LEARNING FROM ACADEMICALLY OPTIMISTIC TEACHERS:
SUPPORTING TEACHER ACADEMIC OPTIMISM

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Abstract

Educational researchers have identified school and teacher characteristics that positively affect student outcomes. One of these characteristics is teacher academic optimism. To bolster teacher effectiveness and student success, it is important to discover how to support this teacher academic optimism in teachers.

Previous research on this latent construct has been exclusively quantitative; as a result, this thesis seeks to expand the understanding of this teacher level characteristic by using a qualitative research design that is focused less with standardized measures and predetermined response categories and more on an emerging approach to inquiry (Patton, 2002). Specifically, this thesis seeks to learn from academically optimistic teachers, or teachers who score high in academic optimism, as to how they support and develop their teacher academic optimism.

This doctoral thesis is a qualitative interview study. Four elementary and middle school teachers in the researcher's district were identified as academically optimistic using the Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Elementary Teachers and the Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Secondary Teachers. Once the academically optimistic teachers were identified and agreed to participate, data was collected and analyzed in the form of interviews and memos. Patterns and themes were established in order to identify the means by which academically optimistic teachers support their teacher academic optimism.

The data suggests that in order to support teacher academic optimism in this school district, teachers should be knowledgeable about, and utilize, many different practices and hold various beliefs in order to adapt to meet various situations. The data suggests that the academically optimistic teachers are mostly optimistic, humanistic, and student-centered; however, it also suggests that, at times, the opposite is necessary. This finding is consistent with
learned optimism, a theoretical underpinning of teacher academic optimism. Based on the data, specific recommendations for the development of certain beliefs and practices in teachers are suggested in order to support teacher academic optimism in the district. Recommendations for further research on teacher academic optimism are also included.

Keywords: teacher academic optimism, teacher efficacy, teacher sense of academic emphasis, teacher trust in students and parents
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Learning from Academically Optimistic Teachers:
Supporting Teacher Academic Optimism

Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, the elementary and secondary educational system is not adequately supporting all students. This fact is reflected in the alarming outcomes of American schools as six out of ten fourth-graders and approximately two-thirds of eighth-graders score below proficient in mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011a), approximately two-thirds of fourth-graders and eighth-graders score below proficient in reading (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011b), and greater than one out of every five public school students will not complete high school in four years (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Bruce, & Fox, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial for educational leaders to support teachers in developing the characteristics that help lead to student success.

As the educational leader of a school district, I have been on a journey to ascertain and understand how to support and develop school and teacher factors that lead to teacher and student success. One such construct is teacher academic optimism. This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature on this topic and to investigate how best to support academic optimism in my school district.

I have noticed in my school district that some of the most effective teachers appear to be those teachers who seem to remain confident in their ability to make a difference with all students, despite the numerous obstacles that can impact the learning process. After reading through the literature on the topic, I came across a latent characteristic made up of collective teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in students and parents that combine to form what
is known as collective academic optimism (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006a); a school-level characteristic that is significantly related to student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006a; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). This latent construct has also been identified at the individual teacher level and is known as teacher academic optimism (Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008).

In my school district, I have encountered evidence of attributes that make up teacher academic optimism. I have presided over several meetings where various staff members identified faculty trust as the most important characteristic in the district's pursuit of improving school climate. Additionally, I spoke to a number of teachers who described the importance of high expectations and the confidence in the ability of teachers to teach all students. It became clear to me that in order to help support the prevalence of this significant characteristic in the school district, it would be prudent to learn from the professionals with the highest academic optimism.

The study of teacher academic optimism is in its infancy and more studies on this concept need to be conducted to gain a richer understanding of how to support this construct. Most, if not all, of the research on teacher academic optimism has been correlational and survey-based (Beard, 2011; Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010; Fahy, Wu, & Hoy, 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008) and has not generally focused on how to support and develop this characteristic. As a result, there is a need for qualitative studies that examine teacher academic optimism in a different context.

This thesis seeks to provide a more in-depth, real world examination of teacher academic optimism through the use of a qualitative interview study. Conducting this study has allowed me
to question academically optimistic teachers about the beliefs, actions, and experiences which support their teacher academic optimism, by using a research design and tradition that goes beyond the study of relationships between variables (Maxwell, 2005).

**Significance of Research Problem**

As a researcher and an educational leader, it is important to identify and support school level and teacher level factors that improve student learning. Research has demonstrated that several characteristics, including academic optimism, enhance student achievement (Hoy, 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2013) and failure to foster these characteristics may stymie educational efforts to bolster teacher effectiveness and student success.

The idea that school level and teacher level factors matter did not always exist in educational research. Coleman et al. (1966), for example, concluded that student achievement was primarily the result of hard to change socioeconomics of a school's community rather than school level effects. These alarming findings led researchers to work to disprove these conclusions and to confirm the existence of school level factors that could explain student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Hoy, 2012). Since this time, several of these school characteristics have been confirmed (Hoy, 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2013), allowing for a more optimistic view of the effects that schools can have on student achievement for all students. One such school characteristic is collective academic optimism, which is made up of three school effects that have collectively proven to predict student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006a; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). Academic optimism is defined as "a collective set of beliefs about strengths and capabilities of schools that paints a rich picture of human agency in which optimism is the overarching theme
that unites efficacy and trust with academic emphasis" (Hoy & Miskel, 2013, p. 196).

Academically optimistic schools contain teachers that collectively believe that they "can make a difference, that students can learn, and academic performance can be achieved" (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006b, p. 145).

Due to the significance of this framework, researchers have conducted studies to measure the relationship between collective academic optimism and other constructs and have recently identified the existence of academic optimism at the teacher level, which is made up of teacher efficacy, teacher trust in students and parents, and teacher academic emphasis (Beard, 2011; Beard et al., 2010; Fahy et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Teacher academic optimism is defined as follows:

A teacher’s positive belief that he or she can make a difference in the academic performance of students by emphasizing academics and learning, by trusting parents and students to cooperate in the process, and by believing in his or her own capacity to overcome difficulties and react to failure with resilience and perseverance. (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008, p. 822)

Studies have not yet been conducted to find out if the same relationship between teacher academic optimism and student achievement exists, even after controlling for socioeconomic status; however, it stands to reason that this correlation exists, because it shares the same theoretical components as collective academic optimism. In addition, teacher academic optimism has been linked to a variety of positive educational factors (Beard, 2011; Beard et al., 2010; Fahy et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). As a result of the demonstrated importance of teacher academic optimism in the brief history of the research on this topic, teacher academic optimism is worthy of further study and exploration.
The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to discover the means by which teacher academic optimism can be supported in all teachers in my district by studying those teachers who are already academically optimistic. By learning from these professionals, I hoped to improve my effectiveness as a superintendent by discovering patterns that could help me understand how I can support a culture of academic optimism in my district. In addition, as a scholar of this literature, I also sought to contribute to the ongoing conversation of this construct and more specifically what it looks like from the perspectives and experiences of teachers.

**Positionality Statement**

I tend to view the world from a post-positivist frame with positivist tendencies. Post-positivists go beyond positivism or the belief that genuine knowledge is only based on absolute truths derived from direct experience (Patton, 2002). Instead, post-positivists recognize "that we cannot be 'positive' about our claims of knowledge when studying the behavior and actions of humans" (Cresswell, 2009, p. 7). Post-positivists believe that apprehending reality is not entirely possible; however, they believe that it is possible to make claims with a strong degree of probability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002).

On the other hand, positivism asserts that genuine knowledge is only based on absolute truths deduced from theory, derived from direct experience, and empirically replicated (Patton, 2002). Positivism has been widely rejected since the middle of the twentieth century, because its approach is extremely narrow and severely limits what passes for knowledge (Patton, 2002). The positivism paradigm lends itself toward a reality that can be apprehended and driven by laws summarized through generalizations devoid of context. Replicated findings are considered to be true and procedures are rigorously followed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My positivist tendencies can be influenced by my need to fix problems. It was important for me to be cognizant of this
need to find the answers to problems during this study so that I could avoid assuming that the results are generalizable to other populations. In regards to generalizability, the sample for this study was selected from teachers in a suburban school district in Massachusetts with an almost exclusive Caucasian population of both students and teachers. Therefore, the results, in most, if not all instances, were not generalizable to districts that have different contexts.

It was also necessary for me to temper expectations and biases, as I asked questions, gathered and analyzed data, and presented results. I made sure that I was reflexive and continuously examined the biases, expectations, values, and experiences that I brought to the study (Cresswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) describes reflexivity as follows:

The qualitative analyst owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective; a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness; complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the researcher's focus becomes a balance-understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness. (p. 41)

Qualitative research is not concerned as much with completely eliminating the biases, expectations, values, and experiences of the researcher, rather the emphasis is placed on understanding how these biases, expectations, values, and experiences influence the research (Maxwell, 2005). Therefore, it was necessary for me to make the reader aware of these perspectives. A brief discussion of my background is offered to expound further on these perspectives.

I am a Caucasian male in my early forties raised in a middle class family in southeastern Massachusetts. For most of my life, I have lived in this region of the state with the exception of four years of undergraduate school at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I have lived in
several parts of the southeastern Massachusetts region and lived in both suburban and urban municipalities. For this reason, I hold a great understanding of the values and culture of this part of the state.

Prior to being hired in my current district, I worked in several suburban and urban districts in the region as a substitute teacher, school-based counselor, and a teaching and counseling intern. I conducted the research for this thesis in my current school district, where I have worked for the past sixteen and a half years; the past eight and a half as the Superintendent of Schools. Prior to becoming superintendent, I worked in the district as a middle school principal, an assistant principal of both the elementary school and middle school, and a middle school guidance counselor.

Conducting the research for this study in the same school district where I am the educational leader of the district had its advantages and disadvantages. As an insider, I already possessed knowledge of the culture and history of the site, whereas the same may not be said if I was an outsider (Robson, 2011; Smyth & Holian, 2008). Furthermore, this study provided me with an opportunity to act as a scholar-practitioner, where I was able to gain knowledge about how to support the ongoing work of teacher development in my district by learning from the professionals in this study.

However, there was a downside to being an insider, because I was in a position of authority. Even though I didn't directly supervise any of the participants, I was still situated above them on the district's organizational chart. As a result, the participants may have saw me as a superintendent or a superior more than a researcher, which could have caused them to feel obligated to participate in the study or to provide me with information they thought I wanted to hear instead of the truth (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Smyth & Holian, 2008). In order to mitigate
these issues, I explained to the participants, both verbally and in writing, my role as a researcher in this study and how their participation put them at no risk for retribution as a result of their participation, or their decision not to participate in this study. I obtained written informed consent prior to the start of collecting data in each phase of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Smyth & Holian, 2008), and as a part of obtaining informed consent, I explained to the participants the ways in which they held a perspective that was critical to increasing my effectiveness as a leader in the district.

**Research Questions**

This study was conducted in order to explore the beliefs, actions, and experiences that academically optimistic teachers describe as important in influencing their academic optimism, which is made up of teacher efficacy, teacher trust in students and parents, and teacher academic emphasis (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). One of the best ways to inquire about the experience and understanding of individuals is through qualitative interviews (Weiss, 1994). As recommended by Cresswell (2007, 2009), this study has one overarching, central question and several subquestions.

The central research question for this study is as follows:

1) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher academic optimism?

The three subquestions for this study are as follows:

1) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their sense of teacher efficacy?
2) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher trust in students and parents?

3) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their academic emphasis?

**Theoretical Framework**

Academic optimism is the theoretical framework that is the basis of this study. It is a framework that exists both at the school and teacher level and is derived from the theoretical underpinnings of optimism and positive psychology. This study focuses specifically on teacher academic optimism and explores how to support this characteristic in teachers.

**Collective academic optimism.** Academic optimism at the school level, or collective academic optimism, is made up of three concepts that together have been consistently associated with high student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Hoy et al., 2006a; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). Academic optimism is the overarching theme that unites collective efficacy, or the faculty's belief that they can make a difference in the learning of the school's students; faculty trust in students and parents, or the belief that teachers, students, and parents can work cooperatively to improve student learning; and academic emphasis, or the focus on academic performance (Hoy & Miskel (2013). These three characteristics interact together in a transactional fashion to create a culture of academic optimism in a school (Hoy et al., 2006).

**Teacher academic optimism.** A similar conceptual framework makes up academic optimism at the teacher level. Like collective academic optimism, teacher academic optimism is
made up of three elements of academic optimism that interact and reinforce one another. Teacher academic optimism is made up of teacher efficacy, teacher trust in students and parents, and teacher academic emphasis (Beard, 2011; Beard et al., 2010; Fahy et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Teacher academic optimism is the framework that is the focus of this study.

The overarching theoretical underpinning that unites all of the elements that make up teacher academic optimism is optimism, specifically learned optimism (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008; Hoy et. al., 2006b). Optimism and the contemporary branch of psychology known as positive psychology that embodies positive characteristics such as optimism both provide an appropriate framework for teacher academic optimism, because they both provide this teacher characteristic with a sense of the possible.

**Optimism.** There are two main bodies of research on optimism: dispositional optimism and learned optimism. These two notions of optimism are similar in that they derive from people's expectations (Scheier & Carver, 1992) and share conceptually similar outcomes (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). However, these two constructs deviate in the sense that dispositional optimism is a trait that is stable, while learned optimism is learned and therefore variable (Fineburg, 2013). These concepts differ enough for Carver et al. (2010) to state that their measurement "cannot be considered interchangeable" (p. 880); however, debate persists as to whether these two concepts are dissimilar or different aspects of the same concept (Fineburg, 2013).

**Dispositional optimism.** Dispositional optimism is a personality variable that describes a person's general expectations that one will experience positive versus negative outcomes in the future (Scheier & Carver, 1992). These generalized expectancies are measured through the use of
the Life Orientation Test (Scheier & Carver, 1985) and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Dispositional optimism is built on the notion that human behavior is dependent on the pursuit of goals. People identify and adopt goals and regulate their actions based on these goals (Peterson, 2000). Scheier and Carver (1992) describe dispositional optimism as follows:

People who see desired outcomes as attainable continue to strive toward those outcomes, even when progress becomes difficult or slow. Alternatively, if outcomes seem sufficiently unattainable (regardless of the reason for the difficulty), people withdraw their effort and disengage themselves from the goals that they have set - even if the consequences of such disengagement are at times severe. (p. 202)

Therefore, when people believe that their goals are achievable, they experience a positive affect, which causes them to continue to strive to meet these goals rather than to merely give up (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Dispositional optimism is related to learned optimism; however, it is a trait that is stable and is not malleable like learned optimism. Learned optimism is more appropriate as a conceptual framework for academic optimism, because it assumes that academic optimism can be learned and developed.

**Learned Optimism.** Learned optimism is derived from learned helplessness and explanatory style. Learned helplessness is the innate reaction to give up when faced with obstacles or setbacks; it is the belief that whatever one does to change the situation will not matter. Explanatory style is the way a person habitually explains why bad events happen (Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Seligman, 2006). Achievement and success are attributed just as much to a person's explanatory style as a person's talent and motivation. A person holds a pessimistic explanatory style when they attribute the causes of bad events as permanent, make
universal expectations for their failures, and internalize and blame themselves when things go wrong. On the other hand, an optimistic explanatory style occurs when a person believes that the causes of misfortune are temporary, holds specific explanations of adversity, and externalizes or blames other people or circumstances for negative events. An optimistic explanatory style protects people from learned helplessness and generally leads to success, while a pessimistic explanatory style often leads to hopelessness and failure. The good news is that learned optimism, unlike dispositional optimism, can be, as the name implies, learned and developed. Each one of us can change our explanatory styles to one of optimism, which in turn can help us to overcome helplessness and improve our lives (Seligman, 2006).

It is important to note that pessimism is sometimes worthwhile and optimism is not a panacea; however, it is hard to discount the large amount of research that has noted the many benefits of optimism when compared to the shortcomings of pessimism (Carver et al., 2010; Peterson, 2000; Seligman, 2006). Peterson (2000) describes the superiority of optimism over pessimism as follows:

Optimism, conceptualized and assessed in a variety of ways, has been linked to positive mood and good morale; to perseverance and effective problem solving; to academic, athletic, military, occupational, and political success; to popularity; to good health; and even to long life and freedom from trauma. Pessimism, in contrast, foreshadows depression, passivity, failure, social estrangement, morbidity, and mortality. (p. 44)

In schools, pessimism promotes the notion that students cannot learn and there is little that a teacher can do to change this outcome. It is devoid of a sense of the possible. This outlook is self-fulfilling and defeating (Hoy & Miskel, 2013), while "academic optimism, in stark contrast, views teachers as capable, students as willing, parents as supportive, and the task as achievable"
(Hoy et al., 2006a, p. 440). Consequently, an optimistic explanatory style, applied to schools, is consistent with academic optimism.

**Positive Psychology.** Learned optimism is but one of the concepts derived from positive psychology, which is a comprehensive term that encompasses the study of positive emotions, character traits, and enabling institutions. Positive psychology attempts to supplement, not supplant, the traditional model of psychology that is predominantly focused on human suffering, weakness, and disorder (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) describe positive psychology as follows:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (p. 5)

Positive psychology aspires to understand and cultivate the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and "to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience" (Frederickson & Losada, 2005, p. 678). Positive psychology focuses on the possible and the positive, rather than exclusively on pathology and the negative. It is this focus on the possible and positive that makes positive psychology an appropriate framework for academic optimism.
In this study, I used the academic optimism framework, which has its roots in the positive and possible, in order to identify academically optimistic teachers and to learn from them as to how to support academic optimism in my school district.

**Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

Academic optimism is a powerful organizational factor that is linked to student achievement in students even when controlling for socioeconomic status (Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Hoy et. al., 2006a; Kirby & DiPaola, 2009; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). This characteristic has been recently extended from a collective focus to an individual one, where research has demonstrated that the three transactional elements that make up academic optimism in the collective sense also make up academic optimism at the individual level (Beard, 2011; Beard et al., 2010; Fahy et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

This review once again examines academic optimism and its individual elements but does so with a more in-depth explanation of these characteristics when compared to the first chapter of this thesis. This is followed by the educational factors and outcomes related to these constructs and the ways to develop them. The following questions guide the analysis of the literature:

1) What is academic optimism?

2) What is the relationship between academic optimism and collective and individual teacher behaviors and beliefs, student outcomes, and other educational practices?

3) What is teacher academic optimism and how do you develop this construct?

**Collective Academic Optimism**

More than a half of a century ago, Coleman et al. (1966) found that much of student learning was explained by student socioeconomic status, while school characteristics only had a
minor effect on student achievement. Since that time, researchers have been searching for school factors that significantly affect student achievement to provide hope that student learning could be affected by what happens in schools rather than being largely predestined by family and community background. Evidence of these school effects has been difficult to come by; however, research has revealed several school properties that consistently relate to student learning, even when controlling for socioeconomic status (Hoy, 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

Collective academic optimism is one of these properties. It is "a collective set of shared beliefs and behaviors about the strengths and capabilities of a school that infuse it with the capacity to achieve academic success" (Hoy & Miskel, 2013, p. 314). Collective academic optimism is a latent construct made up of collective efficacy, faculty trust in parents and students, and academic emphasis. Collective academic optimism is derived from the theoretical foundations consistent with these concepts, which include social cognitive theory, social capital theory, and research on trust in schools, school climate, and school culture (Beard et al., 2010; Hoy et. al., 2006a).

Collective efficacy, faculty trust in parents and students, and academic emphasis are three school factors that have consistently been shown to be as powerful as socioeconomic status in affecting student achievement. Goddard and Goddard (2001) define collective efficacy as the "perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the course of action required to have a positive effect on students" (p. 808). Faculty trust in parents and students occurs when teachers collectively believe that the students will do their work and the parents will support the teachers in encouraging this work ethic (Hoy et. al., 2006b). Finally, academic emphasis is the "extent to which the school is driven by a quest for excellence" (Hoy, Hannum, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998, p. 349). This school factor requires an orderly and serious
learning environment, teachers who set high achievable goals for students, and diligent students who respect their peers and obtain good grades (Hoy, Hannum et al., 1998).

All three of these elements of collective academic optimism are similar in that they are collective and consistent with an optimistic outlook and a sense of the possible (Hoy et. al., 2006a). These similarities prompted Hoy et al. (2006b) to explore whether they combined to form a single, latent construct. They postulated and later determined that each of the three factors interacted in a triadic manner where there was a reciprocal causality in that each element was dependent on and supported by the others.

Each element represents a cognitive, affective, or behavioral dimension and collectively interacts with the other to explain the culture of the teachers in a given school (Hoy et. al., 2006b). Collective efficacy is a group belief that is cognitive, which works with the affective dimension of faculty trust in parents and students to produce an academic emphasis or behaviors that influence teaching and learning (Wagner & DiPaola, 2011). Hoy (2012) describes the interaction and dependence of the three elements as follows:

Collective trust in students and parents encourages a sense of collective efficacy, which reinforces and enhances trust. Similarly, when teachers trust parents, the faculty can insist on higher academic standards without fear of being undermined; and high academic standards reinforce collective trust. Finally, collective efficacy has a positive influence on achievement and academics, and such academic emphasis reinforces the development of collective efficacy. (p. 85)

After Hoy et al. (2006b) established the construct of collective academic optimism, Hoy et al. (2006a) confirmed that this latent construct was significantly related to reading, social studies, and writing achievement at the high school level, even after controlling for
socioeconomic status and other factors. McGuigan and Hoy (2006) found similar findings at the elementary level for both mathematics and reading and noted that the link to student achievement was so significant that it overcame socioeconomic status as a predictor of achievement. Smith and Hoy (2007) also described a significant relationship between academic optimism and student achievement at the elementary level for mathematics, even when controlling for socioeconomic status; however, unlike McGuigan and Hoy (2006), the sample was of elementary teachers in urban schools, rather than suburban and rural schools. Bevel and Mitchell (2012) and Kirby and DiPaola (2011) would later report similar findings in urban elementary schools for student achievement in reading and mathematics.

Researchers also studied collective academic optimism at the high school level. Kirby and DiPaola (2009) confirmed a significant relationship between collective academic optimism and student achievement in high school biology and history, while controlling for socioeconomic status, while Wagner and DiPaola (2011) indicated similar findings for biology, reading, and writing achievement, with the strongest effects consistent with biology achievement.

In addition to its consistently positive effects on student achievement, collective academic optimism has been linked to community engagement (Kirby & DiPaola, 2011), distributed leadership (Chang, 2011), an enabling school structure (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006), organizational citizenship (Wagner & DiPaola, 2011), and certain factors of school climate (Kirby & DiPaola, 2009). In regards to the latter study, Kirby and DiPaola (2009) found that school climate was made up of collegial leadership of the principal, teacher professionalism, and community engagement.

**Teacher Academic Optimism**
Teacher academic optimism is a new construct that evolved out of research on academic optimism at the organizational level. This measure of academic optimism focuses on the individual teacher rather than the collective culture of a school. The definition of teacher academic optimism is as follows:

A teacher’s positive belief that he or she can make a difference in the academic performance of students by emphasizing academics and learning, by trusting parents and students to cooperate in the process, and by believing in his or her own capacity to overcome difficulties and react to failure with resilience and perseverance. (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008, p. 822)

This individual teacher characteristic is made up of the same three factors as academic optimism in schools, except that these elements focus on the individual teacher rather than the collective. As a result, teacher academic optimism is made up of teacher efficacy, teacher academic emphasis, and teacher trust in students and parents. Like collective academic optimism, all three of these elements form a triadic relationship where they interact and support each other to form academic optimism at the individual level. Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) describe the interaction of the three dimensions of teacher academic optimism as follows:

Teacher trust in parents and students encourages a sense of teacher efficacy, and a sense of teacher efficacy reinforces and enhances the trust. Similarly, when the teacher trusts parents, he or she can set high academic standards with the confidence that they will not be undermined by parents, and high academic standards in turn reinforce the teacher's trust. Finally, when a teacher believes she or he has the capability to organize and execute actions for a positive effect on student achievement, the teacher emphasizes academic
achievement, and academic emphasis in turn reinforces a strong sense of teacher efficacy.

(p. 823)

**Teacher efficacy.** Of the three elements that comprise teacher academic optimism, teacher efficacy is the concept that has been the most researched. Teacher efficacy is "a judgment about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783). Rooted in the social learning theory of Rotter (1966) and the social cognitive theory developed by Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997), this significant construct has been associated with various positive student outcomes and teaching behaviors.

The study of teacher efficacy began in the 1970s with a two item assessment by RAND Corporation researchers that sought to measure the idea that teacher beliefs in their abilities to promote student learning are important (Armor et al., 1976). This early research was based on Rotter's (1966) theory of locus of control, which states that people "have developed generalized expectancies in learning situations in regard to whether or not reinforcement, reward, or success in these situations is dependent upon their own behavior or is controlled by external forces, particularly luck, chance, or experimenter control" (p. 25).

Using Rotter's (1966) theory as a basis, the RAND Corporation researchers devised the notion of teacher efficacy as "the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the reinforcement of their actions, that is, whether control of reinforcement lay within them or in the environment" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 784). Teachers that perceived that student achievement was in their internal control rather than external control would demonstrate greater teacher efficacy. In fact, the RAND Corporation researchers found that "the most effective reading teachers had a strong sense of personal efficacy in teaching minority children;
they believed that they could get through even to children with shaky motivation or home background” (Armor et al., 1976, p. 37-38).

In the RAND Corporation study, teacher efficacy was measured by the level of agreement of two statements. The first item states, "When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment" (Armor et al., 1976, p. 73). Agreement with this statement indicates that external factors overcome any feeling that teachers in general can exert power in schools. This aspect of efficacy has come to be known as general teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The second RAND Corporation item states, "If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students" (Armor et. al., 1976, p.73). Agreement with this statement indicates that a teacher maintains confidence in his or her individual abilities to affect student achievement despite outside factors that would make learning difficult for the student rather than a generalized belief about the abilities of teachers to overcome environmental factors that impede student learning. This characteristic of efficacy has come to be known as personal teaching efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

The RAND Corporation study found that teacher efficacy was related to the reading achievement of students (Armor et. al., 1976). These positive results inspired others to undertake further research on the subject matter. Researchers would soon look to improve on the efficacy instrument due to concerns over reliability and construct validity of a scale with only two items (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). As a result, many different measures were developed over the next few years that were consistent with the theory of locus of control, such as the Teacher Locus of Control (Rose & Medway, 1981) and the Responsibility for Student Achievement (Guskey, 1981), until Gibson and Dembo (1984) offered a different view on the
nature of teacher efficacy. They argued that the two items in the research conducted by the RAND Corporation researchers were consistent with Bandura's social cognitive theory rather than Rotter's social learning theory. Bandura (1997) asserted that "beliefs about whether one can produce certain actions [perceived self-efficacy] cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered the same as beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes [locus of control] (p. 20). He found that these two concepts are distinct in that perceived self-efficacy is a better predictor of behavior than locus of control.

Gibson and Dembo (1984) posited that the two RAND Corporation items were thought to assess Bandura's ideas of outcome expectations and perceived self-efficacy. They developed the Teacher Efficacy Scale based on this premise. This scale has two factors, personal teaching efficacy, which is consistent with self-efficacy, and general teaching efficacy, which is consistent with outcome expectations. Bandura (1997) noted that "perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one's ability to organize and execute given types of performances, whereas an outcome expectation is a judgment of the likely consequence such performances will produce" (p. 21). The latter is consistent with the first RAND Corporation item and representative of a teacher's belief that teaching in general can impact student learning despite external constraints, and the former consistent with the second item and representative of a teacher's perceived ability to positively impact student learning.

Many instruments have been developed to measure teacher efficacy; however, Gibson and Dembo's (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale has been the most widely used teacher efficacy instrument (Henson, Kogan, & Vacha-Haase, 2001). This instrument has been used to establish many links between positive student behaviors and student outcomes. However, studies have indicated problems with this instrument related to internal versus external orientation of items,
the effects of the negative and positive phrasing of the items, the two-factor structure of the scale, and the lack of specificity of the teaching tasks (Deemer & Minke, 1999; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Henson et al., 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). The questioning of this instrument's validity and reliability prompted some researchers to either suggest an overhaul of this instrument or to abandon it altogether for an improved measure (Deemer & Minke, 1999; Henson et al., 2001).

The call for an improved measure of teacher efficacy was answered by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) who sought to align the measure more closely with Bandura's (1997) notion of self-efficacy and his suggestion of establishing balance between generality and specificity. The Teacher Efficacy Scale has a general focus on teacher efficacy, while the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES), constructed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), is an instrument created in order to strike a balance between specificity and generality in measuring teacher efficacy. Bandura (1997, 2006) warned that general measures of self-efficacy are not appropriate and should be more specific to the task and context; therefore, "self-efficacy beliefs should be assessed at the optimal level of specificity that corresponds to the criterial task being assessed and the domain of functioning analyzed" (Pajares, 1996, p. 547). As a result, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) designed an instrument that sought to balance specificity and generality by which teacher efficacy "is a joint function of both the teacher's analysis of the teaching task and the teacher's assessment of personal teaching competence" (Heneman III, Kimball, & Milanowski, 2006, p. 3). The three dimensions of the scale measure teacher efficacy for instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management, which allows this instrument to go beyond other instruments by assessing a wide range of teaching tasks generally enough so that it can be compared across contexts, levels, and subjects.
The scale correlates highly with personal teaching efficacy and is a valid and reliable measurement of teacher efficacy that has become the preferred measure for research on this teacher characteristic (Heneman III et al., 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

**Teacher efficacy and related constructs.** Teacher efficacy has been related to the ability of teachers to cope with the stressors of the profession and external supports that bolster satisfaction with teaching. It is related to job satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010) as well as a commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992). Teachers with a high level of teacher self-efficacy have been linked to a lower rate of absenteeism (Imants & Zoelen, 1995), as well as lower stress levels, and a lower susceptibility to burnout (Betoret, 2006; Brudnik, 2009; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Parkay, Olejnik, & Proll, 1988).

There are several organizational benefits related to teacher efficacy. Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1992) found that teachers who work in collaborative environments with other teachers have higher teacher efficacy. Peer coaching (Bruce & Ross, 2008), study groups (Pfaff, 2000), support from academic coaches (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009), and classroom-embedded professional learning (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010) have been shown to be related to teacher self-efficacy. Teacher efficacy is associated with better relations with parents (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010) and parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987).

Teacher efficacy has been associated with several student outcomes, such as the orderly behavior of students (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Newmann, Rutter, & Smith, 1989), student beliefs about their performance and potential (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), and student achievement (Armor et. al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Hines & Kritsonis, 2010; Ross, 1992).
However, in regards to the latter, it is important to note that Heneman III et al. (2006) reported no direct effect of individual teacher efficacy on student achievement in their study, while Klassen, Tze, Betts, and Gordon (2011) only indicated modest evidence linking teacher efficacy and student achievement.

At the school level, collective efficacy, or the shared efficacy perceptions of teachers in a school, has been demonstrated to consistently explain student achievement, even when controlling for socioeconomic status (Bandura, 1993; Goddard, 2001; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002). However, Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) found that the link between collective efficacy and achievement did not exist for all subjects, when controlling for socioeconomic status, and Moolenaar, Sleegers, and Daly (2012) noted that the socioeconomic background of students was a more powerful predictor of student achievement than collective efficacy.

Teacher efficacy has been associated with several teacher behaviors and characteristics. In regards to classroom management, teachers who are less critical of struggling students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984), who possess greater trust in students, who have a more humanistic pupil control orientation, and are more willing to share responsibility for solving classroom problems have higher teacher efficacy (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). In addition, a high teacher efficacy has been related with more of a helpful rather than restrictive response style when dealing with student behavior problems (Almog & Shechtman, 2007; Ashton & Webb, 1986). Ashton and Webb (1986) noted that teachers with high teacher efficacy created a more relaxed, friendly, and efficient classroom environment and had better relations with students. In contrast, teachers with low teacher efficacy found it difficult working with low-achieving
students and were less optimistic for the prospects of struggling students. Other research studies echoed this pessimistic attitude of teachers with low teacher efficacy towards low-achieving students. Teachers with low teacher efficacy have been shown to make more negative predictions about the prospective success of students (Tournaki & Podell, 2005), are more likely to refer students for special education and student support teams (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf, 2010; Podell & Soodak, 1993), and less likely to agree with the placement of special education students in an inclusion setting (Soodak & Podell, 1993).

Allinder (1994) found a relationship between teacher efficacy and the organization, planning, and enthusiasm of the teachers, while Tschannen-Moran, et al. (1998) reported that higher levels of teacher efficacy contribute to greater effort, goals, and aspirations. Teacher efficacy also correlates to the emotional intelligence of teachers (Penrose, Perry, & Ball, 2007), withitness or awareness of the classroom environment (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984), and the academic emphasis of teachers (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993).

When considering the element of teacher efficacy, researchers have found this construct to be related to the use of a wide spectrum of teaching practices. Teachers with greater teacher efficacy have been linked to the use of constructivist and student-centered teaching methods (Burton, 1996; de Laat & Watters, 1995), while Burton (1996) reported a negative relationship between teacher efficacy and those instructional practices that depend on student absorption of material, such as seatwork, the use of worksheets, and programmed learning, which are more consistent with a teacher-centered approach. Ashton and Webb (1986) came to a similar conclusion in that they found that "few high sense-of-efficacy teachers ran classes that we would term innovative or went much beyond the direct instruction, teach-and-drill methods suggested in the process-product literature" (p. 87).
On the other hand, there is some evidence that practices found in teacher-centered models of teaching, like direct, explicit instruction, are positively related to teacher efficacy. Along with Saklofske, Michayluk, and Randhawa’s (1988) finding of a correlation between questioning behaviors and teacher efficacy, Gibson and Dembo (1984) found that teachers with higher teacher efficacy were more likely than teachers with low teacher efficacy to persist with students who answered a question incorrectly instead of merely moving on to the next question. In addition, Gibson and Dembo (1984) reported that teachers with higher teacher efficacy conducted more large group instruction, less small group instruction, and spent more time monitoring and checking seatwork. Muijs and Reynolds (2002) also found that a behaviorist teaching approach had a significant effect on teacher efficacy and went so far as to state that a substantial amount of teacher training should be dedicated to learning behavioral teaching practices.

Additionally, the research supports the relationship between a wide array of teaching practices and teacher efficacy. Studies have demonstrated that teachers with high teacher efficacy are more likely to be receptive to implementing new instructional practices (Guskey, 1988), adopting new practices and innovations (Evers et al., 2002; Smylie, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988), and actually using a larger variety of instructional methods than teachers with lower teacher efficacy (Allinder, 1994).

**Developing teacher efficacy.** In order to investigate the means by which teachers develop teacher efficacy, it is important to consult the research on the aforementioned constructs associated with efficacious teachers or to consider social cognitive theory. This theoretical framework emphasizes that "cognitive processes play a prominent role in the acquisition and retention of new behavior patterns" (Bandura, 1977, p. 192) and that behavior is guided through
the observation of others and the analysis of the expectations of certain behaviors. Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) posits that a person gauges their self-efficacy from interpretations made from four sources of information: verbal persuasion, physiological and affective states, vicarious experiences, and enactive mastery experiences. These sources of information are powerful influencers of the development of efficacy. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy beliefs derive from verbal persuasion or encouragement of others and through interpretation of physiological and affective states when performing tasks. In addition, a person gauges their capabilities through vicarious experiences or through the observations of others and through enactive mastery experiences or the perceptions of success or failure of a domain from personal accomplishments. The latter is the most influential of all of the sources of efficacy information. Bandura (1997) noted that mastery experiences provide "the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed. Successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy. Failures undermine it, especially if failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). As a result, teacher efficacy is developed through the observations and encouragement of others in the field, as well as the mastery experiences obtained through successfully engaging and motivating students to succeed.

