shown to increase teacher resources and increase job engagement and satisfaction (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025). A study investigated how principals that utilized distributed leadership impacted teacher job satisfaction (Fan & Chu, 2025). Distributive leadership is exemplified when principals delegate authority and decision

making power to classroom teachers using a stable, hierarchical framework. COR theory highlights the collaborative nature of distributive leadership through its emphasis on strategic resource distribution. The study found that distributed leadership has a positive effect on job satisfaction in teachers (Fan & Chu, 2025). Another study explored how principals that utilized job resource crossover within the professional learning community affected work engagement in primary and secondary classroom teachers (Cai et al., 2022). The study found that the professional learning community offers valuable resources for teacher work engagement. Just as distributive leadership uses delegation to enhance teacher resources, leaders that emphasize professional learning communities encourage collaborative practices that increase teacher resources such as self-efficacy (Cai et al., 2022). These studies indicate the importance of principals emphasizing collaboration and delegation to help teachers gain resources that will ultimately lead to high work satisfaction (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025).

COR theory and Qualitative Studies of Employee Resources

Although researchers have not yet applied the COR theory to qualitative studies in public education, they have used it to analyze specific resource loss and gain qualitatively, in the medical field. The COR theory states that individuals with fewer resources are more likely to experience a further resource loss (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). However, the question arises as to which specific resources are needed to compensate for previous loss and to rebuild resources (Eder & Meyer, 2022). A study of nursing home employees in Germany aimed to understand how and why resources are lost and what it takes to rebuild them. The nursing home employees in the study participated in eight workshops conducted in the nursing homes. The results showed that the construct of self-endangering behaviors (a diminished ability to say no when asked to fill in or work overtime) was a strong predictor in the context of the emergence of burnout (Eder &

Meyer, 2022). In the second step of the study, nursing home leaders were interviewed to gain their perspective on employee resource loss. They found that the leaders perceived the nurses who filled in for each other as having a stronger bond and a happier work experience (Eder & Meyer, 2022). The study showed that filling in for colleagues is one of the greatest challenges that employees in high need, low resource facilities face and that leaders may perceive this act differently than the employees (Eder & Meyer, 2022). Applying this design to public education regarding teachers and principals highlighted the differing perceptions of resource loss and gain and brought new insights to light in the field of education.

Another study explored the specific resources that were essential for nurses working in hospitals during the pandemic. Through interviews of the nurses, the researchers found that the most important personal resources for the nurses were hope and the belief that they were useful to their patients (Yildirim & Bulut, 2022). Working on a well-functioning team and social support were resources that the nurses felt helped them gain resources in the workplace (Yildirim & Bulut, 2022). In alignment with the COR theory, when the nurses felt perceived threats to these resources, stress developed. According to Yildirim and Bulut (2022), it is very useful for hospital managers to know which resources the nurses have and which may be under threat so that they can make necessary adjustments to help their employees gain resources in the workplace. Applying this framework to public education aimed to help principals understand which teacher resources may be under threat so that they can help their teachers regain those resources through support.

Turnover rates in medical professionals have also been studied through the lens of the COR theory. Naseer et al. (2024) interviewed doctors, nurses, and paramedics to explore how resource loss contributed to a desire to resign. The study found that perceived lack of

recognition, devaluation of professional expertise, and exclusion from decision making depleted individual resources and contributed to decisions to leave the workplace (Naseer et al., 2024). The participants also spoke of a power distance which is a cultural dimension that shapes how employees handle unjust work conditions (Naseer et al., 2024). Because of this power distance, when the employees were feeling disrespected, they hesitated to advocate for themselves for fear of social stigma or loss of future career opportunities. In alignment with the COR theory, because these employees consider their work to be resource depleting, when their work goes unnoticed or disrespected by authority, their resources cannot replenish and will become even more depleted, causing them to withdraw from their work or even resign. Like medical professionals, teachers are helping professionals where personal resources deplete more quickly than other professions (Fontes, 2020) and this study aimed to understand how teachers perceived their own resource depletion and how their principals could best help them gain resources back by supporting them in the workplace.

Researchers have also studied medical residency qualitatively, through the lens of the COR theory. A study in Southern California used qualitative methodology to explore emergency medicine trainees' perceptions of resource loss during their residency years (Jain et al., 2021). The study found that residents described emotional fragility and neglect of self, leading to a calloused view of patient suffering in their daily work (Jain et al., 2021). This resource loss contributed to the breakdown of the resident-patient relationship which led to an increase in stress and burnout. The study found that clear expectations from leaders and the providing of early burnout prevention interventions from leaders may help residents gain resources during their residency years so that they may share those resources with their patients (Jain et al., 2021). Like medical residents, teachers give of themselves to their students (Fontes, 2020) which can

often lead to a breakdown of teacher-student relationships and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020).

Like medical professionals, teachers work in high stress environments. (Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020). If principals do not efficiently and specifically support teachers, they may develop burnout and have an increased motivation to leave (Fontes, 2020). Principles can do this by understanding what kinds of support to use with their teachers based on what Way of Knowing the teachers are currently engaged in (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). This unique approach brought together these perceptions so that new insights could be made about how teachers are perceiving principal support, how principals see themselves supporting teachers, and how this aligned or misaligned support leads to resource gain or loss in teachers.

Teacher's Motivation to Leave

Employees in the teaching profession experience stress in their work environments as members of the caring profession (Fontes, 2020; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). When teachers do not feel supported in the workplace by their principals, they may feel motivated to leave their school (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Keogh & Roan, 2016; Richards et al., 2018). The following section will explore the factors that contribute to a teachers' motivation to leave their jobs.

Teacher Attrition and Turnover

Research has indicated that teacher attrition rates are high and can lead to turnover rates that can create staffing problems in schools. Specifically, certain teachers are leaving at higher rates than others. According to Ingersoll et al. (2014), newer teachers are consistently more likely to leave the profession than veteran teachers, specifically teachers who have completed their first year of teaching. The data also shows that high-poverty, urban, and rural public schools

have higher turnover rates than low-poverty, suburban schools (Ingersoll, 2014). The teaching profession has been found to have higher attrition rates than professions in law, architecture, and even nursing (Ingersoll et al., 2018). High teacher attrition and turnover rates can have negative effects on school organizations. According to Ingersoll et al. (2018), the large number of teachers entering the workplace and the large number choosing to leave the profession early creates instability in the teaching profession. The loss of new teachers, specifically, negatively affects the educational community as these teachers never had the chance to fully develop their skills.

Teachers are leaving their jobs for reasons other than retirement (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Ingersoll, 2001; Keogh & Roan, 2016; Richards et al., 2018) and retirement had a relatively minor impact on turnover compared to the reasons like job dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2001). Some factors that teachers have cited in their dissatisfaction regard compensation, teacher input and influence, and specifically among newer teachers, administrative support. Other factors have been cited, but not as significantly as the former conditions are large class sizes, lack of planning time, and lack of community support (Ingersoll, 2001). In a study by Ingersoll et al. (2018), it was found that teachers most frequently cited dissatisfaction with work conditions like classroom resources, student misbehavior, input on decision making, and school leadership as their top reasons for leaving the profession.

Lack of Principal Support

Researchers have studied teacher occupational stress, qualitatively, in several studies (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Keogh & Roan, 2016; Richards et al., 2018) with lack of principal support emerging as a theme that contributes to stress in teachers. One qualitative study aimed to understand how teachers experienced their school culture by interviewing 28 teachers from the US Midwest (Richards et al., 2018). The study found that the person who had the most impact on

school culture was the principal (Richards et al., 2018). The teachers felt devalued by their principals and that their perceived importance in the educational process was low. Another study that explored the factors that influenced teachers leaving the profession through semi-structured interviews found that principal behavior played a major part in the teachers deciding to retire early from teaching (Keogh & Roan, 2016). Teachers described their relationship with their principals as highly negative (Keogh & Roan, 2016). Principals who micromanaged teachers also caused teachers to experience a higher level of burnout (Richards et al., 2018). Larger amounts of administrators in one building also increased teacher stress. Arvidsson et al. (2019) found that the increasing number of administrators had a negative impact on the work they were doing. Principals who made teachers feel alienated and ignored, increased stress among teachers. Keogh and Roan (2016) found that teachers experiencing high levels of stress described their principals as never leaving their office and only interested in a top-down approach to leadership.

A lack of autonomy from principals can lead to frustration in the workplace (Chang et al., 2022; Franco et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to Fradkin-Hayslip (2021), the educational system is deeply rooted in a top-down model and is therefore a space where low levels of autonomy are available to teachers. This can leave teachers feeling tension, frustration, and anxiety as they feel the constraints of their decision-making and control (Franco et al., 2022). Autonomy-thwarting practices such as pressuring teachers to act in particular ways have been positively associated with emotional exhaustion. (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Chang et al. (2022) found that a lack of teacher autonomy increased teacher stress and threatened overall teacher well-being.

Lack of Time

Lack of time is also an emerging theme from qualitative research on teacher occupational stress and motivation to leave (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Keogh & Roan, 2016; Richards et al., 2018). A study found that heavy workload with limited time to complete it was one of the most relevant factors contributing to teacher stress (Arvidsson et al., 2019). According to Richards et al. (2018), role overload occurs when the responsibilities of a job exceed the time individuals have available to them. This creates conflict when individuals are unsuccessful in managing expectations in their work roles. Richards et al. (2018) found that teachers described their experience of not having enough time to complete their duties. This caused them to have to complete work outside of work hours which at times led to a lack of sleep. Arvidsson et al. (2019) found that learning new technology systems and new systems of grading add to their already heavy workload. Participants in Keogh and Roan's (2016) study believed their workloads brought on their depression. They had difficulty managing the priorities from their heavy workloads and this played a major part in their decisions to retire early from the teaching profession.

Burnout

Several studies support the notion that burnout results from stressful working conditions (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2020), the development of teacher burnout may start with chronic job demands or stressors, which in turn may deplete energy and lead to burnout. As emotional energy depletes, teachers feel they are no longer able to give of themselves at their jobs (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Teacher burnout has been shown to have significant negative

implications for teachers' well-being in terms of their self-rated mental health and motivation to leave (Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020).

Teacher burnout has been shown to influence students which may, in turn, affect motivation, test scores, or result in the students becoming burnt out, themselves. Madigan and Kim (2021) found that students being taught by a teacher suffering from burnout tend to perform worse on exams than those taught by teachers not experiencing burnout. This could be attributed in part to burnt out teachers' effect on student motivation. Emotional exhaustion and cynicism will also result in teachers being more critical and providing lower levels of encouragement in response to student success. In turn, students may feel less competent and be less likely to internalize intrinsic motives for studying, collectively reducing the capacity and depth of their learning (Madigan & Kim, 2021). According to Shen et al. (2015), teacher burnout is negatively associated with students' autonomous motivation. In addition, teachers with low levels of emotional exhaustion facilitated students' feelings of autonomy. Shen et al. (2015) also found that a burnout contagion can occur where teacher burnout is associated with physiological markers of stress in the students they teach. Thus, if being around teachers who are experiencing burnout can affect students' psychophysiological stress responses, it is possible that, over time, students will themselves become stressed and burned out (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Teachers who experience high amounts of stress have been related to high absenteeism, retirement, and turnover rates (Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020). Skaalvik and Skaalvic (2020) found that emotional exhaustion and self-perceived accomplishment were strongly associated with teacher well-being and motivation to quit. When many teachers are motivated to quit, there are implications for the educational community. Teacher shortages themselves may trigger a cycle wherein the shortage aggravates other teachers' stress levels (Rajendran et al., 2020). Teachers'

perceptions of their work demands increase their emotional exhaustion and intent to leave the profession (Rajendran et al., 2020).

Studies have found that teachers perceive lack of principal support and time to complete tasks as factors that increase their stress levels which can lead to burnout and motivation to leave their teaching positions (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Keogh & Roan, 2016; Richards et al., 2018).

Researchers have yet to explore how teachers perceive principal support based on their current Way of Knowing (Drago-Severson et al., 2016) and the role that perceived teacher stress plays in resource depletion and difficulty in gaining future resources.

Principal Support

Studies have found that principal support has an impact on satisfying teacher needs (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025; Hsieh et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2021). Principals are attempting to meet the needs of their teachers by creating nurturing, positive environments as well as providing professional development opportunities (Beames et al., 2023; Richards et al., 2018). This section will explore studies of principal support from the perspectives of teachers, principals, and district administrators.

Professional Development

Professional development to increase teacher competence is a way principals are attempting to meet teacher needs. Program types that have typically been delivered to teachers have included psychological approaches such as mindfulness, acceptance-based skills, behavioral stress management skills (Beames et al., 2023). Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) is a program that is aimed at helping teachers develop these strategies. CARE combines mindful awareness and compassion practices with emotion skills training to build teachers' wellbeing (Jennings & Min, 2023). The program was found to significantly

improve teachers' emotion regulation and mindfulness and reduce psychological distress and time urgency, some of which continued to improve months later. Prosocial and Active Learning Program (PAL) is another intervention strategy that has been implemented in schools. This program aims to increase teacher self-efficacy and decrease stress. Research shows that PAL has a positive impact on teacher self-efficacy as the teachers made statistically significant gains in the areas of classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement (Foster, 2023).

Nurturing Environment

Teachers perceive nurturing, community driven environments as factors that increase their well-being in the workplace (Richards et al., 2018). Teachers described this positive, nurturing environment as being created by principals. Teachers who experience high levels of stress describe their environments as constraining, but teachers experiencing low levels of stress describe their environments as nurturing and positive (Richards et al., 2018). According to Richards et al. (2018) teachers explained that when a principal listened to them and took their feedback, they felt supported and nurtured. Principals spreading a clear, common philosophy throughout the building also helped to create a community driven environment. This also helped to create positive relationships with colleagues so that teachers felt supported and trusted by all individuals in the building (Richards et al., 2018).

Researchers have studied how transformational leadership can contribute to a nurturing environment (Tikkanen et al., 2022; Tsang et al., 2022). Transformational leadership consists of inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Tsang et al., 2022). Based on research by Tikkanen et al. (2022), differences in teacher job satisfaction between schools are likely to occur due to differences in the quality of the principals in those schools.

A study of primary and secondary teachers aimed to explore the relationships between teacher burnout and psychological empowerment (Tsang et al., 2022). Principals that lead in an authoritative way may be a hindrance because it tends to force teachers to submit themselves to it and do their work without an understanding of or control over the purposes that it defines (Tsang et al., 2022). The research showed that teacher burnout, transformational leadership, and psychological empowerment were significantly correlated with one another. According to Tsang et al. (2022), allowing teachers to have more control over their work environment may not only alleviate teacher stress by structurally empowering teachers but also enhance teachers' cognitive state of mind about their capability to influence their work and social environment. Because increased job demands have been linked to teacher stress, increasing teachers' control over those demands through autonomy may decrease teacher stress (Tikkanen et al., 2022). Collie (2021) conducted a study on 325 teachers to examine factors that may decrease stress. The research revealed that autonomy-supportive leadership was associated with lower levels of stress and emotional exhaustion (Collie, 2021). Transformational leadership alleviated teacher stress by enhancing teachers' sense of work, meaningfulness, self-determination, and competence (Tsang et al., 2022).

Principal and Administrator Perceptions of Support

Principal leadership styles and behaviors have been studied from the perspective of both principals and district administrators (Lambert et al., 2023; Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2022). One study explored principalship as a profession by interviewing elementary school principals. They found that principals felt that sharing decision making with teachers was an important leadership quality to possess as a principal (Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2022). The participants also discussed frustrations they felt as principals. They felt that within their own buildings, they had

high levels of autonomy to act as they saw fit, but they felt they had little control over decision-making at the district level stating that their input was not valued by the district authorities (Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2022).

A mixed methods study explored the association between the quality of principals and the occupational health of teachers. The quantitative portion of the study found that teachers working in schools with higher rated quality principals reported higher occupational health and therefore the quality of a principal does affect teacher job satisfaction and health (Lambert et al., 2023). The qualitative portion of the study explored positive and negative principal leadership qualities and behavior from the perspective of district administrators. The district administrators described a high-quality principal as a no-nonsense individual and even though they may not be liked by all, they hold teachers accountable while they described a low quality principal as someone who is new to the role and someone who needs much assistance from district leaders (Lambert et al., 2023). The study found that the quality of principals may play an important role in the health of teachers and the success of a school building (Lambert et al., 2023).

By studying this topic through the lens of Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing, from both teacher and principal perspectives, new insights emerged regarding specific types of support that are the most helpful for certain teachers and how principals can support each teacher as an adult learner, in their current Way of Knowing.

Summary

According to Drago-Severson et al. (2013a), teachers are adult learners with specific support needs based on their Ways of Knowing. When a principal's support aligns with a teacher's Way of Knowing, satisfaction occurs. When a principal's support misaligns with a teacher's Way of Knowing, frustration occurs (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). Teachers are

leaving their schools due to a perceived lack of principal support as well as heavy workload and burnout (Pakarine & Saloviita, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Principals are attempting to support teachers by creating nurturing environments and providing various professional development opportunities (Beames et al., 2023; Tikkanen et al., 2022; Tsang et al., 2022). COR theory looks at stress and resilience through the lens of loss and gain spirals, making it a theory that has implications for understanding the process of developing stress as well as gaining coping strategies (Hobfoll, 1998). This study utilized Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing and COR theory to explore adult cognitive development by looking at perceived resource loss and gain.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

All aspects of the research methodology are addressed in this chapter. After the research purpose and questions are stated, researcher positionality and philosophical paradigm are addressed regarding how the researcher's philosophical way of thinking and experiences influences all aspects of the research design. The next section explains how data was collected for the study regarding participants, data collection methods, and methods of data management. The data analysis section describes the coding process as well as highlight how the theoretical framework will inform this process. The final section of this chapter discusses how trustworthiness was achieved in this study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do elementary school teachers from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perceived resource loss and gain in relation to principal's support?

RQ 2: How do elementary school principals from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perception of teacher's resource loss and gain?

Research Positionality

My positionality is informed by a constructivist worldview. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. I believe that every individual has a right to interpret their world in their own way and that there isn't truth or

knowledge that exists outside of perception and interpretation. In interpretive research, the researcher desires to understand the meaning being made from an experience rather than explanation being the purpose of the study (Given, 2008). As a researcher, I hope to not explain someone else's experience, but rather I find more value in attempting to understand how meaning was constructed based on those experiences. I value and recognize that there are multiple, subjective realities in this world being constructed constantly. Considering this, I wanted to understand each individual participant's journey of knowledge construction based on the interaction with the perception of resource loss and gain. This was my guiding principle as I conducted my study.