**Teacher trust in students and parents.** The second element to make up teacher academic optimism is trust in students and parents. Until the 1980s, little research had been conducted on trust in schools until Wayne Hoy and his colleagues began to focus on the effects of this teacher characteristic in this context. The predominant research focus for trust in schools has been at the collective, rather than the teacher level.

Hoy and Kupersmith (1985) constructed a measure of trust in schools that included three dimensions: faculty trust in the principal, faculty trust in colleagues, and faculty trust in the
school organization. The works of Rotter (1967) and Golembiewski and McConkie (1975) were used to construct the three aforementioned dimensions, the measure, and the definition of trust. Hoy and Kupersmith (1985) defined trust as a "generalized expectancy held by the work group that the word, promise, and written or oral statement of another individual, group, or organization can be relied upon" (p. 2). With the advent of this new conceptualization of faculty trust, and a reliable and valid scale to measure this construct, researchers began to explore the collective effects of trust in schools.

**Teacher trust in students and parents and related constructs.** Early research found faculty trust to be related to leadership variables that include principal authenticity (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998) and supportive leadership (Hoy, Tarter, & Witkoskie, 1992; Tarter, Sabo, & Hoy, 1995). In addition, trust in the principal is associated with the principal's authenticity and leadership, while trust in colleagues appears to be influenced little by the behavior of the principal, but instead by teacher relationships (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Hoy, Sabo, & Barnes, 1996; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989; Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991; Tarter et al., 1995; Hoy et al., 1992; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998).

Research has also demonstrated an association between faculty trust and open and healthy school climates. Openness (Hoy, Sabo, Barnes, Hannum, & Hoffman, 1998; Hoy et al., 1991; Tarter et al., 1989), school health (Hoy et al., 1996; Hoy, Sabo et al., 1998; Hoy et al., 1991; Smith, Hoy, & Sweetland, 2001; Tarter & Hoy, 1988), and a refined measure of organizational climate, which combines openness and health (Hoy, Hannum et al., 1998; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002), are all related to faculty trust. Several constructs that make up these school climate variables are associated with various aspects of faculty trust. For example, teacher affiliation is strongly linked to both faculty trust in the principal and in clients (Hoy et al., 1996),
while morale and consideration highly influence trust in colleagues and trust in the principal respectively (Hoy et al., 1991; Smith et al., 2001; Tarter & Hoy, 1988).

Faculty trust is also associated with parental collaboration in school decision making (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), teacher professionalism (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998), organizational justice and fairness within the school (Hoy & Tarter, 2004), perceived school effectiveness (Hoy, Sabo et al., 1998; Hoy et al., 1992; Tarter et al., 1995; Tarter & Hoy, 2004), organizational citizenship (Tschannen-Moran, 2003) and school mindfulness (Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006; Smith & Scarbrough, 2011).

Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) would later expand on the work of Hoy and Kupersmith (1985) by developing a new definition and measure of trust based on an extensive review of literature on the subject. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) defined trust as "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (p. 189). As a result of this new definition, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) set out to adjust the previous measure by changing the items to be consistent with this conceptual framework. Their work culminated into a new scale known as the Omnibus T-Scale (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). In constructing this faculty trust scale, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) found faculty trust to be made up of three dimensions: trust in the principal, trust in colleagues, and trust in clients. The first two dimensions are consistent with Hoy and Kupersmith's (1985) measure, but the latter is made up of a combination of trust in parents and trust in students. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) established that trust in parents and trust in students loaded on a single factor which made up trust in clients at the elementary level. Smith et al. (2001) later found this also to be true at the high school level, but Van Maele and Van Houtte (2009) concluded that faculty trust in students
and faculty trust in parents do not merge to form a single factor but are closely related. Nevertheless, the trust in clients factor has produced relationships with powerful implications.

Trust in parents and students has been associated with the level of collaboration in a school (Tschannen-Moran, 2001), collective efficacy (Hoy, 2002; Tarter & Hoy, 2004), academic emphasis (Hoy, Smith et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2001), cooperative learning and project-based learning (Tschannen-Moran, 2004a), the degree of student bullying (Smith & Birney, 2005), professional seniority, and the number of teachers at a given school (Bilgic & Gumuseli, 2012). In addition, Van Houtte (2006) found that teacher trust in students significantly affected job satisfaction, while Adams & Christenson (2000) reported that teacher trust in parents was significantly related to credits earned, grade point average, and attendance of high school students.

The most important finding related to trust in clients or trust in students and parents was first reported by Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, and Hoy (2001) who concluded that trust in students and parents is a significant predictor of student achievement at the elementary level, even after controlling for socioeconomic status. These results were later replicated at the elementary level (Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009). Hoy (2002) and Tarter and Hoy (2004) also determined that teacher trust in students and parents was strongly related to student achievement after controlling for socioeconomic status; however, they both noted that the effects were indirect in that trust in students and parents positively affected collective efficacy, which in turn positively influenced student achievement.

In their study, Bryk and Schneider (2002) described a type of trust they called relational trust, which they derived from Coleman's (1988, 1990) social capital theory, which posits that social capital, or the complex web of social ties that provide support for purposive action,
facilitates productive activity when there is extensive trust. Like the research of Hoy and colleagues, Bryk and Schneider's (2002) study of trust in schools was strongly linked with student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status. However, their notion of relational trust is different than Hoy and colleagues' faculty trust in that relational trust does not simply focus on separate dimensions of faculty trust; rather it includes social exchanges from many different groups in a school community and measures them as a composite of teacher trust. From their extensive research, Bryk and Schneider (2002) established that schools operate best when all parties in an organization have distinct role relationships where all parties have an understanding of their role and hold expectations of the role obligations of other parties. When these expectations and obligations are understood and properly synchronized, then social exchanges and trust is enhanced. Additionally, they concluded that relational trust not only enhances student achievement but also is associated with the willingness of teachers to engage in new practices, teacher professionalism, outreach to parents, a professional school community, and teacher commitment.

Tschannen-Moran's (2004b) findings would later elucidate the dimensions of trust in schools that had the most effect on student achievement. She found that principal trust in various school groups was either slightly related or unrelated to student achievement, while faculty trust in the principal was also unrelated to student achievement. Faculty trust in colleagues did have a moderate effect on student achievement; however, faculty trust in students and parents was the only dimension of faculty trust to be strongly associated with student achievement. As a result, trust in students and parents is the dimension of faculty trust with the most conclusive and prevailing evidence supporting a link to student achievement, regardless of socioeconomic status.
Developing teacher trust in students and parents. When developing teacher trust in students and parents, it is important to consider the definition of trust, which is "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 189). It is important for a teacher to demonstrate benevolence and caring for students and parents, because it provides students and parents some assurance that the teacher will act in their best interest and not harm them. It is also necessary for teachers to be reliable and competent when dealing with students and parents, because trust is hindered when teachers act in a caring manner on an occasional versus consistent basis or are ineffective when depended upon. Finally, it is also important for teachers to be honest and authentic, as well as open with students and parents, because the opposite, broken promises and suspiciousness, breeds distrust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004a).

Teacher academic emphasis. The last element to make up teacher academic optimism is academic emphasis, which is also known as academic press or achievement press. Hoy and Feldman (1987) define academic emphasis as follows:

Academic emphasis is the extent to which the school is driven by a quest for academic excellence. High but achievable academic goals are set for students; the learning environment is orderly and serious; teachers believe in their students' ability to achieve; and students work hard and respect those who do well academically. (p. 32)

Like teacher trust in students and parents, almost all of the research on this construct has been at the collective rather than the teacher level. The theoretical underpinnings of academic emphasis come from effective schools research and research on school culture (Hoy, Sabo et al., 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss; 1990; Hoy et al., 1991).
Effective schools research was conducted as a result of the response to the findings of Coleman et al. (1966), which concluded that socioeconomic factors rather than other school level effects primarily explained student achievement. Jencks et al. (1972) and other researchers would later validate these pessimistic findings, which were particularly troubling, because the conclusions from these studies called into question the effectiveness of schools and offered the prevailing notion that student achievement was primarily at the mercy of socioeconomic factors that were difficult to alter. To counter these disconcerting results, many researchers began to search for evidence of school variables that would also have an effect on student achievement. These studies would make up what is known as the effective schools research (Purkey & Smith, 1983).

The design of these effective schools studies consisted of researchers either identifying low socioeconomic schools that achieved positive results and determining which characteristics these schools had in common, or comparing the school variables of high achieving and low achieving schools made up of students of low socioeconomic status (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Weber, 1971). Purkey and Smith (1983) were highly critical of this earlier effective schools research because of its reliance on non-experimental data, a lack of longitudinal studies, and its simplistic prescriptions for school improvement. Nevertheless, they did note that the findings made a great deal of sense and were consistent with theory, which helped to reinvigorate the hope that school factors could have a positive influence over student achievement, regardless of the socioeconomic status of students.

Edmonds (1982) noted five school characteristics that proved to promote student achievement based on the findings of early effective schools researchers. Three of these five
school variables were consistent with academic emphasis, including high student expectations, an orderly and safe work environment, and a pervasive instructional focus. Later research on effective schools, which was more methodologically sophisticated, would also identify school characteristics of effective schools that were consistent with academic emphasis (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988; Sammons, Thomas, & Mortimore, 1997; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993).

The effective schools research influenced the development of the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI), which measures the organizational health of schools (Hoy & Feldman, 1987). The OHI is a school climate measure that is based on the theoretical work of Talcott Parsons and his colleagues who posited that all organizations must solve four functional problems in order to flourish. All organizations, such as schools, must be able to adapt to their environment, set and implement goals, integrate members in order to maintain solidarity in the school, and create and preserve a latent, common, and stable value system. The first two functional problems are considered instrumental needs of the organization, while the latter two are expressive needs (Hoy et al., 1991; Parsons, Bales, & Shils, 1953). Healthy schools meet both types of needs:

Healthy schools effectively meet the instrumental needs of adaptation and goal achievement as well as the expressive needs of social and normative integration; that is, they must mobilize their resources to achieve their goals as well as infuse common values into the work group. (Hoy et al., p. 68)

Parsons (1958) further explains that these needs are met at three different levels of a school or organization. The first is the technical level, which in schools deals with teaching and learning in the classroom. The teachers are directly responsible for meeting the needs at this level. The last two are the managerial level, which is concerned with the internal administration of the school,
and the institutional level, which connects the school to the outside environment. The work of Parsons provides the theoretical framework from which the OHI was developed. The Parsonian framework and OHI describe a healthy school as "one in which the technical, managerial, and institutional levels are in harmony; and the school is meeting both its instrumental and expressive needs as it successfully copes with disruptive forces and directs its energies toward its mission" (Hoy & Feldman, 1987, p. 31).

In establishing the OHI, Hoy and Feldman (1987) found that organizational health could be broken down into seven dimensions. The institutional level was made up of institutional integrity, while principal influence, consideration, initiating structure, and resource support were indicators that comprised the managerial system. Finally, morale and academic emphasis were the dimensions that encompassed the technical level. As a result, the notion of academic emphasis was identified as one of the elements of the organizational health of schools.

Hoy, Hannum et al. (1998) would later combine organizational health with that of organizational openness to create a refined measure of organizational climate. Organizational health, based on the Parsonian framework and made up of the OHI, was synthesized with the degree of openness of a school climate as measured by the Organizational Climate Descriptive Questionnaire (OCDQ) as developed by Andrew Halpin and Don Croft. The latter survey measures the openness of schools on a continuum of an open climate in which the principal and faculty interact in an open manner compared to a closed climate where a principal fails to lead by example or to provide direction and support and the faculty does not collaborate or show commitment (Hoy et al., 1991). Hoy, Hannum et al. (1998) took all of the dimensions of the OHI and OCDQ and simplified the measures into a four factor survey made up of collegial leadership, teacher professionalism, environmental press, and academic press. The latter was made up of the
dimensions of academic emphasis, resource support, and principal influence. Hoy, Hannum et al. (1998) defined academic press as follows:

[Academic press is] a combination of teachers setting high, but reasonable goals, students responding positively to the challenge of these goals, and the principal supplying the resources and exerting influence to attain these goals. (p. 342)

In addition, Hoy, Smith et al. (2002) would later develop the Organizational Climate Index for high schools and would find the same four factors as Hoy, Hannum et al. (1998); however, they renamed academic press to achievement press and added two items, including parental press for high standards and school improvement. Hoy, Smith et al. (2002) defined achievement press as follows:

Achievement press describes a school that sets high but achievable academic standards and goals. Students persist, strive to achieve, and are respected by both students and teachers for their academic success. Parents, teachers, and the principal all exert pressure for high standards and school improvement. (p. 42)

Consequently, there are many different terms related to the press for academics; however, all are consistent with the original definition of academic emphasis as denoted earlier. For the purpose of promoting simplicity and ease of understanding, I will refer to the press for academic achievement as academic emphasis throughout the rest of this thesis. Hoy (2012) does the same in his article and offers a definition of this academic emphasis as follows:

Academic emphasis is the degree to which a school is driven for academic excellence: high achievable goals are stressed; the learning environment is serious; teachers believe in the ability to succeed; and teachers and students alike respect high academic achievers. (p. 80)
**Teacher academic emphasis and related constructs.** There is a relationship between academic emphasis and many different educational variables. Arguably the most important relationship is with student achievement. Academic emphasis has been associated with student achievement in various subject areas, even after controlling for socioeconomic status. The findings of these studies were consistent for all levels of schooling, including secondary school or high school (Hoy et al., 1990; Hoy et al., 1991), middle school (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Hannum et al., 1998, Hoy, Sabo et al., 1998) and elementary school (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2005; Goddard, Sweetland, & Hoy, 2000).

In addition, academic emphasis is associated with many different elements of school climate, such as teacher affiliation, principal influence, resource support, collegial leadership, professional teacher behavior, initiating structure, consideration, directive behavior, and frustration (Hoy & Hannum, 1997; Hoy, Smith et al., 2002; Hoy et al., 1990). Other educational variables related to academic emphasis include instructional leadership (Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2005), student attendance (Phillips, 1997), faculty trust in clients (Hoy, Smith et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2001), collective efficacy (Hoy, Sweetland et al., 2002), organizational commitment (Hoy et al., 1990), and teacher empowerment (Sweetland & Hoy, 2000).

**Developing teacher academic emphasis.** Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, and Mitman (1982) define five categories of teaching practices and behaviors that help to establish and support academic emphasis in the classroom. First, teachers develop academic emphasis by creating an academically demanding climate. Teachers create this climate by instituting clear course requirements and objectives and by holding high standards for all students. All students are believed by the teachers to have the ability to achieve and praise is only doled out by teachers when warranted. Second, the classroom must be orderly and well-managed with clear rules and
procedures that are consistently enforced. Third, teachers must ensure student academic success by communicating high expectations and selecting objectives that are at the appropriate level for each student. Teachers must be available to assist students, provide consistent feedback to students, and reward them for improving. Fourth, teachers should also use instructional practices that promote achievement through teacher-directed practice before students work on their own, with corrective feedback for incorrect responses, and sufficient practice with new material. Finally, teachers should hold students responsible for their own work and communicate to their students that success is under their control.

**Teacher Academic Optimism and Research**

The first study to confirm the construct of teacher academic optimism was an analysis conducted by Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008). In this study of a cross section of elementary school teachers in Ohio, the researchers found that teacher efficacy, teacher trust in students and parents, and teacher academic emphasis forms the single, second-order construct of teacher academic optimism. Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) also established associations between teacher academic optimism and humanistic classroom behaviors, student-centered teaching beliefs, citizenship behaviors, and dispositional optimism. All of these factors demonstrated a significant relationship even when controlling for student socioeconomic status. In fact, all four of these variables combined together with socioeconomic status to explain a large portion of the variance in teacher academic optimism. This study also found that the years of experience of a teacher and the highest degree attained had little relationship with teacher academic optimism, while teacher estimates of student achievement test performance did. It is important to note; however, that Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) did report that the measure for teacher academic emphasis had lower reliability than the other two measures and needed to be improved.
Fahy et al. (2010) would later substantiate the work of Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) by corroborating the existence of the latent concept of teacher academic optimism at the secondary school level. Like Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008), Fahy et al. (2010) also established a link between teacher academic optimism and general life optimism.

Beard et al. (2010) refined the measure of teacher academic optimism and established the existence of teacher academic optimism at the elementary level. In their study, they once again found a relationship between general optimism and teacher academic optimism. An enabling school structure was also found to be significantly related to teacher academic optimism but less so than general life optimism. Beard (2011) would later elaborate on these findings and found a moderate relationship between teacher academic optimism and flow that was nearly as strong as academic optimism's relationship with general life optimism.

Ngidi (2012) further bolstered the credibility of the concept of teacher academic optimism by confirming its existence in a sample of teachers in a country outside of the United States of America. This sample was made up of teachers from across the country of South Africa. Similar to Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008), Ngidi (2012) found significant relationships between teacher academic optimism and student-centered teaching, citizenship behavior, dispositional optimism, and teacher experience. However, contrary to Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008), Ngidi (2012) found that humanistic classroom beliefs were not associated with teacher academic optimism.

In summation, research on teacher academic optimism is in its initial stages, but it appears to be a significant construct, like that of collective academic optimism, with which it shares the same general theoretical foundation. Correlational research has demonstrated relationships between teacher academic optimism and many significant educational constructs;
however, more research using qualitative methodologies needs to be undertaken in order to corroborate what we already know and to extend the study of this concept. Research on the three different elements that make up teacher academic optimism is extensive at the collective level but less so at the individual level, except for that of teacher efficacy. Nevertheless, the profusion of primarily quantitative research on teacher and collective efficacy, faculty trust in teachers and students, and academic emphasis at the school level provides a thorough understanding of these elements and serves as starting points for a qualitative examination of the development of these concepts and that of teacher academic optimism.

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

Supporting teacher academic optimism requires first analyzing the beliefs, actions, and experiences of teachers who demonstrate high academic optimism. By understanding these beliefs, actions, and experiences and how they support this construct in academically optimistic teachers, I sought to identify the means by which I could support academic optimism in my district.

**Research Questions**

The central research question for this study is as follows:

1) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher academic optimism?

The three subquestions for this study are as follows:

1) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their sense of teacher efficacy?
2) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher trust in students and parents?

3) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their sense of academic emphasis?

Research Design

A qualitative study was preferable in this case. This research design best focuses on meaning and understanding (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I sought to provide a more detailed and in-depth understanding of teacher academic optimism and the three elements that make up this construct. As a Superintendent of Schools, my hope was to learn about what academically optimistic teachers in my district identify as the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their academic optimism. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study, because there has been little research on teacher academic optimism from a qualitative perspective. To date, most of the studies conducted have been quantitative, which means that these studies were more closed and restrictive through the use of standardized measures (Patton, 2002). This thesis attempted to expand the inquiry of teacher academic optimism by using qualitative methods, where I sought to learn how participants make sense of particular aspects of their lives. This required a detailed inquiry using words rather than numbers, with the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Research Tradition

The research tradition used for this thesis was the qualitative interview study. Weiss (1994) defines qualitative interview studies as studies based on "interviews that sacrifice
uniformity of questioning to achieve fuller development of information” (p. 3). Weiss (1994) states that qualitative interview studies require a great deal of information from interviews with participants, rely on small samples, and focus on understanding, summarizing, and integrating the collected data. Qualitative interview studies focus on researchers gaining information about the phenomenon being studied by talking to those who have direct knowledge of it. Through interviews, researchers learn about complex matters by exploring the perspectives of the participants in an in-depth manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A qualitative interview study was the best approach for this thesis because it allowed for detailed descriptions (Weiss, 1994). This study sought to identify the factors that help academically optimistic teachers achieve a high degree of academic optimism. It required detailed and rich descriptions necessary to provide sufficient context to ensure responses that were complex and in-depth rather than simple yes-or-no and agree-and-disagree responses (Merriam, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In addition, this type of study is most appropriate when examining perceptions, which is consistent with this study which explores and analyzes the perceptions of academically optimistic teachers. Weiss (1994) asserts that when we already know the event but want to understand the reactions or the perceptions of this event, then a qualitative interview study is most likely the method of choice. Furthermore, he states that when we want to know how something occurs or what it produces, then a qualitative interview study is appropriate. In this study, I examined the perceptions of certain processes that lead to teacher academic optimism.

**Participants**

This qualitative study primarily utilized interviews to collect the data to be analyzed; however, quantitative measures were used to select the participants. Two scales that measure
academic optimism were used to identify participants whose responses reflect the behaviors and beliefs associated with high levels of academic optimism. A purposeful or purposive sample was selected in order to generate the best understanding of what was to be studied. The specific type of purposeful sample was a criterion sample (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Patton 2002). The main purpose of criterion sampling "is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). In this study, I gathered information about factors that support and foster academic optimism; therefore, it was necessary to obtain a sample of teachers with high teacher academic optimism.

The Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Elementary Teachers (TAOS-E) and the Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Secondary Teachers (TAOS-S) was used to identify each teacher or case. The TAOS-E and TAOS-S were both designed to measure a teacher's academic optimism at the individual level. Both of these surveys are made up of questions consistent with a teacher's sense of self-efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust in parents and students (Hoy, 2014a, 2014b). A teacher academic optimism score is produced by adding the scores of the answers to the questions for each separate concept, dividing by the number of questions for each concept, standardizing each of the subtest scores, adding the standardized result, and dividing by three. The average score is a 500 (Hoy, 2014a, 2014b) with a score of at least 575 being used to identify teachers with high teacher academic optimism.

One limitation of using a purposeful sample is that statistical generalizations cannot be made with this type of sampling. Nonetheless, this is not the goal of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Yin 2014). Instead, "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p.77).
Recruitment and Access

The site where this research was conducted was a small school district located in Acushnet, Massachusetts, which is a suburban town with a population of a little over 10,000 people. The Acushnet Public Schools is a PK-8 school district consisting of an elementary school and a middle school. The student population in the district is almost exclusively Caucasian and consists of approximately 1,000 students, of which roughly a quarter are eligible for free and reduced lunches. In addition, there is a significant percentage of Portuguese students in the district; easily making these students the largest ethnic group in the schools. This suburban district sends its students to various local high schools in surrounding municipalities. The Acushnet Public Schools was selected for the potential of fostering and supporting academic optimism in the district. I have been an educator for the past sixteen and a half years in Acushnet, of which the past eight and a half have been as the Superintendent of Schools.

To begin the first phase of the data collection, I disseminated a survey to measure teacher academic optimism at a faculty meeting at both schools. The TAOS-E (see Appendix A) was administered to the elementary school teachers, while the TAOS-S was administered to the middle school teachers (see Appendix B). A recruitment letter (see Appendix C) was disseminated and read verbatim to the potential participants describing this phase of the study. A consent form (see Appendix D), which was located on the opposite side of the survey, was also disseminated. This form required a signature for participant consent and included a space for each teacher to print their name so they could be identified later in the process.

The survey, with the consent form on the opposite side, was disseminated to nearly all elementary and middle school teachers in the district. The consent form contained the identification of the researcher and the sponsoring institution, an explanation of my role as a
doctoral student conducting this research toward the completion of a doctoral degree, a brief explanation of the purpose of the survey, assurance that the decision to participate was voluntary, and an explanation of the degree of anonymity and confidentiality the participants should expect (Cresswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). In regards to the latter, the consent form stated that the numeric results of the survey would be confidential to everyone other than my advisor and would not be made available to anyone unless written consent was later obtained from the participants. I made it clear to the teachers taking the survey that the results of the survey, and their participation, would not have an effect on their career and standing in the schools, as this survey was being conducted for research purposes only.

The teacher academic optimism scales were collected by a staff member who was not taking the survey. This staff member was instructed to seal all of the surveys in an addressed and stamped envelope and to mail them to my advisor, who added a number to each survey. My advisor scanned the surveys with the side that included the number, but not the side with the indentifying information, and e-mailed the files to me. I scored the surveys, without access to the corresponding names, and selected the four highest scoring surveys. All of the scores were higher than 575 on the scale, which is indicative of high teacher academic optimism. I communicated the numbers associated with these scores to my advisor, and she informed me of the names of the high scoring teachers. As a result, the survey was not entirely anonymous, because the results were used to select potential participants for the second phase of the study; however, those teachers represented teachers with high academic optimism, not low academic optimism, and the specific numeric results of all the teachers who completed the survey were unknown to anyone other than my advisor.
I began the second phase of the study by seeking to recruit potential participants through the use of a telephone recruitment script (see Appendix E). I called each potential participant's classroom and asked them to meet with me to go over this phase of the study and to potentially gain their consent to participate. If a potential teacher declined participation in the second phase of the study, then I would have asked my advisor to provide me with the next highest scoring participant. Fortunately, all of the highest scoring participants agreed to take part in the study.

After inviting each potential participant to take part in the study, I met with them to go over the informed consent form (see Appendix F) and spoke with them about any concerns that they may have had about taking part in the study. The written informed consent form included a brief explanation of the study, names of persons to contact if questions arise, the purpose of the study, an explanation of what was expected of the participants, an explanation of the involvement required of the participants, the fact that any information gathered would not affect their employment or be used in any evaluation of their work, how long the data would be stored, the benefits of participating, the fact that the participants could end participation at any time without question, and that all data collected from the participants would be held in confidence as much as possible (Cresswell, 2009; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Patton, 2002). In regards to the latter, pseudonyms were used to better protect participant identity; however, this did not guarantee confidentiality or anonymity (Patton, 2002). The informed consent form explained that it may be possible to discern who each participant was, because of the size of the district, as well as the fact that the name of the district would be revealed in the final write up. In addition, to ease potential concerns of the participants, I provided an opportunity for these teachers to review the transcripts of the interviews and to request the withholding of collected information. Finally, a ten dollar gift certificate to Office Max was provided to each teacher who fully participated in
the study as compensation for their time. This particular gift certificate was chosen in order to provide compensation that could be used to augment each teacher's classroom. The gift certificate was purchased by me from my own private funds.

**Data Collection**

The data collected for this qualitative interview study was mostly in the form of interviews. The research questions in this study required an understanding of various teacher beliefs, practices, and experiences, which either could not be observed or were difficult to observe. As a result, the use of interviews was appropriate for this study. Each teacher in this qualitative interview study was interviewed by me using an interview guide (see Appendix G) made up of interview questions adapted from the Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Elementary Teachers (TAOS-E) and the Teacher Academic Optimism Scale for Secondary Teachers (TAOS-S). The former measures teacher academic optimism at the elementary level (Hoy, 2014a) and the latter measures teacher academic optimism at the secondary level (Hoy, 2014b). The interviews were semi-structured, which is a strategy that "involves using a standardized interview format in the early part of an interview and then leaving the interviewer free to pursue any subjects of interest during the latter parts of the interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 347). The interview protocol was practiced ahead of time in mental rehearsal, where I visualized responses to questions before the protocol was actually used (Stake, 1995). The interview questions were open-ended, followed by probes or follow-up questions designed to solicit elaboration of the responses to the original questions (Cresswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

The length of each interview was just shy of an hour. The interviews took place at a location and time of each participant's choosing. All of the interviews were digitally recorded in order to preserve what was said during these guided exchanges between the selected teachers and
me (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). As recommended by Patton (2002), I took notes during the interviews, but the notes consisted primarily of key phrases, terms, and points so that I did not overly focus on note taking and instead focused more on listening to, and understanding, each participant. The recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim (Merriam, 2009).

Analytic memos were generated and made up a part of the data collection. Analytic memos are "a way to facilitate reflection and analytic insight" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 12). These documents constituted my reflections of the participants, any questions I had, coding choices, emergent patterns and themes, emergent or related theories, personal or ethical dilemmas, future directions, and the analytic memos themselves (Saldana, 2009). These memos were treated as data and coded (Maxwell, 2005; Saldana, 2009).

Data Storage

As recommended by Stake (1995), a data storage log was kept of all of the collected data. This log was updated consistently. During the project, hardcopies of interview transcripts and consent forms were secured in a fireproof lock box. All other data was stored on two flash drives and secured in the same fireproof lock box for safekeeping. One of the flash drives contained a working copy of the data, and the other flash drive served as a back-up copy that was secured for safekeeping (Patton, 2002).

Oliver (2010) asserts that "generally speaking it is not necessary to store all of the raw data from a research study" (p. 90). Therefore, I destroyed all of the data upon completion of the study, which helped to further protect confidentiality and anonymity. Additionally, no one other than my advisor and I had access to the data during data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis
Data analysis "involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). In this thesis, information was gathered in the form of interviews and memos. Data analysis was conducted as a part of data collection (Merriam, 2009), and a periodic review of the data was carried out every two or three weeks throughout the study as recommended by Maxwell (2005).

The patterns and themes from the data were discovered through a process of coding or "labeling passages of text according to content" (Merriam, 2009, p. 194). Saldana's (2009) eclectic coding strategy was used for this study. He advocates organizing coded data first into categories and then into a small number of major themes. Saldana's generic approach to coding includes four basic coding methods during the first cycle or the initial coding phase: attribute, structural, descriptive, and In Vivo. The pattern coding method makes up the second cycle.

During this second cycle, I reorganized and reconfigured the first cycle codes, in order "to develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes and/or concepts" (p. 149). Once the categories and themes were established for each teacher, a cross-case synthesis was conducted to compare how the participants described the beliefs, actions, and experiences that supported the factors that make up teacher academic optimism.

**Trustworthiness**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is an overarching term made up of credibility, dependability or consistency, and transferability. These terms are substituted for internal validity, reliability, and external validity respectively. To address trustworthiness, I used various strategies, including member checking, consideration of alternative explanations, reflexivity, and a rich, thick description.
The strategy of member checking was used in this study to bolster credibility. Member checking is the process by which the researcher solicits feedback about the data collected in order to guard against misrepresentations and to verify the researcher's interpretations (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). I asked the participants to verify the findings for accuracy. Maxwell (2005) touts the importance of member checking as follows:

This [member checking] is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of indentifying biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

Second, alternative explanations were considered in this study. Patton (2002) touts the importance of data analysis during data collection but warns against too much or too little focus on analysis during data collection. He discourages the repression of insights when in the field because it thwarts analytic opportunities; however, at the same time, too much openness to insights during data collection can result in premature and faulty conclusions. To guard against the latter and bolster credibility, Patton (2002) suggests that researchers "become particularly sensitive to looking for alternative explanations and patterns that would invalidate initial insights" (p. 437).

Third, reflexivity was practiced in this study. Reflexivity is a "critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation" (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). It is necessary for researchers to consider their biases and assumptions of the research undertaken and to make these biases and assumptions transparent to the reader (Merriam, 2009). The goal is not to eliminate these biases and assumptions but to provide an understanding of how these
suppositions may influence a study so that the reader can judge the negative consequences of these biases and assumptions (Maxwell, 2005). In order to promote reflexivity, I constructed analytic memos, which are writings separate from transcriptions and coding that allow a researcher to reflect on analysis, method, ethical dilemmas and conflicts, the observer's frame of mind, and any confusing material (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Maxwell, 2005).

Lastly, a rich, thick description was used to enhance generalizability. This strategy requires a detailed description of the findings so that the reader can judge whether the findings apply to or fit their situation (Merriam, 2009).

Conclusion

With this thesis, I sought to learn from the expertise of a select group of academically optimistic teachers in order to understand how to best support teacher academic optimism in my school district. By learning from the beliefs, actions, and experiences that these teachers identified as central to their academic optimism, I sought to bolster my effectiveness as an educational leader by better understanding this construct and using this knowledge to eventually facilitate the development of academic optimism amongst other teachers in the district. This is a worthwhile goal, as teacher academic optimism shares the same basic underpinnings as collective academic optimism, which is one of the handful of educational characteristics related to student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Hoy, 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2013). In addition, teacher academic optimism has been associated with a variety of positive educational factors (Beard, 2011; Beard et al., 2010; Fahy et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008). Therefore, to eventually bolster the success of the teachers and students, it is practical to first learn how to support characteristics with a proven track record, like academic optimism. This study sought to understand how to support academic optimism in
one school district and to begin the conversation as to how to potentially support this significant
construct in other school districts.

**Chapter Four: Report of Research Findings**

This chapter includes a review of the data. It includes four narratives; one for each participant, and a cross-case analysis as recommended by Yin (2014).

**Narratives**

In order to address the research questions, data was collected in the form of interviews and memos and analyzed. Four participants were chosen for this study due to their high scores on the respective academic optimism scale. Two academically optimistic teachers were from the elementary school, while two were from the middle school. The elementary teachers were both females, and the middle school teachers were both males. Ava and Emma were the elementary school teachers, and Alexander and Ethan were the middle school teachers. Due to the fact that I was not trying to understand the relationship between demographic factors and participant thinking, I left out many of the demographic factors of the participants in order to bolster participant anonymity, which was a concern for at least one of the participants.

A narrative for each participant is presented below. Each narrative contains descriptions as well as quotations from the interview transcripts and is organized by the three elements that make up teacher academic optimism. Once I completed each narrative, I solicited feedback from each participant in order to guard against any misrepresentations and to verify the researcher's interpretations (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). A few modifications were made to the narratives based on participant feedback.

The descriptions and quotations gathered for each element coincide with the questions in the Interview Guide in Appendix G. The second and third question in the interview guide were
designed to elicit rich, thick descriptions of the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support teacher efficacy, while the fourth and fifth questions did the same for teacher trust in students and parents, and the last two questions were designed to obtain rich, thick descriptions of the beliefs, actions and experiences that support teacher academic emphasis. The first question in the interview guide was designed to stimulate the interview process and to enhance the data collection by getting the participants to think about and explain some of the beliefs, actions, and experiences related to being a good teacher.

Alexander.

Teacher efficacy. In regards to motivating students who showed low interest in school work, Alexander noted the importance of mixing teaching strategies in order to meet the academic needs of the different types of learners in his class. Alexander noted the existence of two types of learners: students who excel with traditional methods of teaching, and students who don't respond as well to traditional teaching practices but thrive through the use of hands-on modes of learning. As a result, he believes that it is important to vary his teaching strategies in order to help keep all students engaged and motivated.

Another way that Alexander stated that he motivates students and gets students to believe that they can do well in school is through the cultivation of relationships. He affirmed the importance of being personable and establishing relationships with students who are more difficult, because they are often subjected to a home life that negatively impacts their schooling. In one instance, Alexander talked about such a student and noted that this student's lack of success was related to his home life that Alexander believed was not ultimately this student's fault. Alexander demonstrated empathy for this student’s situation, reached out to the student on a consistent basis, and went out of his way to develop a relationship with him in order to help
encourage this student’s academic success. Alexander noted the importance of open communication with his students. He believes that it is important to show empathy for each student’s situation, to respect each student, and to demonstrate that you care about and believe in each student by paying close attention to them. However, he also stated that he makes certain that his students all conform to classroom standards and rules. Alexander described his relationships with his students as follows:

You got to make sure they understand what they're going through and you got to be able to relate to them on a, I guess you can say, a teacher-student level. And how do I do that? I just let my personality be me and they know where the line's drawn, and you know you can talk with them like a regular person and I think that's how kids want to be treated. They don't want to be treated like some stern guy out there barking orders at them and telling them, 'You have to do this. You are not going to do this. You are not going to succeed.' They want to know that you know things are going to be okay as long as they're trying hard and that somebody in that classroom at that present time believes that they can do it.