I also feel that my career path has influenced my views and approach to research. Crotty (2007) argued that meaning is constructed rather than discovered. As an elementary educator, I recognize that my experiences with school leadership, teacher stress, and professional support shaped my interest in this topic and influenced how I interpreted participants' experiences. I believe that everyone is a product of their stories. My belief that knowledge construction is constantly in motion comes in part from the two years I taught elementary school in Harlem, New York City. What I believed about reality and truth changed drastically in these two years based on my experience there. I was one of two Caucasian individuals in my school building, the other being my daughter. We had walked into a world that was not ours. In these two years, I realized that every sentence I uttered while teaching was being interpreted in a different way by my students who were perceiving the information based on experiences vastly different than my own. I learned about the importance of listening rather than speaking. I learned that the reality I was living had changed based on these new social interactions. Crotty (2007) emphasized that meaning is constructed through individuals' engagement with the world, and therefore I

acknowledge that both participants and researcher brought unique perspectives to the research process. To remain attentive to these influences, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process and continuously compared my interpretations with participants' perspectives. I approached my research valuing listening and open-mindedness.

I became interested in adult cognitive development when I began classes at Kansas State University in pursuit of my PhD. I became very interested in the adult brain and how it continues to develop in adulthood. I knew I wanted to conduct a study involving adult cognitive development and that I could set that study in any adult learning environment. I decided to choose teachers and principals as my adult participants as I saw teachers as adult learners and principals as adult leaders in the same community. I brought with me a unique perspective on this research topic, as I have been an adult learner and an adult leader in different occupational environments. I was an elementary school classroom teacher for five years where I learned, as an adult, from my principal. I then served as an educational administrator when I was an Educational Director at a theatre where I was tasked with supporting adult dance and musical theatre teachers in their roles. After learning more about adult cognitive development in my Kansas State classes, I became very interested in how adults learn and interact with others as they grow and develop cognitively.

The assumptions and values I have accumulated over time as both a teacher and an administrator influence the meaning of this study. I bring to this study a unique perspective of experiencing support from both an employee and a leader perspective. With this study, I hope to better understand how adult cognitive development influences the types of support employees are perceiving from their leaders as well as help leaders explore what they can do to help meet the needs of their employees through supporting them as adult learners.

Philosophical Perspective

This study had a constructivist perspective. Constructivism argues that knowledge is constructed by individuals as they make meaning of an experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Humans create their own reality and are constantly constructing it every day based on their experiences and interactions with the world. Merleau-Ponty, a noted constructivist, believed that the world and objects in the world may be meaningless, yet they are our partners in the generation of meaning (Crotty, 2007). This research was guided by the assumption that resource loss and gain had no meaning until it is experienced and conceptualized by teachers. Constructivism argues that knowledge is constructed by individuals as they make meaning of an experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research explored not resource conservation itself, but teachers' perceptions of that phenomenon. Constructivism claims that meanings are constructed by individuals as they engage with the world (Crotty, 2007). The individuals in this study conceptualized the meaning of stress and support which are concepts that are worth exploring in this new way and descriptive qualitative research gives a fresh perspective on concepts that have been familiar and accepted (Crotty, 2007).

This study was guided by a subjective, constructive approach. This epistemology argues that knowledge is constructed by the individual, through perceptions of experiences. Subjectivism claims that reality does not exist independent of an individual's perception of it (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Humans perceive the same piece of knowledge in different ways because they are constructing it individually. Two humans can learn the same fact but interpret that fact in a different way based on their perception of what that fact means to them. Knowledge is constructed within us based on our interactions with others and with the world.

Rationale for Research Design

This study was guided by a descriptive qualitative methodology. Descriptive qualitative research is used when the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research aimed to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. According to Ellis and Hart (2023), descriptive qualitative inquiry is useful when exploring individuals' beliefs and opinions about their external experiences. This research explored teacher and principal perceptions of teacher resource loss and gain in the context of their daily lives in the workplace rather than focusing on one lived experience. In descriptive qualitative research, the participants are asked specific questions about their personal experiences and actual activities described in contextual settings (Ellis & Hart, 2023). This study aimed to understand how teachers perceived their resource loss and gain in the context of daily principal support and perceptions of how principals helped teachers gain resources in the workplace. The focus of descriptive qualitative research is on the content of experiences rather than the psychological experience of the event (Percy et al., 2015). This research explored the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding what types of support help teachers in the workplace.

Researchers have conducted descriptive qualitative studies with a constructivist approach. Lu et al. (2021) explored how burnout shapes emergency medicine residents' educational experiences by using a constructivist perspective and a descriptive qualitative methodology. The researchers conducted and analyzed semi-structured to gather the qualitative data. They found that the residents felt that when they were working and the hospital was very busy, it was hard for them to focus on learning and that the residents felt a lack of agency in their resident years. Hølge-Hazelton et al. (2021) also used a constructivist approach with a descriptive qualitative

methodology to explore the experience of nurses working in low turnover departments. The researchers conducted focus groups to find that what was allowing the nurses to stay at a place of employment had to do with relationships, relationships among co-workers, with leadership, and with the job itself. A descriptive qualitative design with a constructivist lens allows the researcher to explore participants perceptions of their experiences.

A recent study supported the use of a descriptive qualitative methodology to look at the experience of employee resource loss and gain through the lens of the COR theory (Eder & Meyer, 2022; Yildirim, & Bulut, 2022). A qualitative study of nursing home employees in Germany aimed to understand how and why resources are lost and what it takes to rebuild them (Eder & Meyer, 2022). The researchers spoke to nurses as well as administrators. The research revealed that the construct of self-endangering behaviors (a diminished ability to say no when asked to fill in or work overtime) was a strong predictor in the context of the emergence of burnout, emphasizing the importance of administrators needing to provide resources to delay burnout in employees (Eder & Meyer, 2022). They also found that the leaders perceived the nurses who filled in for each other as having a stronger bond and a happier work experience (Eder & Meyer, 2022). The use of a descriptive qualitative methodology illuminated the perceptions of resource loss and gain from both the perspectives of employees and administrators.

The research methodology aligns with this study because descriptive qualitative methodology is used when the researcher wants to understand the perceived experiences of individuals about a certain phenomenon. The research questions explored adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicate that throughout the process of descriptive qualitative research, the

researcher must be attentive to the comprehension of the meaning of a phenomenon for the individuals involved in the study. This research had a constructivist approach that allowed for the researcher to understand teachers' perceptions of their resource losses and gains through the description of their experiences and the principals' perceptions of how they are helping their teachers gain resources in the workplace.

Participant Overview

The National Center for Educational Statistics (2024), reports that there are 37,885 teachers and 1,355 principals currently employed in public elementary schools in Kansas. To examine adult cognitive development, the participants in this study were elementary school classroom teachers and principals currently employed at a public school in Kansas. This study included 16 participants who met the eligibility criteria of this study. To qualify, teacher participants must be in their 1st-5th year of teaching in an elementary classroom and be a current elementary classroom teacher in Kansas. Principal participants needed to have served in the principal role in an elementary school for at least one year and be currently serving as principal in a Kansas school. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality throughout the research.

Recruitment was conducted through purposeful sampling. The 16 participants reside in 14 different cities throughout Kansas. District size varied, with participants working in small districts serving fewer than 1,000 students and larger districts serving more than 5,000 students. The principals ranged from their 3rd to 18th year of experience and the teachers ranged from their 1st to 5th year of experience. Fourteen participants identified as female and two identified as male.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy used in this study was purposive sampling. According to Polkinghorne (2005), purposive sampling involves choosing participants from which the researcher can learn about the experience most substantially. This research explored adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. Randomly selecting participants or selecting many participants would not have fulfilled the purpose of this research. Purposive sampling was the most effective sampling strategy for this study.

Criterion sampling was also be used in this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicate that a researcher must decide what attributes of a sample are crucial and then find sites and participants that meet those criteria. Focusing on an adult population, the participants in this study were elementary school classroom teachers and principals in Kansas. The participants were currently employed at a public school in Kansas to maintain consistency with the State Board of Education rules and regulations that may influence available resources and will aid in any time zone difference difficulties. The teachers met the criteria by being currently employed in a public school and their 1st-5th years of teaching. Van den Borre et al. (2021) found that 45% of teachers leave the profession within five years of entry, making it imperative to understand how to meet their needs. The principals met criteria by currently being employed by a public school and having served as a principal for at least one school year so that they may have experienced a full year and be able to provide rich descriptions of their perceptions of teacher needs early in their careers. This study excluded individuals who did not speak English, those who did not want to be audio recorded, and employees in the district where the researcher was currently employed.

Participants were recruited by obtaining teacher and principal emails from public school websites in Kansas. I emailed these Kansas principals and teachers asking them to participate in my study (Appendix C -). These emails included information on the requirements of the study including years of experience. This helped me find participants that fit the requirement of classroom teacher and principal. I sent emails to hundreds of teachers and principals. Principals responded more quickly to participate in the study than teachers did. It was difficult finding teachers that met the criteria of being in their 1st-5th years of teaching as that information was not listed on the school websites. In the end, I found eight principals and eight teachers that met the participant requirements.

In descriptive qualitative research, the purpose is to acquire rich information rather than obtaining many samples to attempt to represent an entire population (Jahja et al., 2021). This study explored the experience of resource loss and gain and according to Ellis and Hart (2023), when research topics are exploratory, small sample sizes allow for in-depth descriptions of experiences for exploration. Hennink et al. (2017) found that data saturation generally occurs between seven and 12 interviews. I conducted eight principal interviews and eight teacher interviews for this study.

Table 3.1 Summary of Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Current Year of Experience	District Locale
Andy	Male	Principal	4th	Suburban
Billy	Male	Principal	3rd	Rural
Hannah	Female	Principal	9th	Rural
Laura	Female	Principal	7th	Suburban
Mary	Female	Principal	4th	Urban
Melissa	Female	Principal	18th	Rural
Rita	Female	Principal	5th	Urban
Ulga	Female	Principal	4th	Rural
Annie	Female	Teacher	1st	Suburban
Callie	Female	Teacher	5th	Urban
Hallie	Female	Teacher	2nd	Urban
Kat	Female	Teacher	2nd	Rural
Molly	Female	Teacher	1st	Suburban
Nelly	Female	Teacher	3rd	Suburban
Pat	Female	Teacher	3rd	Urban
Tammy	Female	Teacher	4th	Rural

Protection of Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was provided by Kansas State University's IRB office prior to beginning this research. To protect the rights of the participants, each participant was required to complete an informed consent form (Appendix E -) before being officially included in the study. The participants were also informed before the first interview question that they could choose to not answer any of the following questions and may choose to not participate in the study at any time without penalty. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Data was recorded using Zoom, with participant's prior permission. The Zoom interviews were used as data as well as the Zoom generated transcripts, in which the researcher created pseudonyms for the participants. After the interviews were transcribed, the video portion of the Zoom interview was be deleted. Participants were allowed to review the transcript to check for inaccuracies or any sensitive data that would potentially identify them.

The Zoom account used is a K-State affiliated Zoom account that is password protected and the data is stored on the K-State One Drive which is also password protected. After three years, the data will be destroyed.

Pilot Study

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the importance of conducting a pilot study to ensure that questions are understandable and capable of eliciting rich, descriptive data that aligns with the research purpose. A pilot study also helps identify practical considerations, such as the time required for interviews and the clarity of consent procedures, thereby strengthening both the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. I conducted a pilot study with one teacher and one principal. After each interview, I asked each participant for feedback regarding clarity of questions and length of time. I reworded the section of questions on preferred learning and teaching methods as the participants needed more clarity on what the questions were asking. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight the value of conducting a pilot interview to enhance the researcher's interviewing skills, surface unanticipated challenges, and revise questions that may be confusing or misaligned with the research purpose. After the interviews concluded, I coded each interview so see how the interview data aligned with my research purpose. After reflecting, I concluded that I needed to have more questions to explore the resource loss of the teachers and the perceptions the principals had about teacher resource loss and gain. My participants mentioned that they could have talked for even longer about the subject, so I added even more probing questions to gain an even deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Overall, I adapted interview questions and protocols, based on my pilot study, to obtain rich data, aligned to the purpose of my study.

Data Collection

The focus of this study was to explore adult cognitive development and the perceptions of teacher resource loss and gain in relation to principal support from both the perspectives of teachers and principals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the eight principal participants to explore their perspective of teacher resource loss and gain. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers to explore their experiences of their resource loss and gain due to principal support. These interviews were conducted virtually and ranged from 50 to 80 minutes in duration. To help triangulate the data in addition to interviews, a questionnaire was used for participants to self-assess their Way of Knowing. The interview data was collected via video conferencing using Zoom. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher through Zoom transcription technology.

Interviews

Polkinghorne (2005) indicates that the purpose of a research interview is to obtain information from the interviewee to describe an experience to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon. Research interviews aligned with the purpose of this study in that the aim of the research was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. More specifically, the type of interviews I used in my study were semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews align best with my philosophical stance, constructivism, because they are consistent so that the data are comparable across participants and there is flexibility to use additional probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. The participants were informed before the first interview question that they can choose to not answer any of the following questions and may choose to not participate in the study at any time without penalty.

Ways of Knowing Characteristics Questionnaire

To better understand how the participants make meaning according to Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing (2009), I used a short questionnaire developed by Florida Atlantic Office of Educational Leadership Learning (Appendix G -). This self-reflection questionnaire was developed to help people think about the different Ways of Knowing. With all self-reflection instruments, they are open to interpretation and dependent upon the individual completing it. While Drago-Severson (2009) states that no questionnaire alone should be used to determine an individual's Way of Knowing, the intent of adding this questionnaire was just to gather information to compare to the analysis of their responses. The questionnaire results were compared to the interview transcripts for patterns of understanding the ways they process and make meaning.

Potential Challenges

This research involved using Zoom, a video conferencing software. There were potential challenges with video conferencing. Khan and MacEachen (2022) found that dropped calls can interfere with maintaining the tone of an interview. If a participant was speaking about a time where they felt that their principal caused them to feel perceived resource loss, it may have been difficult for them to maintain the tone of their experience when the interview continues after the call was restored. Some participants may have been afraid to participate in the study because of their lack of digital literacy or fear of not being technology proficient enough to use the video conference tool (Khan & MacEachen, 2022). Some of the participants in this study may have had less experience using this type of technology. Video conferencing also lacks the intimacy that face-to-face interviews have, and it is harder to build a rapport with the participants (Khan & MacEachen, 2022). It was very important to take time to build trust with the participants before

the interviews begin to obtain rich, honest data. According to Khan and MacEachen (2022), video conferencing can be used when participants are geographically dispersed. The participants in this study lived in various locations in Kansas, so video conferencing was the best option. Video conferencing is superior to phone conferencing or e-mail interviews because the researcher can see the participant in real time (Khan & MacEachen, 2022). This practice ensured that everything said in the interviews was highly detailed and accessible for analysis (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Data Alignment

The interview questions in this study aligned with the research questions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. The questions for the teacher interviews address the first research question by exploring their cognitive development influence on their perception of resource loss and gain in relation to principal support. The principal interview questions address research question two by exploring their cognitive development and the influence on their perception of teacher resource loss and gain. See Appendix F - for the Alignment Table.

Data Management

The video conferences were transcribed through the Zoom transcription tool. I reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy and created pseudonyms for my participants within the transcriptions. To manage the large amount of data I collected, I kept the transcripts in Microsoft Word documents. I coded the transcripts manually, using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word to organize the codes, categories, and themes.

Data Analysis

Because qualitative data do not possess an inherent structure, researchers create structure through systematic coding and analysis (LeCompte, 2000). This study employed a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic analysis informed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). The analysis was guided by the theoretical framework and research questions. As Saldaña (2021) discusses, a priori coding allows researchers to begin analysis with predetermined concepts informed by theory or prior knowledge while remaining responsive to new insights generated from the data. Prior to coding, an initial set of a priori concepts was developed based on COR Theory and Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing. Throughout the analysis, participant responses were continually compared with these theoretical concepts while allowing new ideas and patterns to emerge inductively from the interview data.

To implement this hybrid deductive-inductive approach, the first cycle of coding employed In vivo and descriptive coding methods (Saldaña, 2021). In vivo coding refers to a word or short phrase, word-for-word, from the data and can provide a crucial look into if the researcher truly understood what was significant to the participant (Saldaña, 2021). Using a participant's actual words also allowed the researcher, using a descriptive qualitative approach, to stay close to the data for analysis (Ellis & Hart, 2023). Descriptive coding, summarizing the descriptive topic of a passage (Saldaña, 2021), was used to compare participant experiences. When participants were describing their experiences, they may have used different words, but those words may have had similar meanings. Descriptive codes assisted in developing patterns and themes across participant data.

Throughout the first coding cycle, the In Vivo and Descriptive codes were examined alongside the a priori concepts derived from the theoretical framework. Some participant responses aligned directly with predetermined concepts such as resource loss or resource gain, while others reflected ideas that emerged inductively from the data. This process allowed a theoretically informed analysis while illuminating participants' individual experiences.

Figure 3.1 Initial Coding

Transcript	Codes
Researcher: Alright, so first question, real easy, how many years have you been a principal, and how many buildings have you been at? Billy: This is my fourth year. My first year, I was an AP at a high school, and this is my third year as a principal at a pre-K through 8th grade building. Researcher: Oh, wow. Researcher: Um, what do you think teachers need to be successful in their jobs? Billy: Um, uh, yeah, let's see. To be successful, I think they need to be in a... in a really good... Billy: culture, uh, for a school. I think that's... that's absolutely important, and... Billy: It's a culture that is, uh, centered on psychological safety and, um. Billy: you know, high expectations, so that freedom to take risks and to fail, but in the pursuit of achieving greatness, right? So I think that... I think that that's a big piece of it, but that culture, um, you just see people thrive, and especially when you can create that collective efficacy, like. Researcher: Mhm. Billy: When they... when they get along, um, when your teams get along really well. Billy: It's just, um... it's just a really good environment to work in, and I think that that's what's absolutely necessary, because they'll lean on each other.	▼ Good school culture Psychologically safety Freedom to take risks Collective efficacy when teams get along lean on your team

The Ways of Knowing Questionnaire as well as the interview data were utilized to analyze which Way of Knowing each participant best aligned. While Drago-Severson (2009) states that no questionnaire alone should be used to determine an individual's Way of Knowing, the intent of adding this questionnaire was just to gather information to compare to the analysis

of their responses. I first looked at each participant's answers to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire to see which Way of Knowing each participant felt they best aligned. I then analyzed each participant's individual transcripts and codes to analyze which Ways of Knowing their responses to the interview questions best aligned. For 12 out of the 16 participants, the answers to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire and the interview question responses aligned clearly with one Way of Knowing for each of those participants. For four of the participants, their Way of Knowing Questionnaire responses aligned with two Ways of Knowing. I analyzed their individual transcripts and codes to see which Way of Knowing their interview responses best aligned with to come up with a final Way of Knowing category for each of those participants.

According to Saldaña (2021) as researchers progress into the second cycle of coding, they might rearrange and reclassify coded data into different and even new categories. In this study, during the second cycle of coding, the codes were separated into the varying Ways of Knowing to analyze participant experience of resource loss and gain. Indicative coding was used to find emerging patterns and themes in each of the Ways of Knowing. In this study, these themes were cross referenced with the initial coding cycle themes to ensure that they represented initial themes. Driven by the theoretical framework, themes emerged regarding participants' perceptions of teacher resource loss and gain based on varying Ways of Knowing to aid in answering the research questions. Reflection is important for the development of interpretation, showing the way the researcher's self intertwines with the understanding of the study (Peshkin, 2000). A reflective journal of researcher thoughts was kept on a separate document as the categories are being developed from the initial codes. LeCompte (2000) indicates that categories can be made by grouping codes together in meaningful ways and by noticing frequent codes

within the data. Synthesis combines different ideas to form a new idea which consolidates meaning (Saldaña, 2021). These subcategories were conceptualized into broader categories and then into emerging themes.

Figure 3.2 Codebook

Code	Participant	Quote	Possible theme
feeling supported matters	Pat	at that time, I was like, I'm just gonna leave teaching completely. Like, I... maybe I'm just not meant to do this job. Now that I'm at a different building, it was a night and day difference. So, that just... I advocate for so many people who are like, I hate where I work. Then go somewhere else, do it, please. Like, I did it, and I love my job, I feel happier, I feel more passionate about my job, and I'm glad I didn't just leave it completely.	attrition resource loss and gain
not being supported	Pat	the whole 4th grade team left, most people left, counselors left, another 2nd grade teacher, I mean, people were leaving, because we felt like we were being mistreated, and we were not being supported	attrition
authority in own classroom	Callie	I've worked in buildings where it was, like, everything would be second-guessed. Um, and that is really, really difficult, because then, like, you feel like you don't even have authority in your own classroom to say. You know what I mean? Like, if you can't do this.	autonomy
listen to my thoughts	Pat	Teachers should be trusted. Like, I feel like if I was hired for this position, and you've observed me, and you know who I am, and you know I'm doing my job right, I want to feel trusted, and know that my opinion, whether it's about data, or behaviors, or whatever, you listen to my thoughts no matter what	autonomy
behavior takes away time	Annie	There's just a lot of different emotions of, like, oh my goodness, I have to keep teaching because I have to get these kids, we have to stay on time, we have to stay with the pacing, but I need to stop and talk to this student really quickly, or I keep having to redirect these other students.	behavior
takes pressure off me student check-ins time	Annie	I think it takes a little bit of pressure off of me to try and find time to talk to those kids.	behavior

Figure 3.3 Second Cycle of Coding

Codes	Present/Appreciative Principal	Principal has back and trust/listens	Principal behavior support	Burnout/Turnover	Time Drainers: PD and workload	Behavior as a stressor and lack of support
A time I can spill out my heart to principal	A time I can spill out my heart to principal	Authority in own classroom	Behavior consequences from principal	anxiety when brain doesn't shut off	Able to develop skills	Behavior a brutal class
Able to develop skills	Affirmation in person	Autonomy Having a say reduces stress	Behavior consequences from principal	Burnout affects the kids because they don't have an understanding	Don't waste my time	Behavior a lot of student emotions
Absent parents	Anxiety inducing when principal is vague	Autonomy Teachers should be trusted	Behavior consistent for each kid	Burnout battery died	Overwhelmed by resources	Behavior cussed at
Add nice feedback to tough feedback	Can't convey tone in emails	Catch me at difficult times on purpose	Behavior explosive help	Burnout came to school at 10%	PD a waste of time	Behavior defeating
Admin give treat	Face to face with principal is best	Feel second guessed by principal	Behavior I wanted someone to come help me	Burnout I come home so tired	PD can tell people don't like it with body language	Behavior destroying the room
Admin needs to be prepared	Feedback before in person meeting	Feeling of success, being heard	Behavior Principal school wide expectations	Burnout mentally and physically worth it?	PD District wide doesn't work	Behavior extreme
Admin wasn't prepared	Hear from the principal	Feeling principal is on your team	Behavior principal support	Burnout my husband kept telling me to quit	PD don't have mental capacity	Behavior felt like a mental institution
Adult interaction to keep sanity	One on one time with principal	Frustration when not backed	Behavior principal take care of business	Burnout pent-up anger	PD good if can apply in classroom	Behavior hard to do job when kid screaming
Affirmation in person	Opportunity to show your ability	He has my back	Behavior principal talk to them	Burnout the kids can see	PD is crap	Behavior I was hit with things
All negative feedback damper	Prefer staff meetings because in person with body language	He has my back	Behavior remove from room	Burnout the kids feel shut down by me	PD just draining	Behavior Lots of hitting
Allowing us to feel heard	Principal in my room more	I can't keep feeling so undermined	Behavior students held accountable	Burnout your family feels it	PD like it when it applies to my classroom	Behavior major outbursts are challenging

Figure 3.4 Researcher Journal

Nov 12, 2025

After all Pilot Study interviews

Wow, I felt very similar to Bob in my way of knowing. I need to be really careful that I am not listening for alignment only and am hearing the information from the participant in raw form. It is especially hard when I relate to the participant so much. That will be important to keep in mind as I continue to talk to principals and teachers.

I learned a lot about how I can use probing questions and add more questions to obtain richer data and align even more to my research questions. I am very glad I decided to interview many more participants in a pilot study before moving on to the other participant interviews. I feel much more prepared.

Dec 29, 2025

After all interviews

I learned a lot about what principals think teachers need and what teachers are saying they need. I am really glad I went with having the two perspectives because it has been interesting to be able to see both sides. It was hard not to relate to what the principals were saying as a former leader and with what the teachers were saying as a current teacher. I want to make sure to keep as much bias out of the data analysis as possible as I realize I am close to the situations the participants are in.

Jan 11, 2026

Coding

I decided to code all principals first and then all teachers so that I could keep everything straight. I am really glad I did that. As I am coding the principals, I am noticing that they are saying a lot of the same things. And I noticed that the ways of knowing seemed to affect the way the principals viewed teacher stress and affected how they gave support. When I began coding the teachers, I really began to notice how the ways of knowing affected teachers' needs at work, even more than the principals. They were all still saying similar things, but the way they each viewed support really hinged on their way of knowing.

According to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), steps involved in the process of thematic coding that involves a balance of deductive coding derived from a theoretical framework and inductive coding from the themes emerging from participant's discussions, demonstrate rigor within a qualitative research study. The data analysis clearly identified how themes were generated from the raw data to uncover meanings in relation to resource loss and gain for these participants and how their varying Ways of Knowing can inform their perceptions of resource loss and gain.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, this research was guided by Tracy's (2010) criteria for exemplary qualitative research. Tracy (2010) found that there are eight categories that should be addressed in creating quality qualitative research: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. This study met the criteria in these eight areas of research.

Worthwhile research often questions assumptions and challenges ideas that have long been accepted (Tracy, 2010). Leaders may assume that they are supporting their employees effectively but may lack understanding of their employees as adult learners and the influence that may have on making meaning of that support. There have been studies on teacher needs and on principals attempting to meet teacher needs (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Fontes, 2020), but this study is worthy in that it brought these two perspectives together to bring new light to the topic through knowledge of cognitive development.

Meaningful coherence was enhanced through rigorously following the research design and protocols. Studies that are meaningfully coherent “interconnect their research design, data collection, and analysis with their theoretical framework and situational goals” (Tracy, 2010, p. 848). The research questions and interview questions all aligned with the purpose of this study. Tracy (2010) notes that researchers should put in effort, care, and thoroughness throughout their research process to achieve a level of rich rigor. The research purpose and questions were kept in mind throughout the entire research process so that the study remains focused. Rigor was also met by the care and practice of data collection procedures (Tracy, 2010). The transcripts that were used for coding were generated by Zoom to ensure accurate representation of the participant interviews. I reviewed the automatically generated transcripts for any inconsistencies/errors compared to the recording before the coding process begins to ensure clear representation of the data.

Sincerity was achieved by self-reflexivity and transparency. Researchers can achieve self-reflexivity through assessing their own motivations and personal biases (Tracy, 2010). I am a current educator and former administrator and have reflected on how this fact affects my motivation to research this topic. To aid in keeping my bias from infiltrating data interpretation, I

kept a journal reflection of thoughts throughout the research process. Transparency can be achieved by noting a study's challenges (Tracy, 2010). The difficulties and limitations with this study have been clearly stated and were continually monitored throughout the study in the researcher notes.

Credibility was achieved by triangulation and member checking. Tracy (2010) describes triangulation enhancing credibility by asserting that multiple sources of data converging to the same conclusion strengthen study findings. This study explored cognitive development and leader support from two distinct perspectives so that a deeper understanding of the topic may be obtained. Credibility can also be enhanced by providing collected data to the study participants so that they may decide if they have been accurately represented. The transcripts were shared with the participants for their feedback. These important precautions helped to ensure credibility.

Resonance was achieved by transferability. When individuals connect to a study and the research overlaps with their own situation, they can actively apply the research to their own lives (Tracy, 2010). Although the teachers and principals in this study currently work in Kansas, there are 98,817 principals of public schools in the nation (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2024) that could potentially benefit from the findings of this study. There are also many other leaders and employers that may benefit from this study as well. After exploring cognitive development and support through the perspective of employees, leaders may be able to adjust their support to employees based on the findings.

This research made a significant contribution to the leadership field. This study “framed a contemporary problem” (Tracy, 2010, p. 846) by addressing adult cognitive development and the problem of occupational burnout. Tracy (2010) found that significant studies capture how practitioners cope with problems and provide implications that may help participants improve

their actions. This study highlighted the need for leaders to gain an understanding of adult cognitive development so that they can better support their employees as adult learners.

This study was rigorously ethical. Tracy (2010) suggests that participants should be informed about the nature and potential consequences of the study. In adherence to the IRB, participants were fully informed of the risks as well as the potential benefits of the study. Participants must understand that their participation is voluntary (Tracy, 2010). Participants were informed that they were volunteers that may choose not to answer any question or to exit the study completely, at any time, without penalty.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. According to Ellis and Hart (2023), descriptive qualitative inquiry is useful when exploring individuals' beliefs and opinions about their external experiences, therefore a descriptive qualitative methodology guided this study of exploration of experiences. To understand how teachers are perceiving principal support, Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing were utilized to highlight the alignments and misalignments between this support and teachers' Ways of Knowing. To understand how the stress or motivation influences resource loss or gain, the COR theory was utilized. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of their adult cognitive development level and their experiences of resource loss and gain from teachers and principals. Data was transcribed and analyzed through indicative coding using in vivo and descriptive coding methods to create themes. Trustworthiness was addressed using a reflective journal to minimize bias and member checking to ensure accurate representation of the participants.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study examining teacher perceptions of stress dynamics and principal support from the perspectives of both teachers and principals engaged in various Ways of Knowing. The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. Data was collected through interviews with teachers and principals and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach.

The findings are organized according to patterns that emerged from the data and are presented in alignment with the study's research questions. Teachers and principals were analyzed separately. Table 4.1 illustrates which Way of Knowing each teacher most aligned with followed by specific findings from each Way of Knowing. After that are the themes that emerged regarding the teachers' perceptions of their resource loss followed by the themes regarding their perceptions of their resource gains in relation to principal support. The principal findings are presented next including Table 4.2 which represents their Ways of Knowing followed by their perceptions of teacher resource loss and gain. The themes were then analyzed and put into Table 4.3 at the conclusion of the chapter, illustrating which themes were clearly represented by participants categorized by Ways of Knowing.

Teacher Findings

The teachers were given a questionnaire to fill out regarding how they preferred to learn and interact with others to evaluate which Way of Knowing they most aligned. I first looked at each teacher's response to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire to see which Way of Knowing they felt they best aligned. I then analyzed each teacher's individual transcript and codes to analyze which Ways of Knowing the responses to the interview questions best aligned. For six

out of the eight teachers, the answers to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire and the interview question responses aligned clearly with one Way of Knowing. For two of the teachers, their Way of Knowing Questionnaire responses aligned with two Ways of Knowing. I analyzed their individual transcripts and codes to see which Way of Knowing their interview responses best aligned with to come up with a final Way of Knowing category for each teacher. Table 4.2 illustrates which Way of Knowing each teacher best aligned.

Table 4.1 Teachers' Ways of Knowing

Way of Knowing	Teacher
Instrumental	Hallie
Socializing	Molly, Nelly, Pat, Tammy
Self-Authoring	Annie, Callie, Kat

Instrumental Teacher

Hallie, a teacher engaged in the instrumental Way of Knowing, felt stress when she felt unprepared or when expectations were unclear. She talked about feeling anxious by “not knowing what is coming up” and when “a to do list was just thrown all at once” at her. She talked a lot about the perceptions of others, including students’ parents, as causing her stress. “I didn’t want to look unprepared to parents, you know what I mean,” she said. Hallie talked about feeling stress relief when her principal provided her with clear expectations in a timely manner. “I love to be planned ahead and I like when somebody has clear expectations of what they want from you done,” she said. She appreciated when her principal provided concrete examples for her as well. She talked about a time when her principal gave her “specific examples of what parents may ask” at conferences. She also felt that her principal should have school-wide expectations for behavior so that the students were clear on what was expected of them. “I think

there should be school wide expectations so that kids don't think they can get away with things without consequence," she said.

Socializing Teachers

The socializing teachers, Pat, Nelly, Tammy, and Molly, spoke about the need to be treated like a human at work instead of just an employee. They felt increased stress by receiving corrective feedback from their principal without a balance of positive feedback and by trying to decipher human intent when interactions at work were not in-person. "I think the biggest thing is I, as a person, I feel like I get influenced by people a lot," Pat said. Tammy talked about receiving corrective feedback from her principal causing her anxiety. "Oh, I get anxious. It's a day ruiner for me. I take it personally," she said. Molly said when her principal focuses too much on corrective feedback for her it "puts a damper" on her day or week. The socializing teachers benefitted from a principal who understood that teachers are human and helped them to feel safe and secure at work. Nelly spoke of needing a principal who "acknowledges that you're human and that things happen and some things are out of your control." Tammy prefers a principal who makes time for her so that she can "spill out" her heart. The socializing teachers all talked about feeling more reassured when their principals checked in with them and affirmed them with positive comments about their teaching.

Self-Authoring Teachers

Teachers engaged in the self-authoring Way of Knowing described feeling frustrated when they felt dismissed by their principals and feeling more confident when they felt that their principals trusted their opinions and expertise. Kat felt frustration when her principal did not understand her views as a teacher and dismissed her ideas. Callie discussed feeling second-guessed by her principal and feeling like she didn't even have authority in her own classroom.

The self-authoring teachers felt more confident when their principals showed trust in their opinions and treated them as professionals. Annie spoke about a time when she wanted to deviate from the curriculum because she felt that was best for her students. “Hearing what my opinion was, and why I had the opinion, she was very supportive and understanding. It makes you have that feeling of success,” she said. Callie talked about the need to be “treated as a professional” by her principal and that having teacher input is very important to her. These self-authoring teachers also understood that principals are human and working for a system that is sometimes out of their control. They understood that the principals often don’t have control over professional development opportunities and that they are under stress as well. Annie said the principal's challenges are different. “I think he was overwhelmed because everyone was having the same issue. I feel like he's got a lot on his plate and that kind of made things a little challenging, but he's a great principal,” she said.

Teachers’ Perceived Resource Loss

The teachers in this study perceived resource loss as losses of energy, time, personal connection, confidence, and agency. All teachers spoke about feeling drained of energy due to student behavior in their classrooms. They also talked about this drain worsening from a perception that their principles were not assisting with behavior in a way that was effective. Across participants, they also felt a loss of time due to large workload and having to attend numerous meetings scheduled by their principals. The socializing teachers perceived resource loss as a lack of confidence due to the absence of affirmations from their principal. This loss as well as a perceived negative environment led to these socializing teachers to become withdrawn and dissociative. The self-authoring teachers felt resource loss as a loss of agency from their

principals dismissing their ideas and not treating them as professionals. Below are the themes from the findings regarding teacher resource loss.

Teachers Frustrated by a Lack of Behavior Support from the Principal

The participants described their principals not supporting them with their student misbehaviors and their energy and time becoming drained because of this lack of support. “Behaviors are a big thing,” said Molly. Tammy said that her classroom was “Brutal. Lots of hitting and destroying the room.” Pat said that her student hit her with things and cussed at her. “It felt like a mental institution a lot of times,” she said. “And it was less about teaching, and more about just surviving.” Hallie explained how unexpected behavior from students in her classroom caused her stress.

It's just hard to do your job when you know you're trying to deal with a kid that's screaming or crying or trying to hit you or another student, it just makes the day really drag out. It affects my well-being.

Annie discussed her student misbehaviors as taking up a lot of her teaching time. “There's just a lot of different student emotions and I have to keep teaching because we have to stay on time but I need to stop and talk to this student, or I keep having to redirect them,” she said. Kat said that it took energy for her to self-regulate while she was trying to help a student regulate. “I get exhausted faster and my patience towards other kiddos that I should be able to have more patience for goes away.” They described student behaviors as leaving them “out of energy.” Callie was “drowning in behaviors.” Pat, Tammy, and Molly described how their drained energy led them to feel exhausted and angry, ultimately affecting their ability to do their jobs effectively. Pat said, “I was not doing enough for the kids. I was just doing the bare minimum, because that's all I could do. Molly described her energy drain in a similar way.

I don't have a lot of energy to do the planning that I need to do. Like, I do it, but it just takes a lot more out of me to get to it. I also have a shorter fuse when I'm extremely stressed and harder to not explode.

Tammy described her stress affecting her students as well. She said that her students “feel shut down” by her and “don’t have an understanding” of why she is shutting them down. This energy drain also affected the participants when they arrived home from work. Pat described being “mentally drained” from student behaviors and just “shutting down” when she arrived home from work. Tammy was so drained when she came home that her husband did not want her to continue teaching.

My husband kept telling me to quit. I mean, at the end of the day, you do have to see, is this mentally and physically worth it? I mean, because no offense, your family reaps the repercussions of it all when you get home. It’s tough.

The participants talked about wanting their principals to intervene when students misbehave. Pat said “I just wanted someone to be there. I wanted someone to support me.” They talked about how when they called for support for their students’ misbehavior, their principals were unhelpful. “The kids kept getting sent to the office for the same thing,” Molly said. Pat and Tammy described sending their students to the office and the students coming back with a treat rather than a consequence. Molly even said her students were “getting in trouble on purpose so they could go to the office.” Tammy described her frustration with the perceived lack of behavior support. “I don't want them to just come back to my room, you know, and I don't want them to just get a snack or candy. I want them to be held accountable.” Eventually Pat gave up asking her principal for help with behavior support. “You just stop asking because you know help is never

gonna come.” Kat also described times when she wanted support for a student who was misbehaving.

I send a kid to the office for screaming at me and then they're back in my classroom in an hour causing a ruckus. And I'm thinking, either he goes out of my room, or it's not gonna be good for anybody.