Alexander reported that the quality of work he receives is better because of the time spent developing respectful, caring relationships with his students, which in turn motivates students to do well because these students don't want to let him down.

Alexander stated that he encourages students to believe they can do well in school by coaching his students. As a coach, he believes that he can enhance student confidence in their abilities by establishing relationships, teaching them how to learn how to study, providing extra help, and teaching his students to push themselves to learn when the subject matter is
complicated. In one example, Alexander stated that he was able to convince several students to believe in themselves. Alexander described this case as follows:

I started motivating through organizing their thoughts, organizing their notes, showing them how to learn in a different way, and trying to instill in them that it's okay to not get a hundred on a test.

Alexander stated that he sets up his class to be challenging. He believes that all children can learn, and through praise, coaching, and student effort he believes they can be successful.

**Teacher trust in students and parents.** The analysis suggests that Alexander supports trust in his students through the development of relationships. Alexander's comments indicate the importance of being genuine and honest with his students and fostering open communication while providing the reasons behind the things that he conveys to them. In regards to building relationships with his students, Alexander stated:

They understand what I'm telling them. I'm not lying to them that this is going to be on the test or if I'm telling them a life experience...'This is for real. This is why you need to know this.' They can see if I'm telling them something. I'm also showing them it also in an educational way. I'm just not saying, 'Take my word for it.' With kids it's kind of I feel like if you're telling them something, you got to almost prove it.

Alexander stated that he supports the trust for the parents of his students through the use of parent communication. Alexander explained that he communicates with parents in a variety of different ways, including by phone, e-mail, and parent meetings. He considered his trust in parents in Acushnet to be high, and he trusts that parents will respond well to the constructive criticism he provides to them about their children. Alexander explained his trust for parents as follows:
I'd say out of a class of one hundred kids, ninety-five of those kids' parents are going to respond well to you calling them, and I trust in the parents that when I see the kid the next day you can tell if that kid got a good talking to or not...And you know even in a meeting when you tell a parent something you can almost see them taking your word. You know, they're not going to second guess you. They're taking your word and they're going to look at their kid and say, you know, 'Why are you doing this or why are you not doing this?'

Alexander also noted the importance of proactive and positive parent communication in supporting trust between parents and teachers. Alexander explained how he would respond to this type of communication as a parent:

I want to hear a teacher say instead of calling me about all of the bad stuff he might do, you know, call me and say, 'Hey, you know your kids doing a great job. Just thought I'd let you know that.' And I think that builds a lot of trust with the parents and you know just getting your face out there and let them know you're associated with your kid's learning is a good way to build trust.

Alexander further explained that proactive communication and telling parents something positive about their child is enjoyable to him:

Calling a parent and telling them something positive is something fun to do. Most of the time there is an awkward pause from the parent when you state your name and title. You can almost feel their anxiety building, and then you hit them with 'your kid is doing such a great job.'

*Teacher academic emphasis.* Alexander stated that he presses each student every day to do their best and holds really high expectations for all of his students. Alexander shared many
different beliefs and actions that support his academic emphasis. He believes that it takes a lot of effort and hard work to press students. Alexander noted, "If you are not going home by the end of the day feeling tired, you are doing something wrong as a teacher." He expressed the importance of focusing on all of his students, knowing each one of their weaknesses and capabilities, and addressing those weaknesses:

You're a teacher. You should be focusing on all of them [the students]. So you should know your students are either an A student, a B student, a C student, or below that. You should be knowing in your head, or, if you're not good at keeping track of it in your head, on paper. And you should know what you're pushing them for. So if a kid is not great in reading and writing, you should be pushing them to do that in your class.

When prompted about the level of challenge of the work he assigns to his students, he stated, "I think I give them a really high level." Alexander also noted that he varies the degree of difficulty of the work based on the ability of each student and varies his instructional strategies to help coach or walk his students through different ways of answering questions.

Lastly, Alexander noted the importance of establishing relationships with his students as important in pressing students to achieve academically. He stated that these relationships take time and a lot of hard work to develop. Alexander noted that "it's not cool when you see kids just all stressed out on the harder questions." As a result, he uses the relationships that he's cultivated with his students in order to set the conditions by which he can help students deal with the anxiety that comes with pressing and challenging students academically. He explained the importance of developing relationships as follows:

It's slowly building that relationship up so they listen to you. And having that, like I said, trust and that relationship with them so they know you're on their side...No matter
how hard things get it comes down to you want them to know that you believe that they can succeed.

**Ethan.**

*Teacher efficacy.* Ethan reported that he motivates students who show low interest in school work by using more hands-on, project-based teaching strategies. He acknowledged that he does use traditional teaching strategies; however, he identified the importance of teaching in a hands-on, project-based manner in order to engage these types of students. Ethan described the importance of hands-on teaching strategies as follows:

I feel hands-on is very important....The kids that can learn just from someone teaching and then giving or showing a video and then some paperwork, they can also learn I feel hands-on but then there's some kids that it's tougher for them to listen and then just go, 'Okay, now I have to do this paper.' It seems like all of them would be able to learn...They all understand what is hands-on...They learn better from hands-on and that's what I'm trying to...in my classroom.

The analysis suggests that Ethan believes that the reason these hands-on teaching strategies motivate his students has to do with the fact that they get to produce a product, and because his students find these teaching methods to be enjoyable. Ethan stated, "If you are doing something that they think is fun, they're not going to realize that they're actually learning." Ethan also noted the importance of providing test-taking strategies in order to get students to believe they can do well in school. He suggested that the goal of teaching these strategies is to reduce the test anxiety of his students:

A lot of kids when they take tests they like tense up and get very nervous so I was trying to show them how to relax and the different ways to take the test....After they learned all
of those strategies....their shoulders dropped and they were like more relaxed and seemed
like they were going to do very well on it.

Ethan talked in length about the importance of building relationships when motivating
students and getting students to believe that they can do well in school. He described this
relationship building as follows:

I believe that if you actually can reach the kid and just kind of get to know them a little
bit then they're going to do well in your class, because they look at you and say, 'Oh, this
teacher actually took a liking to something that I like'....Then they get to know you and
they build a relationship with you and they don't want to let you down.

Ethan further stated that if you make a connection with students, listen to them, and show them
respect, you get that same respect in return, which results in increased student motivation and
effort. He described the importance of this connection as follows:

You still need to have a connection with them because if they don't feel like they have a
connection with you...they are just going to say, 'Oh, it's another class. Oh, okay.' And
not even really listen to you or try to succeed and do their best....But if they have a
connection with you...and see that you actually have an interest in what they like to
do, they'll say, 'Okay, he has an interest in what I like to do. I'll take an interest in what
he's doing and do well in the class.'

In establishing these relationships and connections, Ethan noted the importance of really
listening and being kind to his students; however, he made it clear that you also must have and
maintain clear rules and boundaries as well. Ethan also touted the importance of giving examples
of what he went through as a child in order to help get students to believe that they can also do
well in school. Through his stories, he explains to his students what he was thinking when he
was their age. Ethan identifies the emotions that he felt as a student and explains the thought process that he had as a child to his students in order to demonstrate empathy for their situation. He also explains to his students the reasons why it was important when he was a student to put forth effort in order to become successful. Ethan described his interactions with his students as follows:

When I was a kid, yes, did I say, 'I want to become a math teacher?' No. Did I sit here and say [as a student]....'Why am I doing this?' Probably, and I said, 'But I still came in and I knew it was something that I had to do.' I said, 'If I didn't do it, I wasn't going to be able to succeed later on....' You show them that it is not all business. 'Yes, you need to be here, but I understand that you would rather be somewhere else.' I said, 'But we need to be here. You need to learn this cause you're going to need to know it when you get older as well.' And they seem to, for the most part say, 'Okay, I understand what you're trying to say.'

Ethan also noted the importance of instilling in his students the importance of effort rather than getting a high score or grade, because he feels a focus on effort helps students ease their anxiety, and it is this anxiety that hinders motivation and the belief that students can succeed. An example of Ethan's sensitivity to student anxiety and his push for students to focus on effort versus results is as follows:

It's not all, 'Okay, I want to impress you, I need to do well and if I don't...' Cause that's another thing, they could look and say, 'I want to impress you' and the stress gets back to them...so you need to kind of make it clear to them that, 'Yes, I want you to do well, but even if you don't do well, if you are able to understand what is going on and use it later on, then yes, you still showed me that you...could even say impressed me.'
Ethan further touted the importance of effort over results by stating that effort leads to success as well as mistakes. However, he noted that making mistakes and learning from them also can lead to future success.

Teacher trust in students and parents. Ethan stated that he always trusts his students. He noted that he promotes trust by communicating clear expectations and the fact that he trusts them. Ethan stated that, for the most part, his students understand when he communicates his trust for them and the need to trust each other.

Ethan also reported that he is flexible and understanding when dealing with his students. For example, when students don't pass their assignments in on time, Ethan stated that he chooses to give them the benefit of the doubt when he could have just as easily chose to do the opposite. He allows students to pass in work late without penalty when situations arise at home that prevent his students from passing an assignment in on time. An example of this flexibility is as follows:

There's been times where parents have e-mailed me....'Is it okay that we did try to do the homework?...She wasn't able to do it? She is afraid that she is going to get a zero on it for not doing it, but she didn't understand it all. Can you just give her another day or explain to her how to do it and then give her a couple of days to do it?' And I e-mailed back and said, 'Yes, if you sat down with her...You didn't know how to do it. She didn't know how to do it.' And I always try to let the parents know, 'If they're struggling; it's up to you. You can say okay only do half the worksheet.' I said, 'Just write me a note...'. And they seemed to...The kids even don't try to take advantage of that.
Ethan stated that "in order to I guess trust the students; you need to trust the parents." He trusts that the parents will help their children with their homework and reinforce the concepts being taught in school at home.

Ethan noted that he supports the trust for the parents of his students through the use of a variety of methods of parent communication. Ethan stated that he communicates with parents via e-mail, notes, and parent meetings. Ethan proactively communicates with parents as well. He stated, "I always try to reach out to the parents as much as I can." He further explained that when he receives a communication from a parent he responds promptly so he doesn't make that parent impatient and upset with him. He added, "They are always thankful that I responded in the timely manner that I did."

**Teacher academic emphasis.** Ethan stated that he pushes his students to achieve "all the time." He believes that all students can learn with effort and that he will do whatever it takes to get his students to succeed or understand the concepts taught. He noted that he feels responsible when his students don't understand the material:

I feel that if they're not all understanding it, either I need to explain it differently or a littler clearer....I'll actually spend time to make sure their understanding it....I don't want to go, 'Okay, this is my schedule. They didn't understand it. I am not going to just keep going.'

Ethan stated that he always gives his students challenging work. He noted that he varies his instructional practices and differentiates his instruction. In regards to the latter he stated:

In my mind, challenging work for one kid might not be challenging to another, so you kind of have to vary it a little even if it's saying, 'Okay, these eight problems you have to do....Well you're doing eight.' Another kid might be doing fifteen, because it might just
be the amount of work that is challenging for them, because they need to focus for that long to get through it....But also I've had times where....I gave the pretest and a kid got a one-hundred on the pretest, and I said, 'Well, I'm not going to make him sit through this lesson. He got a hundred. I didn't even teach him anything, and he got a hundred on it,' so I came out with a different packet and said, 'You're going to be doing this [instead].'

Ethan stated that he believes that it is important to challenge all of his students regardless of their ability. Ethan described how he challenges his students as follows:

You've got to challenge every student whether it be low level or high level....There's many different ways to challenge them but you can't just say, 'Okay, well I'm only going to challenge my higher level students.' You need to also challenge your lower level to get them up to where they need to be as well.

Ethan noted the importance of teaching students the importance of student effort. He stated that he evaluates how his students respond to challenges and feels that some students continue to try and put forth the effort when challenged and other students "just sit there and give up." Ethan expressed the need to identify the students that give up easily and explain to them the importance of effort and why it is important to not give up when confronted with challenging tasks. Ethan described the importance of effort as follows:

Giving up to me is 'Here I am going to give you this challenging paper' and you just go, 'Nope, I'm done.' And that's giving up to me. It's not even trying. I try to explain to them, 'I want you to try. If you try it and then don't do well, that's fine, then you can stop, but if you just give up before you even try, then yes, you are giving up,' and I try to explain to them the difference. Because they think, 'Well, what if I do three problems and I don't know how to do it anymore.' I said, 'That's fine. You showed me that you tried to do it
and then you just couldn't.' There's a difference of couldn't and not going to. Like, 'Yes, you couldn't do it but you showed me. You put in the effort and tried.'

Ethan stated that it is important to refrain from pushing students so much that they become overloaded with anxiety. He stated that he seeks to ease student anxiety by focusing on the content learned and the effort produced rather than the results. Ethan simply wants students to do their best. He allows students to retake tests, shows them how to study, and has conversations with his students about the level of challenge of the work he bestows on them.

Ava.

Teacher efficacy. Ava reported that she varies her instructional practices to motivate her students. Instead of exclusively using traditional methods of instruction like lecture, she prefers to get her students up and moving, playing games, working in small groups, tutoring each other, and using technology. Ava described how she uses technology to engage and motivate her students as follows:

I think the most important thing is to make it fun and make them participate, so I use my...interactive whiteboard a lot. So, in that sense, they love video games, and that's the closest thing to a video game in school that they probably have, so I use that a lot and make sure that they're participating, and I do notice the participation levels increase when I do turn the board on....So I try to use technology to motivate them.

Ava also noted that relating her teaching to things that interest students is also important when motivating them. She described how she relates the material to be learned to student interests as follows: "So I might just find something that I know that they're interested in. Like if they're interested in baseball or Skylander or whatever, I would try to base the lessons around their interest to spark it a little bit."
Ava conveyed that she tries to get her students to believe that they can do well in school every day. She described how she motivates struggling students as follows:

I feel that if they come across something and they're like, 'Oh, I don't think so. You know, this is going to be so hard.' And I'm like, 'You watch. You will be able to do it.' A lot of times I talk them into it.

Ava reported that she consistently provides praise and positive reinforcement in order to motivate her students and to get them to believe that they can do well in school. She also stressed the importance of effort and a can do attitude. Ava explained that she states things like the following in order to promote student motivation in those students who think they can't do something: "You are going to do this. You will just try your best and with effective effort you'll get it." Ava described how she uses praise and positive reinforcement as follows:

You just keep telling them that over and over again. Positive reinforcement constantly no matter how often they get things wrong. You constantly look for something to praise them about. That helps students really believe in themselves. I think that if their teacher believes in them, they learn to believe in themselves and that's really important to especially the students that have low self-esteem or think that they can't do it.

Ava noted that she believes that positive reinforcement must be a priority and that it is very important to her. She stated, "I always learned that a positive attitude brings positive change, and I want my kids to believe that too." Ava also noted that, in order to promote a can do attitude in her students; she consistently praises them for their progress. Judging from Ava's interview, she believes that with proper student effort coupled with positive reinforcement, praise, and support, every student can be successful. Ava described how she handled one struggling student as follows:
I have a student that comes into my reading group and he cries probably every single day. You know, and we always make sure that we turn it around and you know, 'You're going to get this, and we're going to make sure that you get through this, and if you can't do it by yourself, we're going to help you.'

**Teacher trust in students and parents.** Ava stated that she doesn't feel like she has ever not trusted her students. According to the data analysis, Ava's flexibility, understanding, and belief in each child help to support her trust in her students. She noted that when students make mistakes they need to receive a consequence; however, she stated that it is also important that they also know that they can earn her trust again. When describing one instance where a child made a mistake, Ava addressed the student as follows, "You did make a mistake but now I do believe in you, and I believe that you're going to make better choices now." She later stated the following upon reflecting on the incident, "She had to learn that if you make a bad choice in life, you know, it’s okay, and you can be trusted again."

Ava seemingly has empathy for her students that do not receive a lot of support at home. Because of this lack of support, she feels that it is important for her as a teacher to spend extra time focusing on these students and to continue to reach out to their parents. She expressed her empathy for these students' situations as follows:

It really isn't their fault. If they go home, and they try, and they open their book and they don't get it, then they don't have the support at home, we can't expect that from them. We can't expect that they will come in with it [their homework] done. It's not like, you know, 'We're going to take recess away from you because you didn't do your work. Because it's not your fault.'
The above passage demonstrates Ava's flexibility, understanding, and sympathy for things that may be out of the control of her students.

Ava stated that she promotes trust in her classroom by team building and by establishing a sense of community. She described how she uses team building in her classroom as follows:

I also think that community building and team building promotes trust. You know, if you know that you're always working together and forming friendships and working as a team, then you know you wouldn't want to hurt a teammate; you're working toward a goal. So, you know, I think that helps promote trust because you're working like a family.

Ava also reported that she trusts the parents of her students through open and consistent communication with them. She described this communication as follows:

Because of that open communication, I feel that the trust goes both ways between myself and the parents, and I mean I don't know of one way in particular that I show trust for my parents other than that I am always communicating with them, and the hopes that they'll communicate with me anything going on with their child.

She communicates with the parents of her students in a variety of ways, which includes notes, e-mails, parent conferences, monthly newsletters, surveys at the beginning of the year, and phone calls. She described the beginning of the year survey as follows:

So at the beginning of the year, I send out a survey to ask the parents; it's like a bunch of hands, and just ask the parents everything about their child: their strengths, their weaknesses, their likes, their fears, everything that I can possibly find out about them.

Ava describes her phone calls to parents, which may be proactive or reactive in nature, as follows:
I'll really call a parent for anything....I mean if I have twenty kids in my class; I probably have twelve parents that I talk to on a regular basis. If it's a social-emotional problem with a child, if it's an academic problem with a child, if it's, 'Wow, your child is doing so awesome, and I just want to let you know what a great kid you have....' So that's just my open doors of communication is just making sure that...and it's honestly mostly by phone.