Callie described a similar situation where she felt her principal was enabling a student's misbehavior which was causing her precious time in her classroom. “If every time I send him out, you play a game with him, give him a treat,” she said, “he's going to continue to do these things, because it's an attention-seeking behavior.” Pat described her frustration with this continued lack of support as leading her to feel that her “battery” was dead.

I was drained because I was constantly angered. I had this pent-up anger inside and then my battery would just die. It was like I came to school at 10%, so if someone said something wrong, or looked at me weird, I felt like I wanted to go off. I was not healthy. I could tell I was not myself.

Callie left two school buildings due to her lack of support from her principal. She was giving so much energy to her students that she ended up dreading coming to work every day.

My principal did not have my back at all. And I was like I can't keep doing this and I was out of energy. Because you just don't want to go to work, you know? I just couldn't work in that building anymore.

Pat described a lack of principal support for behavior as ultimately leading to her and many others' decisions to leave her school. She said, “The whole 4th grade team left. Most people left. People were leaving, because we felt like we were being mistreated, and we were not being supported.”

Teachers Lost Confidence Due to Corrective Feedback and Lack of Affirmations from Their Principals

When receiving corrective feedback from her principal, Tammy said, “Oh, I get anxious. It's a day ruiner for me. I take it personal.” Molly described how corrective feedback from her principal affected her. “I have a lot of growth that I need to make,” she said, “but if it's, like, all negatives, I feel like that would just kind of put a damper on my day or week.” Pat spoke about how a perceived lack of positive feedback from her principal gave her a “sinking feeling.” “Am I a bad teacher? Am I doing enough?” she questioned. Nelly mirrored that sentiment by saying, “It makes me question myself a lot, like, am I doing the right thing?” Tammy felt that when she does not receive positive feedback from her principal she gets in her own head and her emotions get the best of her. The participants also described feeling less confident when they received written communication from their principal rather than in-person positive feedback. Nelly stated, “I can't sense emotions or like what they really are meaning by that over an email.” Nelly described how written interactions from her principal influenced her stress.

It would cause me a lot of stress and anxiety, and I would be overthinking constantly, like, what does this mean? And I would probably take it to the dramatic far inside of what he means because I just do that with any kind of written thing.

Pat also spoke about how electronic feedback can cause confusion and tension. “We read emails, and sometimes like, ooh, that didn't sound very nice, and I know that's not what the intent was,” she said.

Teachers Losing Feelings of Agency from Being Dismissed by Their Principals

The participants described feeling a lack of agency and authority in their role as teachers. For Callie, feeling second guessed by her principal caused her frustration. “I've worked in

buildings where everything would be second-guessed and that is really difficult because you feel like you don't even have authority in your own classroom,” she said. “I just can’t keep feeling so undermined.” Kat feels frustrated when her principal did not understand the perspectives of teachers, did not agree with decisions she made, and did not back her up. Annie felt dismissed by her principal when she wanted to have an in-depth conversation about a struggle she was having. “The response I got was, well, a lot of the other grade levels are dealing with that, so just try your best and I didn't really appreciate that because I really wanted the problem fixed,” she said. “I think sometimes it feels like it's just a cop-out because I like to know the why.” Callie also felt dismissed by her principal when she wanted to have a productive conversation. “I've had principals who say we don't like this and when I've asked them how would you better do that? And they say well, I don't know. It would be nice to have some input, you know?” There were times when Callie felt a loss of agency by her principal coming to observe her at times that were perceived as inconvenient to her.

He would specifically try to catch you in really difficult times, so he'd come at the last lesson block on a Friday afternoon before a break. It's just the difference between an administrator feeling like they're on your team, and an administrator feeling like they're out to get you.

Teachers Felt More Withdrawn Due to Conflict with Principal and a Negative Environment

Participants described perceived negative personal interactions with their principals and colleagues caused them to feel tense and even caused them to want to self-isolate. “I think the biggest thing is I, as a person, I feel like I get influenced by people a lot,” Pat said. Nelly said “Drama type situations or like workplace negativity, that's a big stressor.” The participants were

sensitive to the body language of their principals as well as described issues with trusting others in their work environment. Pat described how her principals' body language made her feel like she couldn't trust her.

I think just the approach, kind of like their body language, if they already come at me stressed out, or the tone of their voice is not very welcoming, I automatically kind of, not really put a guard up, but automatically feel kind of worried about what's gonna come out of their mouth. And if I don't trust you, I'm not gonna talk to you.

Tammy talked about feeling very isolated her first year due to the "backstabbing people in the building." Pat said, "It got to a point where you kind of just wanted to stay in your own little bubble. You had, like, 3 people you maybe trusted, because it just got toxic."

Teachers Felt Overwhelmed by Principal Assigning Tasks and Scheduling Meetings

The participants described feeling stressed by the amount of professional development meetings they needed to attend on top of their workload. Annie said she had never been more overwhelmed than she was in the past five months she had been teaching. Hallie talked about being very stressed at the end of the nine weeks of school because "a lot was thrown at us teachers" and she became overwhelmed with a workload she was unaware was coming. Nelly said that professional development meetings were "stressful and hard to listen to" and Tammy would "rather have time in her own classroom" to work. Kat believes that the professional development days at her school "are crap." Callie feels that these days are draining as it is just adding one more thing to her plate. "Don't waste my time," she said. Annie thinks that these days are "pointless" and that teachers could use the time to work in their classrooms. Hallie said,

I'm still learning their curriculum, I'm still learning how to even deal with the behaviors in the room, let alone trying to figure out all of these resources. I do not have the mental capacity to look at all of that.

Nelly talked about the anxiety she felt at home when her “brain doesn’t shut off.” “It does keep getting more difficult, and more things are expected of me to where I have had thoughts about leaving,” she said.

Teachers’ Perceived Resource Gain

The teachers in this study perceived resource gains through principal support by gaining confidence, security, stress relief, and increased feelings of connectedness. Across all participants, resources like connectedness and stress relief were gained from a principal who made time for them and supported them with student behavior. The teacher engaging in the instrumental Way of Knowing spoke about gaining security from her principals’ clear expectations. Socializing teachers gained confidence from affirmation from their principals, particularly in-person affirmations. Self-authoring teachers also gained confidence, but from their principals trusting their opinions. They also felt stress relief from an understanding of their principals’ perspectives. The themes from the findings regarding teacher perception of resource gain are below.

Teachers Gained Confidence Due to Affirmation from the Principal

The participants spoke about needing to feel appreciated and affirmed by their principals to feel more reassured and confident. For some participants, this appreciation came in the form of words of affirmation from the principal. Tammy said that positive words or texts from her principal “are confidence boosters, for sure.” Pat said that she “thrives off of compliments” and that they reassure her that she is doing her job right. Molly talked about how her principals’

words of affirmation help her feel less stressed. “If I’m having a bad day, her telling me I’m doing a good job would boost me up a bit and lessen my stress,” she said. Nelly talked about how words of affirmation from her principal help her spend less energy questioning herself and more energy on her teaching. She said that when her principal focuses on the positive and leaves her notes that say “I’m proud of you,” she feels “lighter and happier” and her “energy can shift to the kids.” Molly also talked about how it helps her when her principal makes sure to affirm her even when she is receiving corrective feedback. “My principal is nice about the way she words things. She puts the comments in there, but then she always has a positive on top of it, too,” she said. The participants also talked about feeling lighter when their principals would show appreciation for the whole staff such as having a staff member of the week or buying treats for all the teachers.

Teachers Gained Confidence due to Principals Trusting Their Opinions

These participants felt confident and successful as teachers when their principals listened to their ideas and allowed them to have autonomy and authority in their classrooms. Hallie described the need for a principal who had her back. “I feel like I can go to our principal and she would absolutely back me up for everything,” she said. Callie talked about being treated differently by two principals. “I’ve had principals that treated me like they respected my opinion and I’ve had principals that did not and that made a large difference,” Callie said. Callie also said that principals “need to treat us like professionals and understand that we have perspectives, too.” She especially thought this was important when parents or students had conflicting stories from hers. It was very important to Callie to feel “believed” by her principal. Kat felt supported by her principal when he would take teachers’ opinions into consideration so that he could make more informed decisions. Kat spoke of a time when she wanted to deviate from what her

teammates were doing in their classrooms as she felt she had the data to back up her decision. “I wanted to do something completely different and my principal was all for it because she saw where I was coming from,” she said, “It makes you have that feeling of success.” Callie said that having “authority in your own classroom and feeling your principal is on your team makes you feel like you can move with confidence in the classroom.”

Teachers Gained Resources when Principals Made Time for Them

The participants talked about how having a principal with good energy, who made time for them, and connected with them personally made them feel supported at work. Hallie described the importance of having an accessible principal who was there for her, someone she could “go to openly.” “Just knowing that you can go to somebody if you ever have an issue and they will help give me advice,” she said. Tammy said she felt supported by a principal who she knew she could always reach out to and who would come and talk to her “on a personal level.” She felt supported when her principal “boxes off a time I can kind of spill out my heart or if I have concerns or things, she allots those times in her schedule.” It allowed Pat to feel supported when her principal was understanding and had a personal connection with her. Pat also talked about preferring interactions with her principal to be in person because she felt like you can “truly see the energy and the body language and just all the things of what it means and looks like.” Nelly described a supportive principal as someone who checks in with her and understands what it is like to be a teacher. She felt comfort when her principal “acknowledges that you're a real human and that life happens, and that you're not just a robot, and that some things are out of control.” Pat ended up being grateful that she did not leave teaching completely as she was able to find a building with a principal that made her feel supported.

At that time, I was like, I'm just gonna leave teaching completely. Like, maybe I'm just not meant to do this job. Now that I'm at a different building, it is a night and day difference. I can just feel the energy from the administration. I feel happier. I feel more passionate about my job. And I'm glad I didn't just leave it completely.

Teacher Gained Security from Principal's Clarity of Expectations

Hallie talked about having a principal who made consistent decisions. Hallie described her stress being alleviated by her principal providing a clear, structured description of what she was expected to do in her job. She prefers a principal that is “very structured with clear expectations.” She said, “I like when somebody has clear expectations of what they want from you done.” If her principal gives her a task such as putting in grades in the gradebook or writing up a lesson plan, Hallie feels better when the principal provides “concrete examples” for her. Feeling like she is planned ahead for everything gives Hallie a sense of calm. She said she loves it when her principal “sends out a daily email for us, which is really nice, of things that are going on that day.” When Hallie was asked to prepare for parent teacher conferences, Hallie felt more confident after her principal helped her prepare in a clear, structured way.

Our principal went over what that would look like and gave us some examples of things parents might ask the first time that you're in a conference, so it prepared us for that. I really enjoyed that because it gave you what you could say, like, if a parent would bring up an issue like this.

Hallie also mentioned that having a principal who has a school wide policy for student behavior helps maintain structure and consistency. She said, “If there's expectations school-wide, students maybe won't think, oh, I can just get away with doing this without having a consequence to follow it.” Hallie also explained that when the students have structured expectations from the

principal, she is better able to use her time energy to teach rather than dealing with student behavior.

Teachers Felt Relief when Principals Helped Them Deal with Student Behaviors

The participants described times when their principals stepped in to assist them with student behavior making them feel more relief at work. Annie mentioned that when her principal checks in with her students that misbehave, they seem to misbehave less, saving her valuable teaching time. Molly described a time when her principal came in to help a student follow expectations in the classroom.

There are some big behaviors that I have in my room that I just felt like I was at a loss, and I'm like, I do not know how to help get this student back on track and my principal took the time to do a conversation with them to get them back on track.

Tammy felt relief when her principal took over her class when she was overwhelmed with a student's behavior. "When you're kind of tapped out, or you need help and you call, they're gonna be there," she said, "One time my principal took over my class so I could take a lap." Kat added to this when she talked about how helpful it was having a principal who was "willing to step in and help" with behavior. Molly appreciated a principal who could "remove the incident from the room." Pat also wanted her principal to come help her handle student misbehaviors. She explained.

I mean, obviously I wanted something to be done, but even if they were just in the room with me, I would feel supported just to know, hey, there's another adult in here helping to see this, to witness if they throw something or anything bad happens, and I have backup, and maybe they can pull them.

Nelly described feeling supported by a principal who is willing to make hard decisions when it comes to handling student behaviors. Pat said she feels supported by a principal who “takes care of business” and has consistent consequences for students who misbehave. Molly feels supported by a principal who “has a backbone” and has “big consequences” for students who misbehave. Nelly also mentioned feeling supported when her principal helped her deal with parents after their child misbehaved. “Tricky parents and conversations are very stressful, but it is very relieving when I know that I have my principal to help me have those tough conversations,” she said.

Teachers Who Understood their Principals’ Perspectives Felt Less Frustrated

Some participants expressed an understanding of other perspectives that helped them gain understanding and lessen their feelings of frustration. Even though Callie mentioned that having a good principal could make or tank a building, she also knows that not all decisions are completely in the principal’s control, especially regarding professional development. “I also understand it from a district perspective of, you need to have some continuity,” she said. Annie also understood that providing those professional development days was part of a principal’s job and that they were doing the best they could. She said, “I think they are at the end of the day just trying to get PD in, in some way, shape, or form that hasn’t already been done.” Annie also understood that the fact that she had kids who were misbehaving in her classroom was “nobody’s fault” and was just a situation that she was in. And even when she was frustrated with a perceived lack of support from her principal, she understood the situation from his perspective, allowing frustration to lessen.

Everybody’s challenges are different. I think he was overwhelmed because everyone was having the same issue. I feel like he's got a lot on his plate. He was gone quite a bit this

last semester, a lot of surgeries, weddings. So that kind of made things a little challenging, but he's a great principal.

Principal Findings

The principals were given a questionnaire to fill out regarding how they preferred to learn and interact with others to evaluate which Way of Knowing they most aligned. Using that data and their answers to the interview questions, I first looked at each principal's response to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire to see which Way of Knowing they felt they best aligned. I then analyzed each principal's individual transcript and codes to analyze which Ways of Knowing their responses to the interview questions best aligned. For six out of the eight principals, the answers to the Ways of Knowing Questionnaire and the interview question responses aligned clearly with one Way of Knowing. For two of the principals, their Way of Knowing Questionnaire responses aligned with two Ways of Knowing. I analyzed their individual transcripts and codes to see which Way of Knowing their interview responses best aligned with to come up with a final Way of Knowing category for each of those principals.

Table 4.2 illustrates which Way of Knowing each principal best aligned.

Table 4.2 Principals' Ways of Knowing

Way of Knowing	Principal
Instrumental	Laura
Socializing	Mary
Self-Authoring	Andy, Billy
Self-Transforming	Hannah, Melissa, Rita, Ulga

Instrumental Principal

Laura, a principal engaged in an instrumental Way of Knowing, felt that teachers gained the most resources by having clear systems in place to complete tasks and having a principal who takes things off their plates when possible. She talked about the teachers feeling stressed by "all the things that need done" and that there is "often not enough support staff to go around." She

talked about her teachers benefiting from knowing how and when to complete tasks at work. “We run on systems,” she said. She makes sure that every teacher receives the same professional development opportunities so that “everyone is on the same page.” She also mentioned that she often has created copies and prepared materials for her teachers during the summer to help them make time for other tasks during the school year. She was very systematic and structured. She never mentioned any relationship building with teachers. Her approach was to structure the building and make concrete decisions.

Socializing Principal

Mary, a socializing principal, thought teachers gained resources from having positive relationships with their principals. She talked about teachers coming into the workforce being “overwhelmed by the huge shift in behaviors” and “taking evaluations really hard.” She said that teachers “walk into the building like we owe them something” and that makes it difficult for them to feel connected and motivated to grow. Mary talked about teachers needing a lot of positive interactions at work for them to feel motivated. “We have to build them up, not break them down,” she said. She thought that even when a teacher needed to grow in an area, she thought the teacher benefited more from positive affirmation than corrective feedback. “Let them have a taste of success,” she said. She also said that teachers felt more motivated when they got “shoutouts” and when they were shown appreciation in front of their peers.

Self-Authoring Principals

Andy and Billy, self-authoring principals, talked about teachers gaining resources by working as one unit toward a common goal and about how when teachers do not operate that way, it causes them to isolate or want to leave or quit. These principals were so steadfast in their goals that they were unwilling to change their expectations for any teacher. Billy said, “Our

culture is being a school that's centered on virtues because that's going to frame all of our learning and it gives purpose.” Andy talked about the importance of “making sure that we're looking at student data in a way that aligns with where the district or the system is going.” Billy echoed this when he said, “We are going to be loyal to our district. It's my job to hold them to a standard and they can decide what they want to do with that.” He went on to explain that when teachers choose to not be loyal, they don't like coming to work because “they were being held to a standard that they really didn't want to live up to. Andy highlighted this as well when he spoke about teachers who do not believe in the common vision as isolating themselves with consequences. “They were not able to or willing to kind of make some shifts to help reconnect. One retired early and another, I helped transition to a different building,” he said. Billy added, “I think sometimes teachers feel overwhelmed by climbing the mountains. Like, you're telling us to climb another mountain? But I can't have any stray sheep, or else I'll lose the whole flock.” Andy echoed this sentiment as he said, “I had a teacher in my office who did not agree with things that I was doing and I didn't really change much from that conversation, but I did listen.”

Self-Transforming Principals

Self-Transforming principals talked about teachers gaining resources from support based on their personalities and from having a principal who can listen without judgement. Rita said that teaching has become “a different level of hard” for teachers and they are unprepared for it. They talked about how when teachers feel stress, they are unable to do their jobs effectively. “That's where you see the burnout,” Melissa said. Hannah added to this saying “Teachers start to get stressed, they get very short with students. They may not have that energy to be up delivering instruction to students. They're just not wanting to interact.” These principals felt that teachers benefited from individualized support from a principal who understands themselves as well.

Hannah says the support she gives “just depends on everyone's personality” and that she liked to “address people differently” based on her relationship with them and what she felt they specifically needed. Rita talked about “never responding with anger” and Hannah talked about teachers needing a principal who can “listen without feeling attacked.”

Principals’ Perceptions of Teacher Resource Loss

Across all Ways of Knowing, principals viewed teacher resource loss as a drain in energy and time due to dealing with student behavior and heavy workload. The principals agreed that teachers lack the skills to handle their stress properly and therefore sometimes this stress created even more resource loss. They said that the increased stress that the teachers felt led to increased irritability and self-isolation, both of which can reduce feelings of connectedness, an important resource. Across all principals, they also felt that teachers lacked an effective attitude and strong work ethic to gain their own future resources in the form of professional growth.

Principals Thought Teachers Experience Resource Loss Due to Student

Misbehaviors

All principals talked about the increase in student behaviors in recent years as a stressor for teachers. Laura said that student behaviors have increased and there is not enough support staff to assist the classroom teachers with behaviors. “I have seen, honestly, probably one of the best teachers I've ever met almost quit her job because of student behaviors,” she said. Ulga said that student behavior “takes a toll” and is “the number one motivation killer” for teachers. She said,

We're having to build in the skills on how to be a learner, and how to regulate emotions.

And they do so many outside, extracurricular-type strategies for kids that are beyond the

curriculum, just to have them in the classroom. So I think when you start to just pile all the things on. That can become overwhelming.

Andy mentioned that students have more social-emotional needs than they used to.

Melissa spoke of the increase in student behaviors and the fact that there is not enough support to go around, she said, “teachers are not being supported, especially with some of the discipline, and we do have a lot.” For Rita, chronic misbehaviors are the number one struggle for her teachers right now. Students are saying statements like “I don’t have to do what you tell me, you f***ing bitch” and “F*** all of you motherf***ers.” She also mentioned that student behavior has increased in the general education classroom because it is harder for students to qualify to attend schools specifically for students with behavior issues. The principals also talked about the poverty the students come from, the lack of parental support, and the mental health needs the students have can take a toll on teachers. Mary described how this shift puts more pressure on classroom teachers.

It's just a different dynamic with society, and society's taken a huge shift, and we're seeing a huge shift in behaviors, and the way parents respond to behaviors. It's a lot harder now too when you're dealing with such a personal thing, where you're basically raising the next generation within those 5 school days.

The Overwhelming Workload Creates Resource Loss for Teachers

The principals talked about how teachers feel that they have a lot of work to do which makes them feel overwhelmed. Melissa believed the teachers experience stress due to the increased number of students that require extra paperwork and meetings. “I think a lot of it is the paperwork. We have a lot more IEPs, we have a lot more students that go through the student improvement team process.” Both the individual educational programs (IEPs) and student

improvement teams (SIT) require meetings for teachers. Melissa mentioned that these meetings often occur during teachers' plan times, making them feel even more overwhelmed. Laura talked about tasks that might overwhelm teachers. "Not only do you have all those curriculum pieces in there, but also you've got your parent contact, you've got your at-home reading folders that you have to update daily, just, all the things that need done," she said. Melissa also talked about teachers having to handle all the things that change in the curriculum and putting in grades and having a hard time balancing all the things on their to do list. Ulga talked about the training for newer teachers being overwhelming for them and Rita said that "We're asking them to do far more than we've ever asked them to do before."

Increased Stress Creates Resource Loss for Teachers

The principals thought that the teachers who felt increased stress became ineffective at teaching in their classrooms. Laura said that teachers who felt increased stress were "quick to lose their cool" in the classroom. "You can tell they're not in control of their learning environment. They're at the mercy of their kids. They're not running their room anymore, they're just trying to survive their day," she said. The principals talked about how this stress affected students. "They are not effective if they're stressed out constantly. The students are going to feel it," Ulga said. They talked about the negative feedback loop that occurs. Melissa explained this.

I think that's where you see the burnout. I think that's where you see or have issues in the classroom, you know? I mean, that's where I start getting more phone calls from parents or you start seeing more behaviors coming out of the classroom.

Hannah talked about how when teachers' energy is drained, they are unable to give energy to their students. "When teachers get stressed, they get very short with students, and they may not have that energy to be up delivering instruction to students. They're sitting at their desk not

wanting to interact,” she said. Rita believed that when teachers are stressed out, principals get a lot more calls due to student behavior in their classrooms. She talked about a particular teacher that she found crying and rocking back and forth on the floor in her classroom saying “I can’t do this anymore” while her students watched. Andy said “I mean, that's really what it is. It’s burnout, and people leave, and on the way out, people stop doing the best they can.”

The principals said that when teachers felt increased stress, they became more irritated with co-workers and tended to isolate themselves from others. Laura said that teachers who were stressed had a change in body language and “didn’t go to positive intent” when interacting with their principal or colleagues. Mary described how she saw a stressed teacher interact with others. “It's just how they pop off just in passing, they might sound sharp, or irritable, or you hear them say something to a colleague that's just off the cuff, doesn't sound like them,” she said. Melissa said that these teachers often just “stay in their rooms and work.” The principals talked about how this behavior can lead to teachers feeling disconnected and even cause them to want to leave the profession. Ulga said, “I think the main word is disconnected, because if they're disconnected, they have no outlet to vent, ask questions, grow, learn.” Billy talked about how these teachers start to give up inside.

They'll just try to draw no attention, they just kind of get to the point where I'll just collect my paycheck. So, if no one's checking on them and holding them accountable, they'll just kind of give up inside. It'll be a quiet quit, you know.

Mary said that “teacher attrition is real and isolation will really expedite that situation. People have to feel supported and connected.”

Teachers Without Relationship Skills will Experience Resource Loss

Principals discussed teachers coming into the profession lacking the skills that are important to being a successful teacher. Ulga spoke about how important it is for teachers to have social skills. “If you don't have written or oral communication skills or emotional intelligence, you're gonna struggle in this job,” she said. Laura said that newer teachers have “a hard time building relationships with students” and Rita added, “they don’t have people skills.” Mary talked about a teacher who lacked the ability to hold boundaries in her classroom. “Her classroom management is horrible. I think that she just wants the kids to like her enough that she doesn't want to hold the boundaries,” she said. Billy acknowledged that newer teachers’ “craftsmanship isn’t phenomenal yet” and Hannah said that newer teachers lack the skills to handle all of the social emotional needs of their students. Mary said that “We're in the people business, and you have to genuinely care about people to want to do this job.” She then described the struggle for teachers who have a more difficult time building relationships with students and colleagues.

They weren't cut out for this job because they're not really person people or they're too deeply introverted to connect and make those connections with students. You have to connect with the kids and your coworkers, and you know, find that connection and support from a principal as well.

The principals talked about teachers lacking the drive necessary to persevere through stressful times or to want to grow professionally. Mary said that the teachers that are entering the workforce are “very entitled.” “We're just seeing the different mentality of teachers come in that you know, like they shouldn't be told that they need to improve in any way,” she said. Melissa said that teachers are lacking perseverance and “do not have that drive.” Billy said that his

teachers are failing to live up to his standards because they “don’t really want to.” For Laura, she felt that teachers often feel that feedback is “a personal attack rather than a professional choice.” Mary described how newer teachers lacked work ethic and an open mindedness to grow professionally.

It's a different generation of people coming into the workforce. They have a different thought process coming into the building. That we owe them something. I've had people take it really hard when I asked them to develop in a certain area.

Andy talked about newer teachers getting more easily frustrated because they underestimated how difficult being a teacher would be. “They expect immediate results. It’s a long game. They don't get that,” he said. Ulga mentioned a teacher that was ready to quit after just under two years of teaching. “I had a teacher, she was a second year teacher. She was very good out of college, but she was ready to throw in the towel in December,” she said.

Principals’ Perceptions of Teacher Resource Gain

The principals in this study thought that teachers gained resources in the form of confidence, autonomy, connectedness, security, and time. Across the participants, teachers were perceived to gain these resources from professional development, autonomy, extra time to complete tasks, and connecting to the school culture. The principal engaged in the instrumental Way of Knowing thought that teachers would gain security and confidence if they participated in school systems driven by concrete data. The socializing principal thought that teachers benefitted more from principals giving them encouraging words than from principals giving them corrective feedback. Self-Authoring and self-transforming principals said that teachers felt a decrease in stress when principals took accountability for their actions and mistakes. Principals operating from the self-authoring Way of Knowing felt that teachers gained a sense of collective

connectedness from understanding and participating in a shared vision and self-transforming principals felt that teachers benefited most from principals who understood them well enough to provide individualized support in the way that they preferred. The themes that emerged regarding teacher resource gain are below.

Professional Development Provides Opportunities to Help Teachers Gain Resources by Building Confidence

Principals believed that engaging teachers in professional development (PD) and learning opportunities helped them feel more confident at work and gain resources. “I think they need professional development,” Laura said. Billy and Hannah believed that teachers build confidence by starting off the year with professional learning. “We set goals at the start of the year,” Billy said, “PD gives teachers the ability to help themselves out in the future.” Hannah believed that a training called LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) was essential for the success of her teachers and that teachers must engage in that learning right away.

In your first year, you will start LETRS training. There's no waiting. I tell them, it's a lot.

But I tell them that that's how important it is, so there's no ifs, ands, or buts. And after it's over, and you're not in the thick of it, and you're able to apply it, it's a lot easier to look back and say, it was hard, but it was worth it.

Andy believes that PD works best for teachers when it can directly impact their practice and Melissa thinks that PD is great for giving teachers tools and resources. For Hannah, she felt that PD helped a specific teacher build his confidence.

The confidence part wasn't there, and so I sent him to a training and when he came back, he was very much like it helped me a lot because it helped me understand some things

but also, he started to feel a little bit like an expert, because everybody started asking him how he does.

Principal Thought Teachers Gained Resources from Systems Created by Concrete Data

Laura talked about the importance of creating systems in her school so that the teachers felt that they were a part of one moving unit. “I try and create systems, so, you know, if everyone's kind of running on the same system,” she said. She also said that having teachers trained on the same content helped teachers. “The commonality of the training has really helped our teachers because with the commonality of that learning everyone had that same knowledge base,” she said. She talked about teachers benefiting from having a system to help them know how to bring up concerns about students or improve their instructional practices.

I think one of the things that we have set up is systems for all types of topics to be covered, so we have student of concern meetings to help them with their Tier 2 and Tier 3 kids, just analyzing the data and making sure we have interventions in place that support the classroom learning. We also have classroom-level meetings where we go over classroom-level data.

When she has given feedback to teachers, she believed that providing the teachers with data helped them understand ways that they could develop. She emphasized this sentiment when she described a professional development where she used data to motivate her teachers. “We were doing a data dive. I had them write all the excuses on post-it notes and then I had them crumble them up and throw them in the middle of the room. I always use data. You can't argue with it, it's right there,” she said.

Principals Believed that Sharing Power with Teachers Helped Them Gain Feelings of Autonomy

The principals believed that teachers felt supported and could gain resources when they felt heard and felt like they had control over aspects of their workplace. The principals talked about utilizing teacher committees such as building leadership team (BLT) as avenues for teachers to gain that feeling of control and autonomy. Mary explained how BLT works to help teachers have a voice in decision making. “Someone from every section of teachers is representing that section when we have big decisions to make, or something didn't go quite well, or we're saying, how can we improve something,” she said. Rita uses her BLT to find out what her teachers are needing. “I took it to leadership team and said, you are going to go talk to the people that you represent, and each person represents a group of people, you're going to ask them what are the needs that they have.” Some principals thought it was very important for teachers to have their voices heard during decision making. Hannah talked about the importance of teacher viewpoints. “I come from it by a different viewpoint than they come from it and when we talk about things, they make me aware of things I have never even thought of,” she said. Ulga said that she “relies on teachers to be leaders.” Melissa felt that teachers should have freedom to make their own decisions in their classrooms. “I don’t believe I should make all of the decisions. They are professionals and I’m going to respect that,” she said. Hannah believed that teachers should be able to make changes to the way they teach.

If they're wanting to change something, I hear it completely out as to why they want to change it. If they can prove to me and they have the expertise and they know what they're doing, I'm gonna listen to them, because they are the experts.

Principals Helped Teachers Gain Resources Through Validation, Appreciation, and Positivity

The principals talked about teachers needing to be reassured through validation and appreciation. “I still see teachers wanting that validation that they're doing the right thing.” Rita said.. Andy and Hannah felt that providing celebratory feedback and positive shout outs to teachers over email was helpful for teachers. Andy also provides breakfast for his staff every month to show his appreciation for them. Mary gives out the Above and Beyond the Call of Duty (ABC) Awards to appreciate her teachers that work hard in her building. Rita thought it was important for teachers to receive validation in multiple ways including through text messages, emails, and hand written notes that say things like “Your classroom feels so inviting.” Melissa gives out gift cards regularly to her teachers so help them feel appreciated. Mary also talked about the importance of letting a teacher know when someone else thought they were doing a good job.

If I hear from a parent or something, I make sure to let them know. They've got to constantly have that input, that they're doing something right. You're hanging in there, and you're doing great, and I saw you doing that.

Mary talked about teachers benefiting from a principal who focuses more on a teachers' positive attributes than on what those teachers need to work on to grow. Mary talked about teachers needing “a safe space” and emphasized the need to “embrace them.” She said that when teachers are struggling, they benefit more from hearing what they are doing right rather than what they are doing wrong. “And if they are struggling, you've got to tell them they are doing something right and good, because they just need that. Let them have a taste of success,” she said. She discussed the need to “stand by your teachers” when they are struggling. She also

discussed teachers needing to feel reassured by their principals even when there has been conflict with them. She talked about a time where a teacher was upset with an evaluation that she had given her. “You just maintain your upbeat attitude. You have to be on all the time with your happy face, and bubbly personality, and just I ignored it a lot and acted like nothing had changed,” she said. She felt that it was more important for her teachers to feel safe and reassured than for a conflict to be solved.

Principals Thought Teachers Needed the Resources of Time

Principals talked about how teachers are better able to do their jobs when they are given the resource of time. Laura completes a lot of preparation work for her teachers before school starts to save them time during the year. “I make the copies for them and just have those tangible things ready to go for them so they can pull and go, as opposed to doing it as they're preparing for the next week,” she said. Hannah said that she used to require lesson plans from her teachers but quickly realized that they could be using that time in other more useful ways. “My first few years, I was like, turn in your lesson plans, do all this, because that's what you were told to do, and then I thought this is stupid, I'm not looking at them and it's a waste of their time,” she said. Ulga talked about how they think it is sometimes more beneficial to give teachers work time rather than having them attend professional development trainings or meetings.

Some of the best work and plan days that the teachers have had is where I've said, we have no meetings, you just need time to work. And so, it's not really developing them, but it is allowing them to do their job when they're already time-crunched for everything. Melissa mirrored that philosophy regarding providing teachers with work time and added “I know you're professionals, and you're gonna work on things that need to be accomplished.” The principals also noted that teachers benefit from being allowed time away from their classrooms.

Hannah talked about the importance of teachers getting 15-minute breaks during teaching time and she offers to cover their classes to give them that time. Melissa mentioned that they advise their teachers to take sick days or mental health days so that they “have a chance to breathe.”

Ulga also talked about a specific teacher that benefitted from an extended amount of time off.

I said you need to take more mental health days. She took off 3 in a row, and I approved it. I even told my superintendent I just said, I'm gonna approve this teacher to take off more days than I probably typically would, but I can totally see her on the brink of wanting to throw this whole profession away and thankfully in her case, she came back, she finished the year strong.

Principals Thought that Relationship Building was Important for Resource Gain

The principals believed that teachers benefitted from engaging in the culture of their buildings and connecting with their colleagues. Hannah talked about creating a “family atmosphere” and Billy emphasized the importance of teachers knowing that “they are a member of this staff.” They also spoke about teachers needing to understand the mission of their building. Melissa said that teachers need to “feel like they have a purpose” and Hannah added “They need to feel that they are a part of something bigger than themselves.” Laura felt that it was important for teachers to feel like they are a part of the system right away.

We have a lot of protocols and systems that are just in place. And so, you know, whether it be a new teacher to our building or a new teacher in the practice, I think just getting them into the routines and understanding our systems and our protocols and why we do what we do is so important.

The principals believe that teachers need to participate in their school’s extra curricular activities to feel connected to their school communities. They talked about teachers needing to socialize in

non-professional ways such as eating together off of their school campuses, coming to school early to participate in breakfasts together, and attending staff holiday parties. The principals described how feeling connected to the building culture motivates teachers to stay at their buildings. Mary said, “There's gotta be a connection to that building. I think teachers fall in love with that, I noticed that those teachers don't usually quit.” Rita spoke about having very little turnover in her building because the teachers believed in “the culture of relatedness and purpose and believe in the mission and the vision of the school.” Ulga added to this by describing a shift in building culture helping to retain teachers.

It's gonna take all of us to turn this culture around. And if you don't like the feeling you get when you come in here, can you please join me in trying to change it? And amazingly, a lot of them bought in. So, I don't know how, but I do think that that's why I've had a fair share of brand new teachers and they've all stayed.

The principals talked about teachers using colleagues as resources by collaborating with and learning from each other. Andy talked about the importance of grade level teams having “great working relationships.” Mary said that having a supportive grade level team “helps release that tension” and that “having a sounding board with people that are trusted in the building and who know the kids you're talking about is very helpful.” Ulga spoke about teachers needing a positive grade level team atmosphere and teachers needing to “really feel connected to their team.” Billy believed that teachers need those team relationships to help them when they go through difficult times. “When your teams get along really well. and I think that’s what's absolutely necessary, because they'll lean on each other,” he said. They talked about mentor relationships being very important resources for teachers. Hannah always makes sure her teachers are set up with a mentor who can “answer all of those questions, and so they feel like

they have somebody they can go to.” Laura talked about the importance of teachers having a mentor to go to for help.

Building those intricate partnerships within themselves, I really encourage that so I pair them up so once I leave, they're not having to come to me every single time. I really want them to use each other, making sure they have another resource to tap into when they have a problem, or they need a solution, or they have questions.

Principals Believed that Teachers Gain Resources from Collective Efficacy

Billy and Andy talked about teachers benefiting from knowing what the school’s vision is and from believing in that vision. “You just see people thrive, and especially when you can create that collective efficacy,” Billy said. He talked about the importance of doing district-wide things with fidelity, understanding the why, and “not doing anything that contradicts those greater, higher goals than our own.” Andy added to this when he discussed the importance of teachers understanding the vision behind things like professional development (PD). I start with the learning intentions for our time together. This is how we know we're going to be successful. And then we take it a step further, this is how it's going to tie back to the vision,” he said. Billy also talked about the importance of teachers understanding “the why” behind professional development. He said, “There is a reason PD gets brought forward but do you have someone who knows the why and do you have people that can champion the why because that makes a difference.” Andy talked about providing support to teachers by pushing them to make decisions based on implementation plans put in place by the district. “If I notice that something is being implemented well or not being implemented, that provides me a frame of reference on a way that I can support a teacher,” he said. “We've clearly defined our values and are pushing the needle in the same direction,” Billy added. He explained in more detail.

You can have all the knowledge, but if you're not a virtuous person, it's almost for naught, right? And so the foundation of everything, the soil of all of our learning, is that we actually have a virtue system culture, so we work on understanding what the virtues are.

Principals Thought Teachers Gained Resources when Principals Aimed to Understand Teacher Perspective

Some principals discussed teachers feeling supported when they interact with a principal who understands and takes responsibility for the way they treat the teachers. “I never respond to a teacher with anger,” Rita said. Ulga explained how she has grown to not take teachers’ venting to her personally so that she can be a safe place for them to express their feelings.

I used to take it very personally when a teacher would be rude to me, or vent to me, when really, they just wanted to vent. I used to feel like, oh my gosh, am I not doing a good job? I've grown a lot. They just want to talk. You know, I'm not going to go home with this heavy on my heart. They don't hate me, they just want to talk about it.