**Teacher academic emphasis.** Ava stated that she feels like she presses her students to achieve academically every day. She explained how she presses her students as follows:

I feel like if they [her students] get it, I'm going to make them go above and beyond; but if they don't get it, they're going to keep doing it and doing it over and over again until they do get it.

Ava stated that she uses a lot of energy and puts a lot of effort into pushing her students to achieve. She described the great deal of energy and effort needed to sufficiently push her students as follows:

As a teacher it's a constant battle. It's a constant struggle. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of effort that's something that has to be done. I mean if you're not pushing them, they're not pushing themselves. And it is an everyday battle. It's exhausting. I will say, being a teacher and making sure that these kids are pushing themselves, it's a hard job, and it's something that has to be done.

Ava uses a variety of different instructional practices so that way all of her students will eventually understand the concepts that need to be learned. She explained the need for using a variety of instructional practices as follows:
I'll just make sure that I find different activities that will make them get it. Like I said, you know you have to reach every learner, so if they're not getting it; you need to find a new way to make them get it.

She stated that she uses games, visuals, kinesthetic activities, stations and small groups, peer tutoring, group projects, and many other instructional strategies in order to engage students and to challenge them. She uses multiple practices in order to match the various learning styles of the students in her class. Ava noted that she constantly walks around her classroom, checks in with her students, and pushes them to do their best to learn.

Ava asserted that she gives challenging work to her students every day. She noted how she challenges her students as follows:

If they say, 'That was easy,' then I always make sure that I'll give them something harder, even if it's just a math problem, or a word to read, or a comprehension question that they have to answer....So I just always try to make sure that if they are getting it easily that I have to take it a step beyond.

Ava stated that she knows the ability levels of and interests of her students, and she stressed the importance of differentiating her instruction based on individual student needs. Ava explained how she differentiates her instruction as follows:

It's differentiated across the curriculum. It's not just in reading. It's writing. It's math. It's everything. So every single lesson, I might give a whole group opener but then I'll know who can handle the work on their own and show them where their challenge sheets are for when they're done, and I know the kids that I need to sit with and work with one on one.
Ava explained how she alters the level of challenge depending on the academic and personal needs of her students. She described this differentiation as follows:

So the level of challenge I give them is I don't want it at their independent level, I want it at their instructional level. And for some students I might even want it at their frustrational level, because it will push them to figure it out on their own. So, again, that all comes with differentiation, because every kid is capable of something different than another kid. So the level of challenge that I might give for one student won't be for another student, and it depends on the student's personality too. I don't want the student to be crying over it. So I have to take into account what type of student it is. If I have a student that has emotional problems, I'm probably not going to go a little bit above what they can handle because they'll have a breakdown about it. So I'll make sure that they can, you know, complete the work that their capable of.

Ava also touted the importance of student effort. She uses what she calls "pep talks" to instill in her students the importance of giving their best effort, believing in themselves, being positive, and taking school seriously. Ava stated that these talks are designed to make the students work together and help each other out. She described her talks as follows:

I make sure that they understand that school is a priority. I talk about the future, and you know, 'What am I? What do you want to be when you grow up? How are you ever going to achieve that dream if you don't try your best now?' You know, I try to give them examples, like, 'If I didn't care about you guys, and I just came in and sat around all day, would I be a good teacher? Would that be good for you? And you know you have to give everything in life your best.' And I don't know, I pep talk them. Let them know how effort is so important in life. Not just in school. And you know I relate it to their baseball
team and if they just, you know...Somebody hit a ball and they were to go out in the field and just kind of walk after the ball and get it...Like you wouldn't be achieving your goals. I don't know. I just talk about stuff like that.

Emma.

Teacher efficacy. Emma reported that she varies her instructional practices. She stated that she motivates her students through cooperative learning, the use of manipulatives and visuals, and by getting her students physically engaged in her lessons. Emma extolled the importance of hands-on, student-centered learning versus exclusively using traditional teaching methods by stating the following:

In regards to teaching, it means to not just have kids sitting there and listening to you....Getting up, moving around rejuvenates them and makes them more invested in learning....It's more so having kids work hands-on; student-centered.....Anything dealing with hands-on for the low motivated students really helps them because it is something else that they're working with and other than just listening, and they're working with their peers versus just with me.

Emma also talked about the importance of motivating her students by relating the material and concepts to be learned to the everyday life of the students. When speaking about her math instruction Emma stated:

I at times like to...either use themselves in the math, or, you know, use their names within the math concept versus what they're saying, so it's kind of like a real life experience versus, you know, what's on page so and so.

Emma stated that she is able to get students to believe they can do well in school every day. She described how she gets students to believe in themselves as follows:
I think that happens every day. That should be happening every single day. You know, I mean, that's just common teaching practice, like: 'You know what, you're here to learn. You're going to do the best that you can no matter what it is'....I share with them that we will get through their struggles together. They are not alone and we work together as a team.

In order to motivate her students, Emma uses positive reinforcement, praise, and encouragement, and she stresses the importance of effort. In regards to the former, she stated:

Every single day is a new day, and like I said I always give that comment, 'I am not giving up on you. I know you can do it.' It's all those positive reinforcements that they like to hear because sometimes unfortunately they might not hear it. So hearing it...and it can be the littlest thing that they can do or say to either myself or a peer, and if you catch it and you can compliment them on it, then that will make them feel more positive and successful with themselves....and in turn, will want to perform to the best of their ability.

Emma stated that her positive reinforcements are both verbal and non-verbal, come naturally to her, are provided on a consistent basis, and are designed to build up her students so they are motivated to impress her and succeed. She described the importance of positive reinforcements as follows: "It's just that one simple thing that he can do. If you can target that, then that will make him feel a little bit better about himself." Emma conveyed the importance of modeling examples of how she deals with situations in order to instill motivation in her students as follows:

I'll give an example of myself, and as soon as you bring yourself into whatever it might be or give an example, they kind of like...You know the walls start coming down and they're like, 'Okay, yeah, you kind of like are a human being versus just a teacher.' So it's
good to, you know, kind of get to their level and say, 'You know what, sometimes this happens to me and this is how I end up handling it.'

Teacher trust in students and parents. In her talks with her students, she stresses the importance of not being afraid to make mistakes, learning from mistakes, and giving maximum effort. She urges her students to ask questions and stresses to them that there are no questions that are inane questions. Emma described the importance of making mistakes as follows:

It's okay to make mistakes...I actually tell them, 'I'd rather you make mistakes and learn from it, then not make any mistakes at all, and really get shattered when you do make a mistake because you're like, 'Oh my gosh. I don't know what to do.'

According to the data analysis, Emma supports trust in her students by building relationships, setting expectations, and being flexible but not to the point where she is not consistently enforcing these expectations. In regards to the importance of establishing relationships, Emma stated, "If you can't establish a relationship with the student, then it is going to be hard for them to trust you and you to trust them." In addition, expectations and rules are established and reinforced. Emma described the importance of setting expectations and rules as follows:

You have to instill in them what you believe in; what your expectations are of them. So I trust that they're going to follow what we've established at the beginning of the year, and you know we kind of go over that throughout the year.

Emma noted that relationships with her students are constructed from the beginning and cultivated over time through two-way communication. She explained the process of developing relationships as follows:

It starts from the beginning. You know, they talk about their lives. You talk about your life. You let them be able to talk to you whether it be on a personal level. You know, if
they don't want to talk to you whether it be on a personal level. You know, if they don't want to talk during class, if they want to do it during recess time, you tell them that you're there no matter what, if you want to talk about anything.

Emma noted the importance of being empathetic, caring, and somewhat flexible when establishing relationships with her students. She declared that in order to establish relationships with students, teachers should engage them by really listening to them. Emma stated that she maintains eye contact when talking to her students, seeks to understand them, asks her students detailed questions and provides detailed comments, and shows them that she is invested in what they have to say. Emma also stated the importance of being flexible and maintaining a "fun personality" while also maintaining consistent expectations and rules. She described the balance between being flexible and maintaining order as follows: "So if you can kind of like have a good, fun personality with them to. Like, yes, definitely joke around with them, but they know when it's time to veer back too."

Emma reported that she supports trust with parents through open and varied communication. Emma noted that she communicates with parents via newsletters, e-mails, phone calls, letters, and conferences. She stated that she hopes that the parents will support and reinforce what she teaches in the classroom. Emma offers an opportunity for parents to share information about their children with her so she can better support her students at school. Emma's communication style is one of affording the opportunity to parents to communicate with her rather than proactively calling the parents of her students. She stated that she is always there for the parents of her students and willing to communicate with them at their convenience. Emma described her communication style as follows:
It's an open communication. So they're more than willing to talk to me, call me, and visit me, whenever it's convenient for them. I always say, 'Whatever's convenient for you,' and I work around them, basically, to the best that I can.

She further described communication with the parents of her students as follows:

If they [the parents] have anything that they want to share, you know, I'm there for them, and some have been on a personal level. You know, sharing things that might be happening at home that might be affecting the child. So they know that I am there for that, which has happened. And with that then, I end up getting them the appropriate resources that they need for themselves as well as their children. So they know that they can use me as an outlet to help them in helping themselves as well as their child.

*Teacher academic emphasis.* Emma denoted that she presses her students to achieve academically every day. She described this academic press as follows:

You're kind of pushing them. You're kind of upping the ante everyday too with them....I think that it should be done every single day. One day shouldn't be just the fluffer nutter day and the other day like, 'Okay, we're going to be hard core.' I think every day they need to get the most out of the time that they're there. The maximum amount of learning, which means the maximum amount of teaching that you can possibly give to them.

Emma stated the importance of supporting this academic emphasis by teaching the things her students are required to know and then challenging them a little bit more. She noted that it was important to challenge them by getting them to answer higher order questions, to make connections, to peak their curiosity, and to express themselves. However, Emma did clarify that the challenge should not be so intense as to overwhelm her students. She also noted the importance of applying skills versus merely studying how to do a skill, and differentiating the
teaching practices used, and the required product to be produced, based on the competency level of the student. Emma stated the importance of knowing the ability level of her students and then providing the lower achieving students a longer period of time to complete tasks, more hands-on instruction, and tasks that match their achievement level so they don't feel overly pressured or get overwhelmed.

Emma stated that she supports her academic emphasis through praise, positive reinforcements, and by always presuming that her students will be successful. Emma asserted:

I am always expecting success. Whether it takes one student two days to get it or if it takes a student, you know, the whole topic or whatever it is. And you just never give up on the child. So if you have to pull that child aside with maybe, you know, do a small group or whatever it might be to push them to be successful.

Emma noted that she uses several positive reinforcements to help push students. She described how she uses positive reinforcements and praise to motivate her students as follows:

Non-verbal positive cues; verbal positive cues...that helps them push those less than motivated students to become successful, to become happier, to become, you know, more interested and invested in learning....And then that way there they can get the praise that maybe they don't get at home and that they need to hear from you [as the teacher].

One reward that Emma highlighted during her interview was something known as positive punches. She described this specific example of positive reinforcement as follows:

Every month, the students receive a die-cut of something relating to that particular month. Positive behavior, effort, hard work, cooperation, participation, whatever denotes praise, that child will receive a punch on their die-cut. Whichever boy and girl gets as close to 20 punches at the end of the month, gets to eat lunch with me and I bring in their
favorite dessert. This reward really makes every child strive to the best of their ability.

No matter how little something can be, he or she is noticed.

In addition, Emma spoke about other mechanisms of feedback that help to support her quest for academic excellence by providing students and parents a way to monitor their achievement through daily logs, weekly charts, and phone calls.

Emma noted that she communicates that she won't give up on her students, has faith in them, and believes that they can accomplish tasks with effort and determination. It is these beliefs that prompt her to press her students, and it is the relationships that she actively develops with her students that helps them to be receptive of being challenged. Emma described the importance of maintaining relationships with her students as follows:

You need that relationship with them in order to push them. Because if you don’t have that relationship, then when you go meet with them, they're going to put up that wall with you, and you don't want that....You want success and happiness from all.

**Cross-case Analysis**

Once the categories and themes were established for each participant, a cross-case analysis was conducted to establish common themes across cases which demonstrated how the participants described the beliefs, actions, and experiences that supported the factors that make up teacher academic optimism. The cross-case analysis was carried out because of its advantages over only providing single cases. A cross-case analysis enhances generalizability and deepens understanding and explanation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Tables were provided to indicate if a participant noted a belief, action, or experience that supported the three elements that make up teacher academic optimism and other factors. It is important to note that the absence of a mark in a box in a table does not mean that a participant
does not exhibit the belief, action, or experience, it simply means that a participant did not mention these beliefs, actions, or experiences during the interview.

**Teacher efficacy.** This section focuses on the common beliefs, actions, and experiences that support participant teacher efficacy. Table 1 provides a brief overview of these beliefs, actions, and experiences as reported by each participant during the portion of the interview that addressed teacher efficacy.

**Table 1**

**Teacher Efficacy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Efficacy</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Emma</th>
<th>Alexander</th>
<th>Ethan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variety of Instructional Practices</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Student Effort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating Concepts to Real Life Experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise and Positive Reinforcement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanistic Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Variety of instructional practices.* When prompted by questions related to teacher efficacy, all four participants stated that they used a variety of instructional practices. All four teachers stated the importance of using more hands-on activities to counterbalance traditional instruction. Alexander spoke about mixing up his instructional strategies in order to meet the academic needs of two different types of learners. He described the difference as follows:

There's kids who are awesome when you give them books and worksheets and they'll exceed in that, and then there's kids who totally get bored to death with the notes, worksheets and that kind of thing and their more hands-on kids.
Like Alexander, Ethan also felt that there were two types of learners. He noted that some students learn either from traditional or hands-on activities and other students learn better from hands-on activities. For this reason, he stated that he was trying to incorporate more hands-on, project-based activities into his lessons.

Ava and Emma, the elementary school teachers, also noted that they vary their instructional practices. They both use traditional instructional practices but also use many different non-traditional instructional strategies for increasing student motivation and engaging students. These practices include, but are not limited to, getting students physically engaged, cooperative learning, and hands-on activities. For example, Emma noted the importance of hands-on activities and cooperative learning practices for students with low motivation. She stated, "Anything dealing with hands-on for the low motivated students really helps them because it's something else that they're working with...other than just listening, and they're working with their peers versus just with me."

**Importance of student effort.** In order to support teacher efficacy, all four participants expressed the importance of instilling effort in their students. All four teachers explained to their students the importance of effort and trying hard at the task at hand in order to motivate them to do well. It appears that for these teachers, student effort was associated to teacher efficacy or "a judgment about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 783). These teachers believed that all students can learn; therefore, student effort was encouraged. For example, Emma stated that she tells students, "I'll never give up on you. Just try," and Alexander explained that it is okay to not always obtain perfect scores on tests as the focus is on students trying their best and giving maximum effort. Ethan and Ava also touted the
importance of explaining the importance of effort to their students and stressing the importance of effort over outcome in overall student success.

**Relating the concepts to real life experiences.** Both Ava and Emma noted that they actively seek to relate concepts taught to everyday experiences in order to spark student interest and motivation. For example, Emma noted that many of her students get confused during mathematics, so she seeks to inspire her students and promote understanding by relating the concepts to real life experiences. Emma stated:

I at times like to put a little spin to that and either use themselves in the math or you know use their names within the math concept versus what they're saying, so it's kind of like a real life experience versus you know what's on page so and so." The middle school teachers, Alexander and Ethan, did not mention this theme during this portion of their interviews.

**Praise and positive reinforcement.** During this portion of the interview, the elementary school teachers, Ava and Emma, specifically mentioned the importance of praise and positive reinforcement in helping them to motivate their students and to get them to believe that they can do well in school. Both Ava and Emma noted that they consistently use positive reinforcement as a part of their practice. For example, Ava stated, "You constantly look for something to praise them [her students] about," while Emma stated, "It's all those positive reinforcements that they [her students] like to hear because sometimes unfortunately they might not hear it." Alexander briefly mentioned the use of positive reinforcement during this portion of the interview, while Ethan did not directly bring it up at all. However, both these male, middle school teachers appeared to stress the importance of motivating students through the development of close relationships, which could have led to many instances of direct praise and positive reinforcement that was just not reported.
Humanistic relationships. Both Ethan and Alexander stated the importance of developing relationships with their students in order to enhance their ability to motivate them and to get students to believe that they can do well in school. They both believed that it was important to establish relationships where they openly communicated with their students, demonstrated empathy for each student's situation, showed respect for their students, and demonstrated that they care about and believe in each student. However, both pointed out that there must be clear rules and boundaries established in order to compliment these humanistic relationships. Ava and Emma did not specifically refer to relationships during this portion of the interview protocol but they did speak about the importance of humanistic relationships in other portions of the interview.

Teacher trust in students and parents. This section focuses on the common beliefs, actions, and experiences that support participant teacher trust in students and parents. Table 2 provides a brief overview of these common beliefs, actions, and experiences as reported by each participant during the portion of the interview that addressed teacher trust in students and parents.

Table 2

Teacher Trust in Students and Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Trust in Students and Parents</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Emma</th>
<th>Alexander</th>
<th>Ethan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanistic Relationships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of Parent Communication Strategies</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive and Positive Parent Communication</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Humanistic relationships. When prompted about how they develop trust for their students, all four participants noted the importance of establishing close relationships with them. The participants indicated that it was important to establish relationships where they openly communicated with their students, demonstrated empathy for each student's situation, actively sought to understand their students, maintained a relatively flexible management style, and demonstrated that they cared about and believed in each student. Alexander described the importance of establishing these close relationships as follows:

"It's slowly building that relationship up so they listen to you. And having that like I said that trust and that relationship with them so they know you know you're on their side...No matter how hard things get it comes down to you want them to know that you believe that they can succeed."