Hannah said that she can also listen to teachers without becoming defensive with them. “I can listen to concerns without getting upset, or feeling like I'm being attacked,” she said. These principals also took accountability for their actions and adapted to the needs of their teachers.

Billy talked about the importance of understanding your own tendencies as a principal. “When I come in and just try and fix when people want me to listen, I can make it way messier,” he said.

Melissa said that teachers benefit from principals who say “Sorry. I messed up.” Andy talked about an interaction with teachers where he learned that he was not providing support in a way that was helpful to the teachers. He said, “when I step in to explain things at IEP’s, the special

education teachers are like we know how to do our jobs, you need to do yours. I wasn't aware that I was doing it."

Resource Gain was Experienced with Principals Providing Teachers Individualized Support

Some principals talked about the importance of understanding the individual teachers who work for them so that they can provide them support in the way that may work for that individual teacher. Hannah says the support she gives "just depends on everyone's personality." She said, "I kind of know how I can say certain things to people, and what they need." Melissa talked about the way she differentiates support when implementing changes.

I think as an administrator, you have to understand your people you're working with. A simple change could be a major thing for some of your staff and for other people, they're ready to say, what's step five? I'm ready to do that for them. So, I think you have to know who your people are.

Ulga said that teachers who take the curriculum literally need help to deviate from the instructions at times. "We have some really black and white teachers that are like, but this is what it says I have to get through. And I'm constantly saying, I get that but you don't have to get through it all," she said. Melissa talked about the importance of "knowing your teachers" and understanding their strengths and weaknesses. These principals also spoke about how the relationships they have with teachers affects the kind of support they give. Hannah explained this.

I know the people I can go up to and I can just be a straight shooter and be like that's something I'm noticing that's not really working and I can be very straight with them, because we have that kind of relationship, they know I'm coming from a good place.

Then there's others that I have to maybe like have you thought about this or this. I think it just depends on everyone's personality.

Melissa even makes sure that she pairs the right mentor with the right teacher based on personality so that the teacher can receive support in the way that works best for them. “An important job that you have is making sure that you match the right mentor with the teacher coming in and that's finding those personalities,” she said.

There were some themes that were clearly aligned with a particular Way of Knowing. Across teacher participants, resource loss and gain were perceived in specific ways by each Way of Knowing. For principals, teacher resource gain was perceived in different ways based on the principals’ Ways of Knowing. Table 4.3 illustrates which themes aligned clearly with each Way of Knowing. Although there was a principal that best aligned with the socializing Way of Knowing, there was not an emerging theme that aligned specifically with that principal’s responses. That principal’s responses are represented in the themes that emerged across multiple Ways of Knowing. Those themes are discussed in the paragraph following Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Way of Knowing Theme Alignment

Teacher Way of Knowing	Theme
Instrumental	Teacher gained security from principal’s clarity of expectations
Socializing	Teachers felt more withdrawn due to conflict with principal and a negative environment
	Teachers lost confidence due to corrective feedback and lack of affirmations from their principal
	Teachers gained confidence due to affirmation from the principal
Self-Authoring	Teachers losing feelings of agency from being dismissed by their principals
	Teachers gained confidence due to principals trusting their opinions
	Teachers who understood their principals’ perspectives felt less frustrated
Principal Way of Knowing	Theme
Instrumental	Principal thought teachers gained resources from systems created by concrete data

Self-Authoring	Principals believed that teachers gain resources from collective efficacy
Self-Transforming	Resource gain was experienced with principals providing teachers individualized support

There were several themes that were illustrated across several Ways of Knowing. teachers, the themes regarding resource loss that were illuminated across all Ways of Knowing were teachers feeling frustrated by a lack of behavior support from the principal and teachers felt overwhelmed by principals assigning tasks and scheduling meetings. Regarding resource gain, the themes that were highlighted across the Ways of Knowing were teachers gained resources when principals made time for them, and teachers felt relief when principals help them deal with student behaviors.

For principals, all themes regarding teacher resource loss were found across all Ways of Knowing. The themes included the overwhelming workload creates resource loss for teachers, teachers experience resource loss while being overwhelmed with student behaviors, increased stress creates resource loss for teachers, and teachers without relationship skills will experience resource loss. Regarding perception of teacher resource gain, the themes illustrated across all principals were professional development provides opportunities to help teachers gain resources by building confidence, principals believed that sharing power with teachers helps them gain feelings of autonomy, principals helped teachers gain resources through validation, appreciation, and positivity, principals thought teachers needed the resources of time, and principals thought that relationship building was important for resource gain.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study, highlighting the experiences of teachers and principals as they navigate stress within their professional roles. Through thematic analysis, several key patterns emerged that illustrate both the challenges teachers face and the resources

that support their ability to manage those challenges. Teachers described feeling stress due to a lack of assistance with student behavior and a lack of appreciation, trust, and respect from their principals. However, teachers also highlighted the critical role of supportive leadership, particularly principals who were present, affirming, and willing to advocate on their behalf. Similarly, for principals, findings emphasized the impact of chronic stressors such as student misbehavior and workload demands which contributed to teachers' ongoing resource depletion. They also felt that teachers lacked the skills and attitudes necessary to be successful in their roles. At the same time, principals identified important ways for them to help teachers gain resources including shared decision-making, mentorship, and strong connections within the school community that helped buffer the effects of stress.

The teachers and principals engaged in certain Ways of Knowing did share common themes regarding the perceptions of resource loss and gain and principal support. Instrumental teachers and principals emphasized stress being caused by chaos and the unexpected and viewed support as participating in a clear system with clear expectations. The socializing teachers and principals spoke about stress related to intrapersonal conflict leading to emotional exhaustion and viewed positive, affirming work relationships and interactions with principals as means of support. The self-authoring teachers felt stress when they felt disrespected by their principals and felt relief when their principals allowed them the freedom to have authority in their classrooms while the self-transforming principals talked about the need to provide individualized support as a vital way to support teachers.

The findings in this chapter provide a foundation for the discussion in Chapter 5, where these results are interpreted in relation to the COR theory, the Ways of Knowing framework, and existing research.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. The interpretation of findings is organized by the two research questions and highlights patterns that emerged. These findings were interpreted through the lens of Drag-Severson's Ways of Knowing and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, providing insight into teachers as adult learners and how that influences how stress is understood and experienced in elementary schools.

The study explored these research questions:

RQ 1. How do elementary school teachers from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perceived resource loss and gain in relation to principal's support?

RQ 2. How do elementary school principals from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perception of teacher's resource loss and gain?

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question explored how teachers, operating from varying cognitive developments, perceive resource loss and gain in relation to their experiences of principal support. Interpreting these findings through the Ways of Knowing and COR theory provides insight into how teachers' cognitive development shape both what they perceive as stressful and what they view as supportive. Common sources of resource loss and gain were identified within the participant responses, however, the meaning made from these experiences varied based on teachers' Ways of Knowing. This section interprets these patterns by examining how teachers at varying levels of cognitive development experience resource depletion and make sense of principal support to gain resources.

Across the Ways of Knowing, resource loss was primarily associated with student behavior, workload demands, and lack of perceived principal support, while resource gain was associated with affirmation, trust, and accessibility from principals. Various Ways of Knowing impact how an adults think, hear, and understand information and teachers engaged in each Way of Knowing make meaning of principal support in different ways and may become frustrated when they do not personally feel supported (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). In this study, the participants felt supported by various types of principal support based on their cognitive development.

Instrumental Teacher: Resource Loss and Gain as Levels of Preparedness

Hallie, an instrumental teacher, primarily experienced stress because of uncertainty, highlighting resource loss as unclear expectations and unpredictable environments. This is consistent with research that states that instrumental teachers can become frustrated when principals ask them to make decisions when there is no clear answer (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). From a COR perspective, Hallie was experiencing psychological stress when her principal failed to tell her what was expected of her and neglected to mention certain end of the year duties were approaching. Psychological stress is defined as “a reaction to the environment in which there is threat of net loss of resources, actual net loss of resources, or lack of resource gain following the investment of resources” (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000, p. 287). In Hallie’s case, she experienced stress due to the threat of not being prepared for the future or not knowing what was expected of her.

For this instrumental teacher, principal support was most effective when it provided clarity through structured communication and concrete examples. Resource gain occurred when her principal provided clear expectations and specific examples, allowing her to feel secure and

prepared. This data aligns with Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano's 2016 research where they found that teachers engaged in this Way of Knowing see situations as right or wrong and do not want to get caught not following the rules. According to COR theory, Hallie's principal gave her a resource in the form of security which aided in reducing the threat of uncertainty and acted as a buffer for her stress. This suggests that for teachers who are engaged in the instrumental Way of Knowing, stress is aligned with feeling overwhelmed due to unpredictability and support can focus on clarity and structure to buffer against future resource loss.

Socializing Teachers: Resource Loss and Gain as Levels of Relatedness

In this study, the socializing teachers, Molly, Nelly, Pat, and Tammy described resource loss in more relational and emotional terms, particularly in response to corrective feedback, lack of affirmation, and conflict with their principals. According to Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016), socializing learners often view interpersonal conflict as a threat to the self. In alignment, these teachers' stress was increased by perceived negative social interactions. This caused these teachers to withdraw from their principals, co-workers, and students, making it difficult to gain resources, such as relatedness, from those relationships. In line with current research, when leaders do not support employee psychological need satisfaction in relation to relatedness, employees become frustrated (Jungert et al., 2022), just as these socializing teachers described. These teachers talked about these perceived threats leading them to feel disconnected, which according to COR theory, can cut individuals off from important social resources such as relatedness (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000).

Resource gain for socializing teachers was aligned with positive relationships, emotional validation, and a sense of belonging. Socializing knowers highly value acceptance from others (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016), so principal behaviors such as offering

encouragement and providing positive feedback were critical in restoring emotional resources. Jungert et al. (2022) found that when workers feel cared for and have gratifying interactions with their leaders, their psychological need for relatedness will be met. As COR theory highlights, social support is a pivotal resource that can aid in the process of coping with stress (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). These findings suggest that socializing teachers interpret workplace experiences in terms of relationships and that emotional support is important for their resource protection and gain.

Self-Authoring Teachers: Resource Loss and Gain as Levels of Autonomy

Self-authoring teachers, Callie, Kat, and Annie experienced resource loss when their professional autonomy was undermined. As Drago-Severson et al. (2013a) states, self-authoring adults may feel frustrated when they are not included in the feedback process or decision making. For these teachers, feelings of being second-guessed or dismissed by principals contributed to frustration and disengagement. Studies have found that a lack of autonomy from principals can lead to frustration in the workplace (Chang et al., 2022; Franco et al., 2022). This can leave teachers feeling tension, frustration, and anxiety as they feel the constraints of their decision-making and control (Franco et al., 2022). In COR theory, in response to such stress, individuals preserve their current resources and at the same time, pursue new ones. Whether successful or not, their attempts would be resource depleting and emotionally taxing (Hsieh et al., 2021). The teachers described feeling frustrated by attempting multiple times to give input to their principals. When these attempts would fail, resource depletion would occur over time.

Resource gain occurred for the self-authoring teachers when principals asked for their input and allowed them to have authority in their classrooms. Adults with a self-authoring Way of Knowing operate based on their own values and often welcome opportunities to express their

opinions (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016), so these teachers benefitted from principals who trusted their expertise. Studies have found that teacher autonomy has been shown to increase work engagement and feelings of meaningfulness (Chang et al., 2022). Specifically, studies that interpreted levels of autonomy through the COR theory indicated the importance of principals emphasizing collaboration and delegation to help teachers gain resources that will ultimately lead to high work satisfaction (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025). Autonomy can create high levels of self-efficacy (Parfyonova et al., 2019) which is a building block of resilience and can aid in kickstarting a resource gain spiral (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000), helping these teachers to buffer future stress.

Another pattern found within the self-authoring teachers was that they demonstrated an ability to consider perspectives other than their own, which appeared to buffer some of their stress. The Ways of Knowing is a cognitive development theory that assumes meaning making systems can grow and develop over time (Drago-Severson, 2016). The more perspective a person can have, the better they are able to manage the complexity of relationships and learning. These self-authoring teachers' responses showed the ability to see the perspective of their principals when they talked about being understanding of some of their stressful situations because their principals were dealing with challenges of their own. Being able to understand their principals' points of view alleviated some of their frustration as they accepted some situations that they understood they had no control over.

Cognitive Development Influence on Principal Support

Across teachers, they perceived resource gain when the support they received aligned with their cognitive development. As Drago-Severson et al. (2013a) discusses, when teachers' mental capabilities match what leaders are asking of them to do, alignment occurs. This

alignment will allow a leader to best support a teacher's practices as it makes the support more relevant and actionable to the teacher. This was illustrated in the findings as the teachers operating from various modes of cognitive development perceived support in different ways.

Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) found that principals can best support instrumental learners by making concrete suggestions and step-by-step guidelines for improving practices. Hallie, operating from an instrumental Way of Knowing, felt very supported by her principal when she provided her specific says to prepare for each week and with concrete examples of what parents might ask at conferences. The socializing teachers did not perceive support in the way the instrumental teachers did. According to Drago-Severson et al. (2013a) principals can support socializing teachers by acknowledging their accomplishments and validating their feelings. The socializing teachers in this study described feeling supported when their principals gave them positive affirmations and took time to listen to their feelings, especially when they were upset or stressed. Self-authoring teachers did not feel supported when they were told explicitly what to do by their principals as Hallie, an instrumental teacher did, and they did not feel as much need for affirmations as the socializing teachers did. To the self-authoring teachers, support was felt when their principals trusted their opinions and allowed them to have autonomy in their classrooms which aligns with Drago-Severson et al. (2013a)'s work which states that principals can provide support to self-authoring teachers by inviting them to make their own decisions and collaborate on initiatives. All teachers, at times, felt more confident and secure based on their principals' support, but that support looked different for each teacher based on their cognitive development, indicating that it may be beneficial for a leader to take an employee's cognitive development into consideration when providing support.

Research Question 2

The second research question examined how principals, operating from different Ways of Knowing, perceive teacher stress and support in terms of resource loss and gain. Interpreting these findings through the Ways of Knowing and COR theory illuminated that principals' cognitive developments shape what they thought teachers needed to gain resources to do their job well. The principals' varying modes of cognitive development influenced whether they viewed teacher resource loss and gain in relation to tasks, relationships, unification, or individuality.

Instrumental Principal: Resource Loss and Gain as Systematic

Laura, operating from an instrumental Way of Knowing, primarily viewed teacher stress as being overwhelmed by tasks. According to Drago-Severson et al. (2013b) an instrumental leader assumes that if policies are followed, learners will be successful. In line with this, Laura emphasized procedures and compliance. She thought that teachers gained resources by participating in clear systems and with the removal of barriers to teacher task completion. From a COR perspective, this reflects a focus on resources such as time and energy. To Laura, participating in clear procedures saved teacher time and energy that could be spent figuring out how to complete tasks or making decisions on their own. In their 2019 study, Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano found that principals in the instrumental Way of Knowing were effective in finding resources for teachers but were not as successful in learning about others' ideas and experiences. This was reflected when Laura mentioned that the best way she can support teachers is to make copies or resources for them before the year begins to save them time in the future, but did not mention learning about her teachers to see what way she might support them.

Drago-Severson et al. (2013b) found that a principal in the instrumental Way of Knowing believes there are right and wrong ways to address challenges. This was highlighted when Laura described having her teachers write all their excuses on paper, throw them away, and focus on the data in front of them. In Laura's responses, emotional and relational resources were emphasized less, suggesting that these forms of resource loss and gain may not have been recognized by her. Support also tended to be aimed at resolving immediate issues. While this approach may produce short-term resource gain in the form of systematic clarity, it may not address deeper conditions contributing to ongoing resource loss. According to COR theory, reactive coping in stressful situations will not trigger resource gain, but investing in resources will help an individual gain more resources in the future (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). As a result, gains may be temporary if underlying sources of stress remain unaddressed.

Socializing Principals: Resource Loss and Gain as Relational

Socializing principal, Mary, interpreted teacher stress as relational, emphasizing the importance of relationship dynamics. Resource loss was seen as a diminished interpersonal connection or relational strain. Mary's responses showed an attentiveness to teacher emotions and a tendency to consider them when making decisions. Because of this, resource gain surfaced as positive interactions and emotional support as key resources to buffer stress. Drago-Severson et al. (2013b) found that socializing leaders may be focused on teacher feelings and offer high amounts of praise and recognition of their teachers as a primary form of support. This aligns with COR theory's social resources, including validation, and feelings of connection. Mary provided resources through encouraging her teachers. It also aligns with research stating that person-centered approaches to leadership have a positive impact on the need for relatedness and on teacher well-being (Haw et al., 2023; Maas et al., 2022; Schoch et al., 2021).

However, attempts to keep increase teacher morale may have limited teachers' abilities to grow professionally. A 2020 study by Drago-Severson et al. studied principals to explore how their Ways of Knowing influenced how they helped teachers grow. The study found that principals who were engaged in the socializing Way of Knowing were hesitant to confront teachers about their growth even when they viewed it as necessary because of the empathy they felt for the teachers. Mary felt that even when a teacher needed to grow in an area, she thought the teacher benefited more from positive affirmation than corrective feedback. Her perception of teacher resource gain could be seen as short term focused and lacking attention to help teachers gain resources, such as resilience, to buffer against future resource loss.

Self-Authoring Principals: Resource Loss and Gain as Levels of Collective Effervescence

Billy and Andy, self-authoring principals, thought that teachers gained resources by not only gaining skills from professional development opportunities, but from understanding why developing professionally is important and from buying into the values of their school. They felt that teachers lost the most resources when they did not buy into the value system or vision of their schools. From a COR theory perspective, relatedness frustration develops when social alienation and exclusion occur, ultimately producing feelings of loneliness (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). It is also in line with a study by Richards et al. (2018) which found that principals spreading a clear, common philosophy throughout the building also helped to create a community driven environment. They felt that when teachers did not fully buy-in to the school's values, they were not able to gain a sense of belonging. These self-authoring principals talked extensively of the importance of teachers understanding the bigger picture of their jobs and of teachers gaining confidence, clarity, and motivation from that understanding. They both

described very clear depictions of each of their visions for their schools. Self-authoring leaders will often have strong beliefs about how to support and improve teacher practices and will make suggestions to teachers based on their own beliefs (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). They talked about how teachers who engage in professional development and especially in understanding why professional development is important, increase their self-efficacy. This is in line with studies on self-efficacy coming from leaders satisfying teacher need for competence. According to Parfyonova et al. (2019), competence is satisfied when individuals expand their expertise in their field, creating higher levels of self-efficacy. When the competence need is met, there is an increase in teacher self-efficacy which makes it more likely for teachers to obtain career satisfaction (Xu et al., 2022).

Andy and Billy's perception of teacher resource gain also reflected their levels of cognitive development. Self-authoring principals operate based on their own internal values and focus on how individual visions do or do not align with their own values and the values of the institution (Drago-Severson et al., 2020). Andy and Billy's view of teacher resource gain was based on whether the teachers were meeting their expectations by participating in the school vision or not. From a COR perspective, when principals provide resources to teachers through organizational trust and professional development opportunities, teachers use those resources to gain even more resources, helping to prevent future resource loss during their time working in the organization (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025; Liu et al., 2021). For Andy and Billy, teacher success was paved in collective co-efficiency, based on what they felt was an effective vision. From the lens of Ways of Knowing, self-authoring leaders evaluate challenges based on their inner judgment and have not yet developed the capacity to reflect on their own value system (Drago-Severson et al., 2013b). In a 2019 study by Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano, it was

found that self-authoring principals took strong stands on behalf of the initiative but often did not include their teachers in their vision. This indicates that without the cognitive ability to reflect on their own values, self-authoring principals may struggle to help teachers gain resources in ways that the teachers specifically perceive as supportive rather than what they, themselves, perceive as supportive.

Self-Transforming Principals: Resource Loss and Gain as Levels of Individual Support

The principals engaged in the self-transforming Way of Knowing, Melissa, Rita, and Ulga viewed teacher resource loss and gain as personal to each teacher. This view is in alignment with COR theory which assumes that resources can include anything individuals find personally valuable in their work environment (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). They discussed differing teacher needs when implementing changes in the school. According to Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2019) self-transforming principals were able to see the interconnected pieces of implementing change. This was highlighted in the study as these principals demonstrated an understanding of which teachers would gain resources from the autonomy to implement the change right away, while other teachers needed the resource of security from more structured support before implementing the changes. According to COR theory, psychosocial strain that results from depletion of personal coping resources in the workplace (McGeary & McGeary, 2012). Again, these self-authoring principals demonstrated an understanding of resource loss being tied to each specific teacher when they spoke about the importance of getting to know each teacher in their building to find the best way to help buffer their stress.

These self-transforming principals talked about helping teachers gain resources by allowing them to be a part of school discussions and decision making. Self-transforming leaders

often lead with collaboration and often hold open ended discussions with teachers as a means of support (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). They understood the value of not being the only voice in the room. Studies that utilized COR theory to look at principal management style found that principals that allow teachers to have more power in collaboration and decision making have been shown to increase teacher resources and increase job engagement and satisfaction (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025). This also aligns with a study by Richards et al. (2018) where it was found that when a principal took their feedback, they felt supported and nurtured. These self-authoring principals also mentioned the importance of listening to teachers without judgment, anger, or defensiveness. They felt that this helped teachers feel less stress and helped teachers feel understood and valued. As Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) explains, self-transforming adults are committed to self-exploration and view conflict to enhance their own thinking. These principals said that they used to take teacher conflict personally, but they now see it to learn and grow. As leaders develop in their Ways of Knowing, they may be more equipped to adapt to the interpersonal challenges of leadership (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). That was illustrated in the self-transforming principals' comments as they showed an understanding of teachers' resource loss and gain being deeply personal, the importance of finding out what those valuable resources are, and handling teacher resource loss with open-mindedness and understanding.

COR Theory

COR theory looks at stress and resilience through the lens of loss and gain spirals, making it an effective theory for understanding the process of developing stress as well as gaining coping strategies (Hobfoll, 1998). In this study, the teachers described their resource loss in relation to the amount of stress that they were experiencing from certain situations. They

described that when they were experiencing this stress, they were no longer able to do their jobs effectively. This can be seen as a loss spiral in COR theory (Hobfoll, 1998). Principal support acted as a buffer for teacher stress and a way for the teachers to gain more individual resources to buffer future stress. This section highlights how teachers perceived their resource loss and gain through levels of stress and principal support.

Teacher Stress as Resource Loss

The findings of this study indicate that teacher stress is best understood as a process of ongoing resource depletion, particularly in relation to emotional energy, time, and professional capacity. According to COR theory, stress is understood as a reaction to resource loss, the perceived threat of resource loss, or the inability to invest in resource gain (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). Looking at teacher stress through this lens revealed that the stress is not only due to isolated challenges, but rather due to the process of ongoing resource depletion. The participants described their stress emerging when resources, particularly conditions, personal, and energy resources, depleted or were not able to be replenished over time. In COR theory, in response to such stress, individuals preserve their current resources and at the same time, pursue new ones. Whether successful or not, their attempts are resource-depleting and emotionally taxing (Hsieh et al., 2021). The participants spoke about feeling emotionally drained in their work environments. According to McGeary and McGeary (2012), if demands exceed resources, individuals are likely to experience negative consequences leading to emotional exhaustion, a key component of burnout.

A pattern that emerged across the findings centered around teachers' negative interpretations of principal interactions. All teachers in this study described feeling unsupported by their principal regarding assistance with student behavior. Hallie, an instrumental teacher,

talked about feeling stressed when her principal was unclear with expectations of her. The socializing teachers spoke about their principals not giving them enough positive affirmation, and the self-authoring teachers discussed their principals not respecting them as professionals. These experiences point to a perceived loss of environmental condition resources, specifically supportive leadership and relational trust. Environmental conditions heavily influence resource losses and gains and may obstruct or impoverish an individual's resource reservoir (Chen et al., 2015). These perceived interactions also appeared to deplete personal resources, including self-efficacy and emotional confidence which are, according to COR theory, building blocks of resilience and pivotal resources that aid in the process of coping with stress (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). The loss of these resources is especially consequential because resources do not occur separately but instead tend to aggregate and create and sustain one another (Hobfoll & Wells, 1998) and if individuals have a low number of resources in their reservoir or they feel that their resources are threatened, their stress increases, making it more difficult to gain future resources (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). These teachers perceived their resources as being threatened due to the conditions in their work environments, making it difficult for them to gain future resources.

Teachers' responses to these conditions further illustrate principles of COR theory, particularly the concept of resource conservation. According to McGeary and McGeary (2012) once employees are emotionally exhausted, they are less likely to reinvest their remaining resources. Instead, they become defensive to protect the small number of resources that they have left. Participants, particularly the socializing teachers, described engaging in self-isolation as a means of coping with stress, withdrawing from or limiting interactions with colleagues and students to avoid additional resource loss. From a COR perspective, this behavior can be understood as a protective strategy aimed at preserving remaining personal and emotional

resources. As Hobfoll and Shirom (2000) stated, when faced with the choice of sharing or conserving resources, the individual will choose to conserve. However, while self-isolation may reduce immediate exposure to stressors, it may also lessen social support which is important for resource gain. As a result, this coping mechanism may contribute to increased stress over time by limiting access to these replenishing social resources.

These findings suggest that teacher stress is best understood as an ongoing process of resource loss that occurs across multiple areas. The teachers described experiencing diminished emotional capacity and working within environments where opportunities for resource gain were limited. These findings add to understandings of teacher stress by emphasizing the dynamics of stress and resource loss. Rather than viewing stress as resulting from isolated challenges, this study highlights how stress develops through resource depletion, protection, and an inability to recover. Interpreting teacher experiences through COR theory highlights the dynamics of stress in teachers and the importance of fostering environments in which key resources are consistently accessible.

Principal Support as Resource Gain

For these teachers, principal support served as a source of resource gain, helping to buffer stress and restore resources. Based on COR theory, providing resources to employees not only increases employee resource pools but can also interrupt resource loss and create a gain cycle (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). This also aligns with a study by Westman et al. (2004), where it was found that employees' resources are harnessed with the intention of building further resources, so when organizational leaders provide resources to their employees, their employees gain long term benefits. This study found that, particularly for socializing teachers, affirmation and appreciation from principals were among the most impactful forms of support. They described

increased confidence and improved emotional well-being when principals provided them with positive feedback. According to COR theory, these affirmations function as psychological resources that replenish confidence and motivation (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). This also aligns with Edú-Valsania et al.'s (2022) research which found that a leader acknowledging employee success can increase motivation and feelings of value in employees which can increase an employee's self-efficacy.

For self-authoring teachers, trust and professional autonomy emerged as essential resources. When these teachers felt trusted by their principals, they reported greater confidence and a stronger sense of agency. This is consistent with COR theory, as autonomy can be understood as a resource that enhances control and reduces stress. When principals provide resources to teachers through organizational trust and distributed leadership, teachers use those resources to gain even more resources, helping to prevent future resource loss during their time working in the organization (Cai et al., 2022; Fan & Chu, 2025; Hsieh et al., 2024). In addition, research shows that increased teacher autonomy has a positive impact on both teachers and the educational institutions they work for (Chang et al., 2022; Dilekçi, 2022; Ertürk, 2023). The self-authoring teachers in this study described their feelings of confidence and success when their principals listened to them, trusted their opinions, and allowed them to have autonomy in their classrooms.

Additionally, principals who made themselves accessible and built personal connections with teachers contributed to their resource gain. These relationships provided emotional support and a sense of security, which helped buffer stress. This is in alignment with research regarding person-centered approaches such as need-supportive leadership, transformational leadership, and collegial support having a positive impact on the need for relatedness and on teacher well-being

(Haw et al., 2023; Maas et al., 2022; Schoch et al., 2021). All teachers in this study emphasized the importance of feeling understood, reinforcing the role of relational leadership in resource replenishment. This finding is like the teachers in a study by Richards et al. (2018) experiencing low levels of stress due to the nurturing and positive environments created by their principals. The teachers in this study and the study by Richards et al. (2018) explained that when a principal listened to them and took their feedback, they felt supported and nurtured, emphasizing the importance of principals who provide these types of environmental resources to their teachers.

Misalignment of Cognitive Development

Looking at the stress mentioned by the teachers through the lens of cognitive development illuminates the idea that the teachers' Ways of Knowing may have been misaligned with the support that their principals were attempting to provide them. According to Perry (1970) adult development begins with the simplest forms in which a person views the world in right and wrong, good and bad, and ends with a person being able to view a complex world in which that person has contingent knowledge and relative values. In position one, basic dualism, the individual sees only right and wrong as the world is divided into absolutes (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Drago-Severson (2009) relates this to adults engaging in the instrumental Way of Knowing where they operate from a place of self-interest, wanting their needs met and not having the capacity to think in generalizations from one context to another. Hallie, a teacher engaged in the instrumental Way of Knowing, felt stress when expectations from her principal were unclear and or when he would give her a list of tasks without explanation. Subject-object balance refers to how much adults can see and manage and how much they can't see or have a perspective on (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Hallie, as an instrumental knower, may not have had the capacity to take ownership of those tasks or find clarity with them on her

own. Her principal may have been trying to support her by providing her with a list of tasks, but she may not have been cognitively ready to handle completing those tasks with fidelity on her own.

Adults have varying mental capacities to handle interactions with others. This can create a misalignment between what is being asked of an adult and that adult's mental capacity to handle it (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016) found that a mismatch occurs when the match between what is asked of teachers and what the teachers are internally capable of does not align. The socializing adult learner has gained more perspective than the instrumental learner, but greatly values acceptance and approval from others. They can understand that their desires differ from others, but also feel responsible for others' feelings and hold others responsible for their own (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). The socializing teachers in this study felt increased stress by receiving corrective feedback from their principal without a balance of positive feedback. They talked extensively about taking this feedback from their principals very personally and how it often ruined their days and made them feel less confident. These teachers had not yet developed self-authorship where they could view corrective feedback as an opportunity for growth, but were still cognitively in need of approval from their principals. These principals may have been attempting to help these teachers grow professionally, but these teachers may not have been ready to receive that feedback in that way.

Teachers engaged in each Way of Knowing make meaning of principal support in different ways and may become frustrated when they do not personally feel supported (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). Support was felt personally by each teacher as their Way of Knowing differed as well as what resources they valued most. The instrumental teacher felt supported when her principal provided her with concrete instructions on how to handle challenges, but the

self-authoring teachers preferred for their principals to listen to them about how they thought challenges should be handled. This indicates that a principal providing support by explaining exactly how to handle a challenge may help one teacher gain resources and may cause frustration and resource loss in another. A misalignment will occur if a leader expects a teacher to immediately view the world in a new way or by asking more of the teacher than the teacher is mentally capable of handling (Love & Guthrie, 1999). These findings indicate that there may have been misalignment of cognitive development between how the principals were attempting to provide support for resource gain and what teachers could receive in those ways.

Implications for Practice

The findings in this study have important implications for the field of education. They highlight the need for principals to understand and respond to teachers as adult learners and for them to understand their own cognitive development as well. The study illustrated how teachers perceive support differently based on their level of cognitive development. Therefore, a standardized approach to teacher support may be insufficient for each teacher's well-being and professional growth. Through understanding teachers as adult learners with differing Ways of Knowing, principals can differentiate support to strengthen teachers' cognitive capacities and growth. Principals understanding their own Ways of Knowing can also be more reflective about the types of support they typically give and allow them to see areas for their own growth in leadership. These implications will strengthen principals as adult leaders and teachers as adult learners.

Principals Differentiating Support Based on Ways of Knowing

Adults must be met with support where they are developmentally and gently challenged to grow further. To help mitigate support that is misaligned with a learner's cognitive

development, Kegan believed that environments need to be equally as responsive to an adult's developing needs in relation to support and challenges by creating a holding environment (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). For example, Drago-Severson et al (2013a) discusses instrumental knowers being very concerned with following rules. Hallie, an instrumental knower, felt stress when she looked unprepared in the eye of her students' parents. This indicates that a principal can support teachers who are engaged in the instrumental Way of Knowing by clearly explaining rules and expectations so that these teachers feel secure in their actions. Socializing teachers feel responsible for others' feelings and hold others responsible for their own (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). The socializing teachers in this study sought the approval of their principals and wanted to feel validated in their feelings. A principal can support these teachers by taking time to have conversations with them about their feelings and reassuring them with positive comments. Self-transforming knowers are primarily concerned with their own competence and performance (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). The self-authoring teachers in this study felt supported when their teaching expertise was recognized. Principals can provide support to these teachers by inviting them to make their own decisions and collaborate on initiatives.

Principals have many opportunities to provide support to teachers in their buildings such as guiding them through new district initiatives and helping them gain skills in classroom management and instruction. The findings of this study indicate that principals can differentiate these types of support based on teacher cognitive development to provide the best support for each individual teacher. Findings indicate that a principal can help an instrumental knower implement new district initiatives by explaining step by step what the initiative is and how they can implement it in their classrooms. They can check in with these teachers periodically to help

them feel secure in the transition. Principals can help socializing teachers by providing an abundance of positive feedback as they implement the changes and by checking in with them about how they are feeling about the changes. Principals can help self-authoring teachers implement change by asking them their opinions on how the changes could be implemented and by allowing them to have the autonomy to make those choices in their classrooms. As a part of their jobs, principals observe teachers while they teach to help them grow professionally. Findings indicate that principals can support instrumental teachers by providing them with clear expectations before the observations even begin so that they feel secure in following those expectations while the observation is occurring. To support socializing teachers, principals can provide corrective feedback after an observation, but can balance that with positive feedback and validation. They can also check in with a socializing teacher's feelings about how they feel the observation went. Principals can support self-authoring teachers by collaborating with them before the observation to ask how they can best be supported in the observation and by taking their views into consideration during post-observation conversations.

As the findings indicate that teachers perceive support in varying ways based on their cognitive development, principals can best support teachers by understanding each teacher by discovering their Way of Knowing. This can create an adult learning environment where the teachers feel welcome and acknowledged in their current Way of Knowing while the leaders are also guiding the teachers on their paths to developing new Ways of Knowing. For this to occur, first, principals will need to gain an understanding of the Ways of Knowing. To accomplish this, district leaders can provide workshops or training to building principals on the Ways of Knowing and on how to use the theory to help know how to differentiate support to teachers. Next, principals can benefit from understanding how their teachers learn and feel supported based on

their cognitive development. This can be done by paying close attention to how teachers in their building interact with others and respond to challenges to gain an even deeper understanding of teachers' cognitive development, principals can provide in-services to teachers where they can explore the Ways of Knowing and reflect on what they need, as learners, to feel supported and grow.

When a principal understands where each of their teachers are in their cognitive development, they may better be able to support them in a way that they are able to receive effectively. This way, leaders can shape their building environments to best support teachers and help them grow. Adults must be met with support where they are developmentally and gently challenged to grow further (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a). To accomplish this, principals can acknowledge teachers' current ways of meaning making while at the same time promoting the development of the next higher order of knowing. For example, to support instrumental learners, principals can provide step-by-step guidelines for instruction and to help them grow professionally by encouraging them to look beyond right answers and toward new ways of thinking (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). Principals can make sure to acknowledge socializing teachers' accomplishments and feelings, while also encouraging them to share their professional opinions without judgement. They can support self-authoring teachers by inviting them to collaborate on solutions and at the same time, help them grow by encouraging them to investigate new philosophies and ways of teaching (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016).

Understanding the Ways of Knowing may assist leaders in not labeling teachers based solely on their behaviors (Drago-Severson, 2009) and may help them to understand their perspectives on their experiences. When principals understand who their teachers are as adult

learners, they will be better able to help them retain their resources as well as gain resources to help buffer future stress. For example, if a principal's goal is to help their teachers gain confidence, different approaches may be more successful for different teachers based on where they reside cognitively. An instrumental learner feels more confident when their principal helps them feel prepared for upcoming challenges. A socializing learner feels more confident when their principal praises them and a self-transforming learner gains confidence when their principals value their opinions and expertise. If principals want to instill confidence in their teachers so that they are better able to do their jobs, they may need to differentiate their support based on an understanding of each teacher's cognitive development.

Principals also need to be aware of which resources teachers deem most valuable based on their Way of Knowing. To an instrumental teacher, feeling prepared for challenges helps conserve energy to buffer stress. When socializing teachers feel appreciated and encouraged by their principals, they will not spend extra energy seeking their approval. When principals provide trust and autonomy to self-authoring teachers, they feel more motivated to take risks and face challenges. Using Drago-Severson's Ways of Knowing, principals can build a bridge between a teacher's current perspective and a broader perspective and way of viewing the world (Love & Guthrie, 1999). When principals understand who their teachers are as adult learners, they can find the most effective way to provide them support and help them grow.

Teachers and Principals Using Ways of Knowing as a Reflective Practice

Teachers benefit from understanding themselves as adult learners. Resources loss and gain perception is felt personally by each teacher. While interacting with a work environment, individuals must invest time and energy to acquire individual resources to build reservoirs needed for buffering future resource loss (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). The more individual

resource energy used, the more work-related stress is likely to occur. Through understanding their own Ways of Knowing, teachers can see what specifically causes them to expend time and energy at work and what alleviates their stress. When they gain this understanding, they will be able to see patterns in themselves and be able to ask for support from their principals in more specific ways. Understanding their own Way of Knowing may also allow them to see where their areas for growth are. Ways of Knowing is a developmental theory in that it assumes our meaning making systems can grow and develop over time. If teachers can see the layers of the Ways of Knowing, they can better understand where they can grow as learners in their professional environment.