All four participants noted the importance of humanistic relationships; however, clear and consistent expectations were also seen as important to their ability to develop trust in their students. In other words, humanistic relationships were important as long as they were tempered with some structure so students were aware of classroom rules and expectations for their behavior. For example, Emma described a balance between establishing humanistic relationships with a more custodial management style. She stressed the importance of establishing and cultivating these humanistic relationships by stating the following: "If you can't establish a relationship with the student, then it is going to be hard for them to trust you and you to trust them." However, she also noted the importance of maintaining a structured classroom environment by stating the following:
You're going to stay consistent. You're going to be structured. Not so much like, you know, 'Gosh, they can't do this...that...They can't say this without that.' But you need to have some sort of structure to gain that trust. There has to be.

As a result, unfettered humanistic relationships were not seen as the ideal. Instead, for these teachers, humanistic relationships with students, with clear and consistent expectations and rules, helped to foster teacher trust in students.

_Variety of parent communication strategies._ All four participants reported the importance of the use of a variety of parent communication strategies in establishing trust with parents. Participants stated that they utilized e-mails, phone calls, parent meetings, notes, newsletters, and surveys to enhance opportunities for communicating and building rapport with parents. Ava described the importance of parent communication in creating trust as follows:

> Because of that open communication, I feel that the trust goes both ways between myself and the parents, and I mean I don't know of one way in particular that I show trust for my parents other than that I am always communicating with them, and the hopes that they'll communicate with me anything going on with their child.

_Proactive and positive parent communication._ Both Ava and Alexander took parent communication one step further and described the importance of proactively communicating positive information to the parents of their students. Ava stated that she would call parents just to tell them that their student was doing a good job and that he or she was a great child, while Alexander described this type of communication as rewarding for him. He stated:

> I've written e-mails and seen parents on good things and you know that's a good part of your job when you tell a parent something good because they're always expecting something bad when they see the school number come up.
Both participants found it to be effective to provide parents with positive information about their children in a proactive manner. It is important to note that Ethan did state that he proactively reaches out to parents, but he made no mention of calling a parent to tell them positive news about their child in a proactive manner.

**Teacher academic emphasis.** This section focuses on the common beliefs, actions, and experiences that support participant teacher academic emphasis. Table 2 provides a brief overview of these common beliefs, actions, and experiences as reported by each participant during the portion of the interview that addressed teacher academic emphasis.

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Academic Emphasis</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Emma</th>
<th>Alexander</th>
<th>Ethan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Student Effort</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students Can Learn</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Differentiated instruction.** All four participants noted the importance of differentiating their instruction as a means to support their academic emphasis. Ethan summed it up by stating, "In my mind, challenging work for one kid might not be challenging to another, so you kind of have to vary it a little." All four participants articulated the need for identifying the weaknesses and capabilities of their students and then using that information to address student needs. Participants reported varying the degree of difficulty of material, the instructional practices, the amount of work expected, and the degree of individual attention provided. All four of the participants were sensitive to the anxiety level of their students and were careful to maximize the
level of challenge of the work without overwhelming the students. As a result, they pressed the
students but made sure to temper that academic emphasis in order to provide the appropriate
scaffolding needed for success.

**Importance of student effort.** With the exception of Alexander, all of the participants
reported the value of stressing the importance of effort to their students so they try their best
when given challenging work. Underlying this focus on student effort is a belief that students can
accomplish required tasks and learn material with effort and determination. For example, Ethan
talked about the importance of students giving maximum effort and trying their best:

> I have a hard time when kids just want to give up. Sometimes I'll give them something
> and they'll just say, 'I don't know how to do this. I'm done.' I said, 'I haven't even taught
> you how to do it yet.' I said, 'You can't just give up before you even try.' I said, 'If you try
> it and you really don't understand it, then yes you can...But you're not giving up. It's just
> you just don't understand it.'

**All students can learn.** All of the participants indicated that they held the belief that all
students can learn. Ethan reported that "everyone needs to be challenged," while Ava noted that
she presses all of her students everyday and that it is imperative for teachers to reach every one
of their students. Emma stated, "I am always expecting success," and she indicated during her
interview that she has confidence in the ability of her students. Lastly, Alexander spoke about his
frustration with teachers who state they can't possibly reach all of their students. Alexander
expressed this frustration as follows: "Sometimes they say, 'How can I pay attention to all of
them? How can I focus on one?' Well that one may need your focus. You're a teacher; you
should be focusing on all of them."
Other factors. This section focuses on the other factors the academically optimistic teachers reported when asked what it means to be a good teacher. These factors may prove to be related to teacher academic optimism.

Table 4

Other Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Factors</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Emma</th>
<th>Alexander</th>
<th>Ethan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Citizenship</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organizational citizenship. The participants reported many different factors when asked what it means to them to be a good teacher. However, the only specific common factor that every participant reported when prompted by this question was the importance of organizational citizenship or what Ngidi (2012) describes as "a teacher's willingness to 'go the extra mile' to ensure that students succeed" (p. 144). Alexander implied that it takes additional work than what is required in order to be a good teacher. Emma noted the necessity of working more than the required number of hours as follows:

Being a good teacher definitely puts in more than the normal hours...so before and after hours just to make your classroom a successful classroom. In order to be prepared and know what you're doing, teaching always leads to more hours than the norm.

Ethan also emphasized the importance of putting in the necessary extra time needed to reach every student. Finally, Ava opined, "I think [being a good teacher] means that you are willing to go above and beyond to reach every single student, no matter what their disability, background, ability happens to be." This finding is consistent with Wagner & DiPaola's (2011) study which noted a relationship between organizational citizenship and collective academic optimism, and
Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al.'s (2008) studies which noted a relationship between organizational citizenship and teacher academic optimism.

**Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to determine how to support teacher academic optimism in my school district by studying those teachers who already demonstrate a high degree of teacher academic optimism. By learning from these professionals, I hoped to improve my effectiveness as a superintendent by discovering patterns that could help me understand how I can support a culture of academic optimism in my district. In addition, as a scholar of this literature, I also sought to contribute to the ongoing conversation of this construct and, more specifically, what it looks like from the perspectives and experiences of teachers.

The research findings are based on the research questions that are derived from the conceptual framework of teacher academic optimism, and the theoretical underpinnings of this latent construct. Teacher academic optimism is made up of three elements of academic optimism that interact and reinforce one another. Teacher academic optimism is made up of teacher efficacy, teacher trust in students and parents, and teacher academic emphasis (Beard, 2011; Beard et al., 2010; Fahy et al., 2010; Ngidi, 2012; Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008).

The central research question for this study is as follows:

1) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher academic optimism?

The three subquestions for this study are as follows:
1) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their sense of teacher efficacy?

2) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher trust in students and parents?

3) How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their academic emphasis?

**Discussion**

Interviews were conducted on four academically optimistic teachers in Acushnet. The data obtained from participant interviews helped to answer the three subquestions and one central research question. This section uses data presented in chapter four to answer the three subquestions and the central research question.

**Subquestion one.** How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their sense of teacher efficacy?

All four participants stated that using a variety of instructional practices helped to support their teacher efficacy or a teacher's belief that he or she is capable of engaging and motivating his or her students and getting them to learn. This finding is consistent with the research which has found teacher efficacy to be related to the use of a wide spectrum of teaching practices (Allinder, 1994), including constructivist and student-centered teaching methods (Burton, 1996; de Laat & Waters, 1995) and teacher-centered teaching practices (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002; Saklofske et al., 1988). However, it is important to note that all of the
participants in this study described the importance of using a great deal of student-centered instructional practices, which are more consistent with the theoretical framework of academic optimism and its theoretical underpinnings as noted by Hoy et al. (2008).

The data also suggests that participant teacher efficacy is supported by praise and positive reinforcement in three of the four teachers interviewed. These participants stated that they use praise and positive reinforcement to help students believe in themselves and to make them more willing to learn. Perhaps teacher efficacy is supported in these participants because it is encouraged by the positive results that these teachers realize as a byproduct of praise and positive reinforcement. This explanation would be consistent with social cognitive theory in that mastery experiences or, in this case, success in helping students believe in themselves through praise and positive reinforcement, may help to enhance teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Interestingly, there appeared to be a contrast in the way the middle school versus elementary school teachers directly motivated their students via praise and positive reinforcement. Elementary teachers reported that they used a large amount of praise and positive reinforcement to motivate their students, while the middle school teachers focused more on developing close relationships with their students. Perhaps this has to do with the age level of the students. Middle school students are older and more independent. As a result, perhaps the middle school teachers feel that, because of this independence, they are in need of less direct praise and positive reinforcement.

Perhaps social cognitive theory can also help to explain why all four participants noted the importance of student effort in supporting teacher efficacy. Like praise and positive reinforcement, encouraging students to focus on effort may help to increase student self-efficacy and success, which in turn may increase teacher efficacy.
Lastly, the data suggests that the teacher efficacy of the elementary school participants is supported by relating concepts to real life experiences, while the teacher efficacy of the middle school participants is supported by developing humanistic relationships. One can only speculate as to why the data reported out in this manner. Perhaps the reason for the latter is that, developmentally, middle school students are forming their own identity and are not as close to their teachers compared to elementary school students; therefore, both the teachers and students may benefit more from humanistic relationships at the middle school level. Perhaps these types of relationships bring middle school students closer with the teachers, which more noticeably enhances student motivation and engagement, which in turn increases teacher efficacy as a result of the increase in student motivation and engagement.

I merely offer an assumption as to why only the teacher efficacy of the elementary participants is supported by relating concepts to real life experiences. Perhaps relating concepts to real life experiences better engages and motivates students, which increases student efficacy and student success, which in turn positively affects teacher efficacy.

**Subquestion two.** How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher trust in students and parents?

In regards to teacher trust in students, the data suggest that developing humanistic relationships is important in supporting teacher trust in students and parents in all four of the participants. This finding is consistent with Hoy & Tschannen-Moran's (1999) definition of trust, which is "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (p. 189), which suggests that these humanistic qualities are crucial to developing teacher trust. As a
result, possessing a humanistic orientation, by being optimistic, open, flexible, and understanding (Hoy, 2001), appears to be vital to developing close relationships, and the data suggests that the participants develop trust for their students through these relationships.

In addition, all four participants noted that, to support teacher trust, the existence of, and the adherence to, clear and consistent rules and expectations helps to compliment the development of humanistic relationships. This finding is curious because a focus on clear and consistent rules is the opposite of a humanistic orientation. This seems to indicate that the participants believe that a pure humanistic orientation is not as effective as a more varied orientation when supporting their trust.

All four participants noted the importance of using a variety of one-way and two-way parent communication strategies for establishing trust in parents. Perhaps the variety of communication is suggestive of a higher frequency of communication with parents. As Tschannen-Moran (2004) notes, "sharing information increases vulnerability because with knowledge comes power." Therefore, this higher frequency of communication increases the sharing of information, which enhances openness, honesty, and caring, which are crucial factors in fostering trusting relationships.

Although all of the participants rated high in trusting students and parents, only two of them indicated the use of both proactive and positive parent communication to support trust in parents. This is surprising because a higher degree of proactive and positive parent communication would mean a higher degree of humanistic and trusting interactions between the parties. Proactive and positive communication would suggest a higher degree of benevolence and openness, and together with the use of a variety of parent communication strategies would
seemingly be more consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of trust than using a variety of parent communication strategies without also being both proactive and positive.

**Subquestion three.** How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their academic emphasis?

All four participants reported the importance of differentiating instruction in support of their academic emphasis. This differentiation is designed to meet the needs of all of the students by identifying the weaknesses and capabilities of the students and then using this information to address student needs and encourage student strengths. The data suggests that the reason for differentiation as a support for teacher academic emphasis has to do with maximizing the level of challenge of the work without overwhelming the students. All of the four participants were sensitive to the anxiety level of their students; therefore, one can postulate that differentiation allows these academically optimistic teachers to press students at a level that does not overwhelm them, which in turn allows teachers the confidence to press students more. In other words, student learning is maximized in what Vygotsky called a student's zone of proximal development, where students are not able to learn alone but could learn with some form of assistance (Slavin, 2009). It would stand to reason that high expectations that are unfettered could actually enhance student anxiety and lessen student engagement, which in turn could actually serve to reduce teacher academic emphasis, because a teacher may not feel confident in pressing students to the point where they are not successful.

Differentiating instruction is consistent with academic emphasis, because one of the teacher behaviors that Murphy et al. (1982) defines as important in developing academic emphasis is providing students with objectives that are at the appropriate level for each student.
However, it is important to note that differentiating instruction in a manner that is sensitive to the anxiety levels of students may appear not to be consistent with Murphy et al.’s (1982) notion of teacher academic emphasis, which annotates the necessity of teachers to hold high standards, have a well-managed and orderly classroom with clear rules and procedures, hold students responsible for their own work, dole out praise only when warranted, and promote achievement through teacher-directed practices. These teaching practices and behaviors seem to run counter to a more humanistic orientation that would support the notion of being sensitive to a student's anxiety level; however, Murphy et al. (1982) clearly point out that academic emphasis cannot thrive without teachers also establishing a supportive environment, where teachers truly care and are concerned about their students.

Three of the four participants reported the importance of emphasizing student effort in supporting teacher academic emphasis. The research on academic emphasis would support this notion as holding high standards for students, believing that all students have the ability to achieve, communicating high expectations, and communicating to students that success is under their control are all important factors in the development of teacher academic emphasis (Murphy et al. (1982).

Lastly, for all of the participants, teacher academic emphasis was supported by the belief that all students can learn. This belief is consistent with teacher academic emphasis and is one of the very factors deemed necessary by Murphy et al. (1982) to develop this element of teacher academic optimism. Murphy et al. (1982) found it important to establish an academically demanding climate when promoting academic emphasis, and they noted that the belief that all students can learn is the crucial tenet that inspires this climate of rigor.
**Central research question.** How do academically optimistic teachers in a small, suburban school district in southeastern Massachusetts describe the beliefs, actions, and experiences that support their teacher academic optimism?

The data suggest that to support their teacher academic optimism, the participants in this study use a variety of instructional practices, stress the importance of student effort, develop humanistic relationships with students and establish clear and consistent rules, use a variety of parent communication strategies, differentiate instruction and are sensitive to the anxiety level of students, and hold the belief that all students can learn.

All four academically optimistic teachers in this study emphasized the importance of a variety of teaching practices. The use of a variety of instructional practices, including teacher-centered and student-centered teaching practices was partially consistent with the research on teacher academic optimism. Although no relationship has been established between the use of a variety of teaching practices and teacher academic optimism, Allinder (1994) found the use of a large variety of instructional methods to be consistent with higher teacher efficacy, which is one of the three factors that make up teacher academic optimism. In addition, Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) both found a relationship between student-centered instructional practices and teacher academic optimism but there is currently no research on the relationship between teacher academic optimism and teacher-centered instructional practices. However, Murphy et al. (1982) described the importance of teacher-centered practices in establishing academic emphasis and Gibson and Dembo (1984), Saklofske et al. (1988), and Muijs and Reynolds (2002) all found a link between teacher-centered practices and teacher efficacy. This study, along with the research on this topic, suggests that teacher academic optimism may
possibly be related to both student-centered and teacher-centered instructional practices, and the use of a wide variety of instructional practices.

All four participants noted the importance of stressing effort to their students. In fact this is one of the themes that many participants spoke about throughout their interviews. Inherent in this belief is that all students can learn and this notion is infused with the positive and the possible, which is consistent with learned optimism. Perhaps the focus on student effort, which is in control of the students, rather than on results, which is not always in control of the students, allows students to better achieve because they don't feel overwhelmed when teachers emphasize academics and press students.

The importance of developing humanistic relationships was expressed by all four of the academically optimistic participants. However, all four participants also reported the importance of establishing clear and consistent rules, which seems to be contradictory to a humanistic orientation and more in line with a custodial orientation. Hoy (2001) states that custodial teachers view students as "undisciplined individuals who must be controlled by punitive sanctions" (p. 425) compared to humanistic teachers who form close and friendly relationships with students and work cooperatively with them. Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) found conflicting results regarding the relationship between humanistic classroom beliefs and academic optimism, so perhaps holding a solely humanistic orientation is not what is associated with teacher academic optimism. This study would suggest that teacher academic optimism is supported by both a humanistic and custodial orientation in some varying degree on a continuum.

All four academically optimistic teachers stated that they used a variety of parent communication strategies, which is suggestive of a higher frequency of communication with
parents. This finding is somewhat consistent with Kirby & DiPaola's (2009, 2011) studies that found a link between community engagement and collective academic optimism. However, to date, there is no research on the association between teacher academic optimism and the use of a variety of parent communication strategies, the frequency of parent communication, or proactive and positive parent communication, all of which would most likely be indicative of a more humanistic orientation. Hoy (2001) states, "A humanistic orientation is marked by optimism, openness, flexibility, understanding, and increased student self-determination" (p. 426).

However, only two of the four participants reported the use of both proactive and positive communication with the parents. Therefore, like was the case against a purely humanistic relationship with students, perhaps the same can be said for interactions with parents. Perhaps both a humanistic and custodial orientation, with more emphasis on the humanistic orientation, helps to support teacher academic optimism.

All four participants reported the importance of differentiating instruction and being sensitive to the negative effect on anxiety that pressing students too hard may cause. This finding appears counter to one of the three factors that makes up teacher academic optimism, teacher academic emphasis, which is a focus on high expectations and the desire for academic excellence. On its face, academic emphasis is seemingly contrary to being sensitive to a student's academic and anxiety level; however, Murphy et al. (1982) point out that teacher academic emphasis can only be realized if teachers are caring and supportive to go along with holding high academic standards and pressing students. This suggests that some sort of balance needs to be struck in order to maintain high expectations; not too low as to not sufficiently challenge students but not so high so as to overly frustrate and overwhelm students. The four participants
indicated that the practice of differentiating instruction helps to strike this balance by addressing students at their appropriate level of need emotionally and academically.

All of the participants noted the importance of the belief that all students can learn. This belief is a fundamental factor of teacher academic emphasis and is consistent with learned optimism, a theoretical underpinning of academic optimism, which "underscores hope, responsibility, and a general positive disposition to life" (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2008, p. 822).

Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) note that "there is more to being an academically optimistic teacher than simply having a positive attitude toward life....Being predisposed to optimism does not guarantee high academic optimism" (p. 831). However, at the same time, Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) point out the importance of an optimistic disposition, a humanistic and trusting orientation when dealing with students, a welcoming nature when dealing with parents, and a willingness of a teacher to go above and beyond to help students. This assertion is consistent with the findings of this study.

The academically optimistic teachers in this study noted the importance of student-centered teaching practices, but at the same time mentioned the importance of teacher-centered teaching practices as well. All of the participants touted the importance of developing humanistic relationships, but at the same time expressed the need to establish clear and consistent rules, a trademark of a more custodial orientation. All four of the participants conveyed the importance of the use of a variety of parent communication strategies, which is indicative of a humanistic orientation; however, at the same time only two of the four participants noted the use of both proactive and positive communication with parents, which embodies the essence of a humanistic origin, is dependent on a high amount of trust, and is congruous with the theoretical underpinnings of optimism. All of the participants mentioned that all students can learn, which is
one of the tenets of pressing students academically; however, at the same time, the participants reported that they differentiate instruction for their students and work with them at their optimal level, so they don't press them so hard that they are overwhelmed by the anxiety of expectations that are too high and work that is too demanding. All told, this study suggests that these participants are more student-centered, humanistic, and optimistic; however, this is not at the expense of the opposite side of the continuum. They actually welcome being teacher-centered, custodial, and somewhat pessimistic when the situation warrants it. They appear to champion a situational teaching, where they are well versed and accepting of many different beliefs, styles, and practices and utilize them when appropriate for each situation.

This situational teaching style is consistent with learned optimism, a theoretical underpinning of academic optimism. Optimism is not the panacea in all situations. It is not simply the absence of pessimism (Peterson, 2000) and pessimism is not always a hindrance. Seligman (2006) notes that "the balance sheet seems to come out heavily on the side of optimism, but there are times and places where we need our pessimism" (p. 113). Seligman (2006) suggests that flexible optimism is what is important, as he states:

Optimism's benefits are not unbounded. Pessimism has a role to play both in society at large and in our own lives; we must have the courage to endure pessimism when its perspective is valuable. What we want is not blind optimism but flexible optimism—optimism with its eyes open. (p. 292)

This theoretical underpinning seemingly applies to the academically optimistic teachers in this study. The participants in this study certainly have a propensity to be optimistic, student-centered, and humanistic; however, they also are at least occasionally pessimistic, teacher-centered, and custodial, depending on the needs as determined by the situation.
**Conclusion**

This study, in most, if not all instances, is not generalizable to other districts. However, this was not the purpose of this study, which was to discover the means by which teacher academic optimism can be supported in my district by studying those teachers who are academically optimistic and contributing to the literature on this topic by helping to extend the study of this concept.

This study found that the four participants described several beliefs and practices that supported their academic optimism. The data suggests that in order to better support academic optimism in my district, it is recommended that the teachers practice being optimistic, humanistic, and student-centered but also maintain the ability to be pessimistic, custodial, and teacher-centered when the situation warrants it. Therefore, it is important for a teacher in Acushnet to be knowledgeable about many different practices, possess various beliefs, and be flexible so he or she can adapt these practices and beliefs to meet various situations. In addition, the data suggests that the district develop the following beliefs and practices in other teachers in the Acushnet Public Schools in order to support teacher academic optimism in the district:

1) Use a variety of instructional practices.

2) Stress the importance of student effort.

3) Develop humanistic relationships with students, while also establishing clear and consistent class rules and expectations.

4) Use a variety of parent communication strategies.

5) Differentiate instruction and be sensitive to student anxiety levels as you press students.

6) Believe that all students can learn.
Perhaps professional development specifically designed to help encourage these beliefs, and the use of these practices, could help to increase academic optimism in Acushnet.

The research also led me to new understandings about myself as a person and as a Superintendent of Schools. I entered this process with a somewhat rigid and definitive notion of what teachers should believe about students and what they should do in the classroom in order to positively affect student achievement. At times, I felt certain of the prescription that ailed my district and education in general. This doctoral project helped me to challenge my positivist tendencies, as it forced me to reflect on my propensity to sometimes promote absolute truths in order to seemingly solve problems and to bring control to a situation; a characteristic that is often found in educators in leadership positions because of the requirement to live up to the system of accountability in education.

I have learned through this process that it is best to temper my positivist inclinations and firmly supplant these tendencies with a post-positivist frame of reference. Post-positivists do not believe in absolute truths; however, they still do believe that it is possible to make claims with a high degree of probability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002). This framework is one of conviction; however, it makes room for flexibility to adapt when it is clear that an idea, notion, or vision should be altered.

This post-positivist framework bodes well for superintendents and educational leaders, as they must confidently create and communicate a vision for a school district. Confidence and conviction is necessary in order to create buy-in to this vision; however, equally important is respect for competing ideas, and the ability to adapt to various situations.

This notion of situational flexibility and adaptability was supported in this study and appeared to be ingrained in these academically optimistic teachers. As a result, I learned a great
deal from these educators who believe in the value of being flexible in order to adapt their beliefs and practices to the situation at hand; a way of being that seems laudable and deserving of support in my school district, and a concept that is worthy of continued reflection and study.

**Future Research**

It is true that qualitative research, like this study, is less definitive, and the conclusions are less certain (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009); however, this type of research does offer insights that can play an important role in advancing the knowledge base of a particular field of study (Merriam, 2009). As a result, this study helped to provide insights into teacher academic optimism that could serve as a basis to direct future research of this teacher characteristic.

For example, this study found that these academically optimistic participants used a variety of instructional strategies. Research has indicated that teacher efficacy, one of the elements that make up teacher academic optimism, is related to constructivist and student-centered teaching practices (Burton, 1996; de Laat & Waters, 1995) and teacher-centered teaching practices (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002; Saklofske et al., 1988). Likewise, Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) both found a relationship between student-centered practices and teacher academic optimism; however, there has been no research conducted on the relationship between teacher-centered practices and teacher academic optimism to this point. Both Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) researched the relationship between student-centered instructional practices and teacher academic optimism, because these two constructs were more consistent with an optimistic framework. Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) states, "Almost by definition, teachers who believe in centring their teaching on their students must trust their students to cooperate in the teaching-learning process." As a result, these researchers saw student-centered teaching as being more consistent with the framework of
academic optimism. However, Seligman (2006) points out that, optimism, the theoretical underpinning of academic optimism, is not the panacea in all circumstances and pessimism can be beneficial depending on the situation. If one applies this logic to teacher academic optimism, then this suggests that the beliefs and practices that help to support teacher academic optimism may be more consistent with the positive and the possible, but not entirely dismissive of the opposite. Therefore, to test this implication, it would be prudent to study the relationship between teacher academic optimism and both teacher-centered and student-centered teaching practices, along with the use of a variety of instructional practices.

In addition, a focus on the importance of student effort was mentioned by all four participants, while praise and positive reinforcements was noted by three out of four of the participants. Perhaps the type of praise and the focus on effort is related to teacher academic optimism in some way. Mueller and Dweck (1998) note that it is better to focus on effort as opposed to outcomes, as they found that it is better to give students praise for effort versus praise for ability. Their findings suggest that students who are praised for ability develop a fixed mindset, while students praised for effort develop a growth mindset. Students with the latter attribute believe their intelligence is as a result of effort, not ability; therefore, when faced with achievement setbacks they are not resigned to the fact that they can't improve, instead they simply remedy the situation with more effort. In contrast, students with a fixed mindset attribute errors to a lack of ability, which can greatly affect their confidence and make them feel helpless when confronted by achievement setbacks. Mueller and Dweck (1998) explain the consequences of a fixed mindset as follows:

We propose that praise for their intelligence, even when it follows a genuine success, teaches children that they can measure how smart they are from how well they do.
Therefore, if they subsequently do poorly, children may remeasure their ability from low performance. (p. 34)

As a result, studies to measure the relationship between the type of mindsets instilled in students by teachers and teacher academic optimism may help researchers better understand the association between these characteristics.

In addition, this study found that establishing humanistic relationships with students, while at the same time establishing clear and consistent rules, helps support participant teacher academic optimism. Like with student-centered teaching, Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) studied the relationship between humanistic classroom beliefs and teacher academic optimism, because a humanistic orientation is more consistent with the theoretical framework and underpinnings of teacher academic optimism. In regards to this relationship, Ngidi (2012) and Woolfolk Hoy et al. (2008) found conflicting results. This study suggests that a relationship between teacher academic optimism may exist between custodial classroom beliefs, as well as with humanistic classroom beliefs. As a result, I suggest further research to provide a better understanding of the relationship between these two types of classroom beliefs and teacher academic optimism.

I also recommend further research on how parent communication affects teacher trust in parents and teacher academic optimism. The data from this study suggests that a variety of parent communication strategies and a higher frequency of communication with parents helps to bolster teacher trust in parents and teacher academic optimism. In addition, two of the four academically optimistic teachers reported that they use proactive and positive parent communication. More research is needed to explore the relationship between the quantity and type of parent communication and teacher academic optimism.
In this study, the participants noted the importance of differentiated instruction and being sensitive to the anxiety and academic levels of students in supporting their teacher academic optimism. This suggests that it is important to hold high expectations and to press students, which is consistent with an optimistic outlook; however, it is also important to also be realistic and to not press students so much so as to overwhelm them. Further research is needed to help explore the optimal way to press students and to discern if some level of realism is necessary when teachers emphasize academics.

In addition, the research on academic optimism is mainly quantitative and warrants additional qualitative studies like this one in order to explore beliefs and practices that help to support or influence academic optimism. This study could be replicated in other settings in order to bolster reliability, or a more robust qualitative study could be conducted that would include additional methods of data such as observations and the collection of documents. These multiple methods of data collection would help to bolster internal validity or credibility through the triangulation of data (Merriam, 2009).

Lastly, it stands to reason that teacher academic optimism is related to student achievement, even after controlling for socioeconomic status, because a relationship exists between collective academic optimism and student achievement, and teacher academic optimism shares the same theoretical components as collective academic optimism. However, research needs to be conducted to substantiate this relationship and, in turn, further justify the importance of teacher academic optimism.
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Appendix A- TAOS-E

**Directions:** This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nothing</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Some Influence</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directions:** Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements below from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. I trust the parents of my students.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I can count on parent support.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I trust my students.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have confidence in my students.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I ask students to explain how they get their answers.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I don't accept shoddy work from my students.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I give students challenging work.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I press my students to achieve academically.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix B- TAOS-S**

**Directions:** This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nothing</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Some Influence</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>A Great Deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(6)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>(6)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directions:** Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the statements below from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Most of my students are honest.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My students' parents are reliable.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I trust my students.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I press my students to achieve academically.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I give my students challenging work.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I set high, but attainable goals for my students.</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Recruitment Letter (Survey)

Dear Colleagues:

As you know, my name is Stephen Donovan. I am the Superintendent of Schools in Acushnet, as well as a doctoral student at Northeastern University. As a part of my research for my dissertation, I am conducting a survey to help measure teacher beliefs and the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities.

You are being invited to take this survey based on your current employment as a teacher of the Acushnet Public Schools. This short survey should take about two to three minutes to complete.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the survey, you can stop at any time.

The numerical results of this survey will be anonymous to everyone other than this researcher's supervisor. These numerical results will be kept confidential by the researcher's supervisor and will not be made available to anyone unless written consent is later obtained from you. I will not see the individual numerical results of this survey.

However, for a small number of teachers, the general survey results may not be entirely anonymous and confidential, because this information will be used by the researcher's supervisor to select potential participants who express certain teacher beliefs and practices for the second phase of the study. Participation in the second phase of the study shall be voluntary and will require additional informed written consent.

Your participation in this survey shall have no effect on your career and standing in the schools. This survey is being conducted for research purposes only.

Attached, you will find the survey and an informed consent form. Please read the informed consent form, and if you agree to participate, then please indicate your consent by both printing and signing your name in the spaces provided. On the reverse side, you will find the survey, please circle the appropriate items and pass the consent form/survey to Mary Carter.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at donovan.s@huskey.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Jane Lohmann, the Principal Investigator and the researcher's supervisor at j.lohmann@neu.edu.

Thank you for your time,

Stephen Donovan
Appendix D

Signed Consent Form (Survey)

Northeastern University, Department of Education
Name of Investigators: Dr. Jane Lohmann, Principal Investigator; Stephen Donovan, Student Researcher

Informed Consent to Participate in a Survey
We are inviting you to take part in a survey. This form provides information about your participation in this survey, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. If you are willing to participate in this survey, then indicate your consent to take part in the survey by both printing and signing your name in the spaces provided below. On the reverse side, you will find the survey, please circle the appropriate items and pass the consent form/survey to Mary Carter.

Why am I being asked to participate in this survey?
You are being invited to take this survey based on your current employment as a teacher of the Acushnet Public Schools. Your participation may lead me to a better understanding of various teacher beliefs, actions, and experiences.

Who will see the information about me?
The numerical results of this survey will be anonymous to everyone other than this researcher's supervisor. These numerical results will be kept confidential by the researcher's supervisor and will not be made available to anyone unless written consent is later obtained from you. I will not see the individual numerical results of this survey.

However, for a small number of teachers, the general survey results may not be entirely anonymous and confidential, because this information will be used by the researcher's supervisor to select potential participants who express certain teacher beliefs and practices for the second phase of the study. Participation in the second phase of the study shall be voluntary and will require additional informed written consent.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the survey, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at donovan.s@huskey.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Jane Lohmann, the Principal Investigator at j.lohmann@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?
You will not receive compensation to participate in this survey.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There will be no cost to you for participation in this study.

Please indicate your consent to take part in this survey by signing below:

Signature of teacher agreeing to take part in the survey

Printed name of person above

APPROVED
NU IRB
VALID 11-26-11
THROUGH 11-2-11
Appendix E

Telephone Recruitment Script (Interview)

Hello, this is Stephen Donovan. A few weeks ago, you filled out a survey as a part of my research as a doctoral student at Northeastern University. Based on the survey results, I am seeking to recruit you for the second phase of the study. The purpose of this research is to compile information about the beliefs, actions, and experiences of academically optimistic teachers in order to better understand how to support academic optimism in teachers. I believe that you hold a perspective that is critical to my study of academic optimism.

Participation in this phase of the study is entirely voluntary. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one or more semi-structured interviews in the winter/spring of 2014. An interview will typically last between one and two hours. The interviews will take place at a location and time of your choosing.

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. You may be concerned that your participation could potentially affect your standing in the schools; however, this will not be the case. Your participation will not affect your career or your position and can in no way be used as a part of your evaluation.

You will be given a ten dollar gift certificate to Office Max for full participation in this phase of the study.

I would like to meet with you to present to you an informed consent form, which provides more detailed information regarding your participation in this portion of the study. At that time, if you agree to participate, I will ask you to sign the form and set up a meeting to conduct an interview session with you.
Appendix F

Signed Consent Form (Interview)

Northeastern University, Department of Education
Name of Investigators: Dr. Jane Lohmann, Principal Investigator; Stephen Donovan, Student Researcher
Title of Project: Learning from academically optimistic teachers: Supporting teacher academic optimism

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are being recruited for this study based on the results of the survey that you compiled in the first phase of this project. In addition, you hold a perspective that is critical to increasing my effectiveness as a leader in the district.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this research is to compile information about the beliefs, actions, and experiences of academically optimistic teachers in order to better understand how to support teacher academic optimism in teachers.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in one or more semi-structured interviews in the winter/spring of 2014. An interview will typically last between one and two hours. The interviews will take place at a location and time of your choosing. All of the interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed in order to preserve what has been said.

In order to guard against misinterpretation, you will be asked to verify my findings and conclusions for accuracy. This process is known as member checking and is important to the validity of the study. Please note that you may offer alternative language or interpretations; however, there is no promise that your recommendations will appear in the final report.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. You may be concerned that your participation could potentially affect your standing in the schools; however, this will not be the case. Your participation will not affect your career or your position and can in no way be used as a part of your evaluation.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study; however, your answers may help us to learn more about academic optimism.
Who will see the information about me?
Anonymity cannot be guaranteed, especially at the district level because of the size of the district and the fact that the district will be revealed in the final write up. However, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name in order to protect your identity as much as possible. During the project, all data will be stored in secure locations. All audiotapes of the interviews and other raw data will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Confidentiality will be protected as much as possible; however, there is no promise of confidentiality for such illegal activities as evidence of child abuse, neglect, etc.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me at donovan.s@huskey.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Jane Lohmann, the Principal Investigator at j.lohmann@neu.edu.

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Will I be paid for my participation?
You will be given a ten dollar gift certificate to Office Max for full participation in this study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There will be no cost to you for participation in this study.

Please indicate your consent to take part in this study by signing below:

Signature of teacher agreeing to take part

Printed name of person above

APPROVED
NU IRB
VALID THROUGH
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent

Date

Printed name of person above

APPROVED
NJ IRDI 1-13-11
VAUD 1-15-11
THROUGH 4-30-11
Appendix G- Interview Guide

Date__________________ Place_______________________ Interviewee_________________

1. What does it mean to you to be a good teacher?

2. Describe, in detail, a time when you were able to motivate students who showed low interest in school work.
   
   *Tell me more about your experiences with motivating students who show low interest in school work.

3. Describe, in detail, a time when you were able to get students to believe they can do well in school.
   
   *Tell me more about your ability to get students to believe they can do well in school.

4. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated trust for your students.
   
   *Tell me more about your trust for your students.

5. Tell me about a time when you demonstrated trust for the parents of your students.
   
   *Tell me more about your trust for the parents of your students.
6. Describe, in detail, a time when you pressed students to achieve academically.
   *Tell me more about your push for students to achieve academically.

7. Describe, in detail, a time when you gave students challenging work.
   *Tell me more about the level of challenge of the work that you give to your students.