Principals who understand their own cognitive development can be more reflective about how they tend to provide support to teachers based on their own Way of Knowing. An instrumental leader assumes that if policies are followed, learners will be successful. They may have difficulty identifying with teachers' perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2016). In this study, the instrumental principal tended to provide support by making sure every teacher knew exactly how to do their job based on common procedures in a unified system. Instrumental principals could benefit from understanding why they tend to provide support in the way that they do and to open their eyes to new ways of providing support based on what their teachers need. Socializing leaders may have difficulty making policy decisions or dealing with teacher conflict on their own (Drago-Severson, 2016). If socializing principals understand that they may tend to avoid tough conversations with teachers, they may work on growing toward providing constructive feedback so that teachers can grow professionally. Self-authoring leaders are concerned primarily with their own competence and values and may not yet have the capacity to understand perspectives that differ from their own (Drago-Severson, 2016). By understanding their own Way of

Knowing, self-authoring principals could understand that having a more open mind to teacher opinions' might help their teachers feel confident and might improve their organizations as a whole and that their tendency to assert their values on their teachers may be causing frustration to some teachers. They also may be able to see how their expectations that their teachers live up to their standard right away may be overwhelming to some teachers who are not cognitively ready for that type of commitment as what a leader may view as an effective supportive strategy may feel overwhelming to a learner (Drago-Severson et al., 2013a).

The Ways of Knowing centers around what individuals can have perspective on and what they are unable to see about themselves or others (Drago-Severson, 2016). The more perspective a person can have, the better they are able to manage the complexity of relationships and learning. If leaders understand their own cognitive development through learning about their own Way of Knowing, they can see more clearly their patterns of providing support to their employees and gain a deeper understanding how to support the employees. They can also see a clear picture of areas for growth in their cognitive development so that they can continue to gain perspective and grow as leaders.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this research was conducted on teachers and principals, leaders and employees in other workplaces could also benefit from understanding leader and employee Ways of Knowing and what influence that may have on resource loss and gain perceptions. There are many other occupations where leaders provide support to employees to help them learn and grow professionally. This study could be conducted with any work environment where leaders are helping adults learn and grow within their work environment. Although this study represented participants from 14 different cities, all participants were employed in Kansas. Studies that have

a larger group of participants from a variety of geographic areas might illuminate different patterns that may be present in various occupational organizations. Studies could include participants from across the country or the world.

This study was only able to capture where these adults were, cognitively, at one time. Longitudinal studies could be utilized in the future to explore how adults' cognitive abilities develop over time and that development may be affected by leadership support. This type of study could also explore how employees who shift in their Way of Knowing may experience stress and support in different ways on their cognitive development journey. A researcher could conduct a study on employees and the way their cognitive development may influence their stress. They could do this by having the leaders and employees across geographic areas attend a workshop on the Ways of Knowing as a self-reflective tool. A questionnaire could then be given to the group to gauge their stress level over a six-month period to see if the reflective tool had any influence on their stress levels.

Conclusion

This study explored adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. COR theory was utilized as a lens to explore the stress dynamics of the teachers and to highlight which specific resources each teacher valued most. This study also aimed to illuminate which resources certain principals felt were the most important for teachers to gain to buffer their stress. The Ways of Knowing were used as a lens to look at how these teachers and principals were perceiving these stress dynamics and how principals were providing support to teachers based on their Way of Knowing. Together, these theories provided a context for exploring how employees perceive support based on their Way of Knowing, how misaligned support can lead to stress and resource loss, and how aligned support can lead to resource gain.

This study found that each teachers' Way of Knowing influenced the way they viewed work stress in relation to resource loss and gain support and influenced how principals chose to provide support to their teachers. Instrumental teachers and principals were focused on consistent systems and concrete instructions providing a sense of security to buffer stress. Socializing teachers and principals viewed stress as relational and thought that positivity and encouragement was the most effective way to alleviate stress. Self-Authoring teachers and principals felt deeply that they knew what was right and true and felt that if others listened to and respected them, they would feel less stress. The self-transforming principals viewed teacher stress as deeply personal and best buffered by providing individualized support. An important finding was the misalignment that occurred when teachers' Ways of Knowing did not align with their principals' way of providing support. When this occurred, teachers' stress increased and their capacity to do their jobs began to deplete. Conversely, teachers felt supported when their principals provided them with support that aligned with their cognitive development. This indicates a need for leaders to gain an understanding of adult development theory to better understand where their employees are cognitively so that they may provide support in a way that they perceive as supportive as well as gently encourage their cognitive and professional growth.

Looking at employee stress and leader support through the lenses of COR theory and the Ways of Knowing illuminated the ways in which employees value specific resources and the way leaders tend to view types of support they feel are most affective for employees. This study emphasized the COR assumption that resources are deeply personal and vary in production and value among different individuals. Each participants Way of Knowing was clearly exemplified in the way they experienced stress and support in the workplace. These findings indicate the need for leaders to understand that their employees are engaging in various Ways of Knowing that

influence the ways they perceive stress and support. Leaders gaining an understanding of the Ways of Knowing could make workplaces into adult educational settings, places for employees to grow as adult learners and professionals.

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Appendix A - Teacher Interviews

Opening: Thank you very much for agreeing to be a part of this study! The purpose of this study is to understand what elementary school teachers need in relation to principal support and how that support affects their stress and motivation at work. I will be asking you questions about what kinds of principal support you feel are effective or ineffective as well as how you feel that principal support affects you at your job.

I will send you the transcript from this focus group as well as some typed up notes and would love for you to review these documents as a member check to be sure you are represented correctly and that I did not miss anything.

A few reminders before we get started: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. Your personal identities as well as the identities of your school buildings and districts will be protected as I will be providing pseudonyms in place of names. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact my major professor, Dr. Royce Ann Collins whose contact information is on the informed consent form.

Do you have any questions at this time?

Interview Questions

1. Would you each please tell me how many years you have been an elementary classroom teacher and how many schools you have taught in?
2. When someone is talking to you, describe the best way for someone to provide you support in your profession.
3. Describe on a continuum from being provided with explicit, step- by- step directions to being allowed to implement new changes using my own reflection and reasoning, describe where you fall.
4. How would you like to receive information from your principal?
5. How would you like to receive feedback from your principal?
6. Please tell me about some times when you felt especially supported by your principal? What did they do? How did it help you in your work or well-being?
7. Describe a time when you were overwhelmed by what you were receiving from your principal. What overwhelmed you about this experience?
8. If your building is implementing something new or making a big change, how do you want your principal to go about informing you and supporting you in that? Why?
9. How do you like to be affirmed by your principal? What approach helps you the most?
10. What is your belief about decision-making in schools? How does that align with your current building?
11. Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict with your principal? What happened? How did that affect you?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B - Principal Interviews

Opening: Thank you very much for agreeing to be a part of this study! The purpose of this study is to understand what elementary teachers need in relation to principal support and how that support affects their stress and motivation at work. I will be asking you questions about what kinds of support you feel are effective or ineffective for teachers as well as what you have done or are currently doing to support teachers in your buildings.

I will send you the transcript from this focus group as well as some typed up notes and would love for you to review these documents as a member check to be sure you are represented correctly and that I did not miss anything.

A few reminders before we get started: You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without penalty. Your personal identities as well as the identities of your school buildings and districts will be protected as I will be providing pseudonyms in place of names. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact my major professor, Dr. Royce Ann Collins whose contact information is on the informed consent form.

Do you have any questions at this time?

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been a principal and how many schools have you served?
2. What do you think teachers need to be successful in their jobs?
3. Tell me about a professional development or in-service opportunities you have provided that you believe supports teachers.
4. How do you help teachers build relationships in your building and how do you think that relationship building helps teachers?
5. What is your belief concerning decision-making in the school? How much control would you say your teachers have over decision-making in regard to curriculum? classroom procedures? Other daily functions?
6. What are things that cause teachers to struggle in your school? What do you do to address the struggling?
7. Please share about a time when you felt something you did really helped a teacher feel stronger, more confident, or better able to do their job?
8. How do you identify when a teacher may be experiencing increased stress? What signs do you look for and what would you do to address it?
9. Please share about a time when you thought your actions or maybe not being able to act, may have left a teacher feeling discouraged or overwhelmed?
10. How do you decide what kind of support to give to teachers in different situations?
11. What strategies have you found to be most effective in supporting teachers?
12. If you are implementing something new at your building, how do you go about supporting teachers in that?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix C - Principal Solicitation Email

Dear Principal X,

My name is Megan Coberly and I am a doctoral student in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Kansas State University working on my dissertation research. The purpose of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of what elementary school classroom teachers need from their principals to be successful and to explore how principals are going about meeting those needs. My study hopes to help teachers and principals understand what needs and resources are essential for teacher resilience and well-being. I am writing to you today to ask if you would be willing to be a participant in my study.

I am looking for principals employed at a public school in Kansas who has served as a principal for at least one school year.

Participation in the research study is completely voluntary and your responses and information are confidential. I will not reveal your identity or the identity of your organization and will only use pseudonyms for all participants and organizations. More details of the study can be found in the attached Informed Consent Form.

Participants who wish to participate will be asked to participate in one interview via ZOOM, lasting 60-90 minutes where I will ask you questions regarding how you perceive teacher needs in your building and how you attempt to meet those needs. If you choose to participate, you may choose to drop out of the study at any time, without penalty and any information collected will be deleted.

If you have any questions, please reply to this email and I will answer any questions you may have.

If you agree to participate in the study, please fill out the attached informed consent form and reply to me at priceme@ksu.edu. I will then email you to set up a time for the ZOOM interview. If you would like to speak to my major professor, Dr. Royce Ann Collins, about this research, you may contact her at racollin@ksu.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration to participate in this study. I hope you have a wonderful school year!

Appendix D - Teacher Solicitation Email

Dear Principal X,

I am writing to you today to ask if you would forward this email to your staff so that I may recruit teachers for my study.

My name is Megan Coberly and I am a doctoral student in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Kansas State University working on my dissertation research. The purpose of my research is to gain a deeper understanding of what elementary school classroom teachers need from their principals to be successful and to explore how principals are going about meeting those needs. My study hopes to help teachers and principals understand what needs and resources are essential for teacher resilience and well-being.

I need elementary school classroom teachers who have taught between one and five years in a public school in Kansas.

Participation in the research study is completely voluntary and your responses and information are confidential. I will not reveal your identity or the identity of your organization and will only use pseudonyms for all participants and organizations. More details of the study can be found in the attached Informed Consent Form.

Participants who wish to participate will be asked to participate in one focus group interview with three other Kansas classroom teachers, lasting approximately 90 minutes where I will ask you questions regarding the kinds of principal support you find most valuable and what you feel that you need as a teacher from your principal to be successful. If you choose to participate, you may choose to drop out of the study at any time, without penalty.

If you have any questions, please reply to this email and I will answer any questions you may have.

If you agree to participate in the study, please fill out the attached informed consent form and send it to me at priceme@ksu.edu. I will then e-mail you to set up a time for the ZOOM focus group interview. If you would like to speak to my major professor, Dr. Royce Ann Collins, about this research, you may contact her at racollin@ksu.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration to participate in this study. I hope you have a wonderful school year!

Appendix E - Informed Consent

Principal Informed Consent

PROJECT TITLE:

Exploratory study of adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, PhD., Department Chair

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Megan Coberly, Doctoral Student

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, racollin@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, rubin@ksu.edu; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, comply@ksu.edu.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. Looking at adult cognitive development and perceived resource loss and gain through these theories will help principals understand their teachers as adult learners and understand what resources they think are essential gaining the resources they need for job satisfaction and what they can do to provide them with those essential resources. Existing qualitative research on resource loss and gain through this lens has not yet been applied to the teaching profession in this way.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Data collection for this study will be collected through semi-structured interviews which will be conducted virtually (via ZOOM). You will be interviewed individually and will be asked to speak about what resources you feel are essential for teacher success and how they are providing those resources to the teachers. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be the primary source of data. All interviews will be recorded (with your permission) and transcribed. You can drop out of the study at any time without penalty.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no foreseeable physical or psychological risks in participating in this study. Participation is voluntary and you may choose to not participate in the study at any time, without penalty.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

You may gain a deeper understanding of how your behavior affects a teacher's ability to function at a high level in the workplace.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Data will be recorded using ZOOM with your prior permission. The ZOOM interviews will be used as data as well as the ZOOM generated transcripts. The researcher will replace your name with a pseudonym on all transcripts, data analysis spreadsheets, and final dissertation. The ZOOM account used will be a K-State affiliated ZOOM account that is password protected and the data will be stored on the K-State One Drive which is also password protected. After three years, all collected data will be destroyed. Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Teacher Informed Consent Form

PROJECT TITLE:

Exploratory study of adult cognitive development and resource loss and gain

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, PhD., Department Chair

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):

Megan Coberly, Doctoral Student

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS:

Dr. Royce Ann Collins, racollin@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, rubin@ksu.edu; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224, comply@ksu.edu.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore adult cognitive development and employee resource loss and gain in relation to leader support. Looking at adult cognitive development and perceived resource loss and gain through these theories will help principals understand their teachers as adult learners and understand what resources they think are essential gaining the resources they need for job satisfaction and what they can do to provide them with those essential resources. Existing qualitative research on resource loss and gain through this lens has not yet been applied to the teaching profession in this way.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

Data collection for this study will be collected through semi-structured interviews which will be conducted virtually (via ZOOM). You will be placed in a focus group of three to four teachers and asked to speak about what kinds of principal support helps you in the workplace so that you may gain job success and well-being. Each focus group will last approximately 90 minutes and will be the primary source of data. All interviews will be recorded (with your permission) and transcribed. You can drop out of the study at any time without penalty.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

There are no foreseeable physical or psychological risks in participating in this study. Participation is voluntary and you may choose to not participate in the study at any time, without penalty.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

Teachers may gain a deeper understanding of how principal leadership styles and behavior affects stress or motivation and in turn how these increase or decrease your ability to gain resources helpful to your job success and health in the future.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

Data will be recorded using ZOOM with your prior permission. The ZOOM interviews will be used as data as well as the ZOOM generated transcripts. The researcher will replace your name with a pseudonym on all transcripts, data analysis spreadsheets, and final dissertation. The ZOOM account used will be a K-State affiliated ZOOM account that is password protected and the data will be stored on the K-State One Drive which is also password protected. After three years, all collected data will be destroyed. Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Appendix F - Alignment Table

Research Question	Teacher Interview Question	Principal Interview Question
Introduction	1. How many years you have been teaching and how many schools you have taught in?	1. How many years have you been a principal and how many schools have you served?
RQ 1: How do elementary school teachers from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perceived resource loss and gain in relation to principal's support?	1. When someone is talking to you, describe the best way for someone to provide you support in your profession.	
	2. Describe on a continuum from being provided with explicit, step- by- step directions to being allowed to implement new changes using my own reflection and reasoning, describe where you fall.	
	3. How would you like to receive information from your principal?	
	4. How would you like to receive feedback from your principal?	
	5. Please tell me about some times when you felt especially supported by your principal? What did they do? How did it help you in your work or well-being?	
	6. Describe a time when you were overwhelmed by what you were receiving from your principal. What overwhelmed you about this experience?	

	7. If your building is implementing something new or making a big change, how do you want your principal to go about informing you and supporting you in that? Why?	
	8. How do you like to be affirmed by your principal? What approach helps you the most?	
	9. What is your belief about decision-making in schools? How does that align with your current building?	
	10. Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict with your principal? What happened? How did that affect you?	
	11. Is there anything else you would like to add?	
RQ 2: How do elementary school principals from varying Ways of Knowing describe their perception of teacher's resource loss and gain?		1. What do you think you need to do for teachers to be successful in their jobs?
		2. Tell me about a professional development or in-service opportunities you have provided that you believe supports teachers.
		3. How do you help teachers build relationships in your building and how do you think that relationship building helps teachers?

		4. What is your belief concerning decision-making in the school? How much control would you say your teachers have over decision-making in regard to curriculum? classroom procedures? Other daily functions?
		5. What are things that cause teachers to struggle in your school? What do you do to address the struggling?
		6. Please share about a time when you felt something you did really helped a teacher feel stronger, more confident, or better able to do their job?
		7. How do you identify when a teacher may be experiencing increased stress? What signs do you look for and what would you do to address it?
		8. Please share about a time when you thought your actions or maybe not being able to act, may have left a teacher feeling discouraged or overwhelmed?
		9. How do you decide what kind of support to give to teachers in different situations?
		10. What strategies have you found to be most effective in supporting teachers?
		11. If you are implementing something new at your building, how do you go about supporting teachers in that?
		12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix G - Ways of Knowing Questionnaire

"Ways of Knowing" Characteristics

Adapted from Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2014)

Instructions

1. Reflect on how you typically interact with and interpret ideas and beliefs.
2. For each statement listed, rate how intensely you believe or feel about it on a scale from 1 to 5.

1 = Low Intensity: You rarely or weakly hold this belief or feeling.

5 = High Intensity: You strongly or frequently hold this belief or feeling.

3. Total your scores for each category. This total will help you compare which "Way of Knowing" dominates your perspective.

Way of Knowing	Statement	Rating
Instrumental	I understand experiences and feedback in concrete, dualistic terms (right or wrong).	
	I prefer clear instructions, step-by-step directions, and specific models to emulate.	
	Achieving tangible results and meeting explicit expectations is important to me.	
	I feel supported by explicit guidance and clear expectations.	
	I appreciate external validation and concrete feedback to measure success.	
	Total	
Socializing	Relationships and others' opinions are important to me. I internalize others' expectations and feedback.	
	I seek validation and affirmation from others whose opinion I value. I value others' feelings and judgments.	

	I avoid conflict to maintain harmony.	
	I feel supported when feedback is delivered with appreciation, recognition, and reassurance.	
	I appreciate safe, supportive environments where expressing personal beliefs and values is encouraged.	
	Total	
Self-Authoring	I have a strong internal belief system and values and tend to make decisions based on personal principles.	
	I reflect upon and evaluate the ideas and beliefs of self and others.	
	I take responsibility for my personal actions and decisions. I am guided by an internal set of standards and goals. I understand others' viewpoints but prioritize personal values and judgments over external opinions.	
	I value feedback that allows for personal reflection, goal setting, and the opportunity to offer and receive critique.	
	I thrive when given autonomy to create and pursue personal goals and initiatives.	
	Total	
Self-Transforming	I recognize the complexity and interconnectedness of various systems, perspectives, and beliefs. I consistently think about the broader implications of actions and decisions on the community and systems.	
	I am comfortable with contradictions and paradoxes. I see value in exploring different and conflicting viewpoints.	

	I value collaborative reflection and dialogue as a means to develop deeper understanding and integrate multiple perspectives.	
	I am willing to continuously reassess and transform personal beliefs and systems of thinking.	
	I feel supported by opportunities to explore and reflect on diverse ideas and practices in a collaborative setting.	
	Total	
Dominant Way of Knowing:		