FACTORS RELATED TO TEACHER RETENTION: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF

FOUR TEACHERS IN AN URBAN, HARD-TO-STAFF HIGH SCHOOL

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Retaining quality teachers is critical to the success of America's schools. How to retain quality teachers, especially in high needs schools, is a question of fervent debate among educational researchers, policy makers, administrators, parents, and students. This study examines the issue of teacher retention from an emic perspective, focused on understanding the perspective of those closest to the retention decision, teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

This study examines the lived experiences of four teachers at a hard-to-staff, urban, secondary school as these experiences impact their decisions to remain in teaching and at their current campus. Research methods adopted an existential phenomenological perspective and focused on understanding deeply the perspective of participants and how participants make meaning of their lived experiences as they relate to the retention decision. Three hour-long interviews were conducted with each of the four participants utilizing methodology laid out by Seidman (1991). Data were analyzed using NVIVO 10 to apply a series of coding and recoding procedures to interview transcripts.

Conclusions suggest four factors motivated these teachers to teach and remain in their current hard-to-staff, urban, secondary school. These factors include: belief in the power of education, relationships with students, mentoring and professional partnering, and remaining professionally challenged. Findings suggest factors that drive teachers out of teaching and out of hard-to-staff schools include: inconsistent administrative support, low student motivation, and lack of resources.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My first years as an educator illustrate the complexity of teacher satisfaction and teacher retention. While attending Austin College, I discovered that I wanted to be a teacher. My professors and classmates encouraged me in a growing passion for teaching and learning. This idealistic enthusiasm made sense when I was a student at a small, private university; however, the real world circumstances of my first students challenged my idealism about teaching and learning.

My first teaching position was 9th grade, English at Pegasus Charter School in downtown Dallas, TX. The school was small, around 200 students, and classrooms were converted office space rented on the second floor of a downtown office building. Resources were scarce: the students shared eight working computers in our computer lab. Tables and chairs, donated from a local high school, were cracked or chipped in some way, and our copier was a "ditto" machine, which left the user's head spinning from the fumes. The student body, primarily low socio-economic status (SES) and dependent on public transportation to get to school reflected the urban location of the student population. Despite these hurdles, students who had underperformed in public schools were learning and even thriving at the school. Students were using downtown Dallas as their learning lab on a daily basis. Teachers, with the help of student committees, worked to develop a project-based curriculum focused on real world experiences. Teachers collaborated and worked with each other late at night planning for the next project. Although this school had few resources, low pay, challenging students and exceptional demands on teacher time, teacher retention was high and the quality of teaching remained high as well.

How can a school with low pay, challenging students, and few resources recruit and retain quality teachers? The issue of teacher satisfaction is complex and a variety of interconnected factors affect both teacher recruitment and teacher retention. These complexities form the starting point for this study.

Teacher quality and teacher retention are related concepts; this study assumes that in order for teachers to address the needs of students in hard-to-staff schools, they must be there long enough to become deeply invested in helping the students and also be there long enough to acquire the skills and pedagogy necessary to teach effectively. However, race and class inequality continue to plague high needs schools leaving them the most difficult to difficult to staff and suffering from the highest attrition rates. The teacher is the critical link to student achievement; therefore, when teachers are leaving the profession, presumably moving to higher paying, less taxing, and more respected careers, the signs of a failing system become apparent (Marks, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll, 2004).

Assuming that retaining qualified teachers in a school is better for students, schools, and our country, I began to question intensely what makes teachers stay in teaching and what drives them away from their current schools. This question was spurred on by my graduate work at the University of North Texas (UNT).

<div align="center">Coordinated Project</div>

While working toward my doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at UNT, I was privileged to become part of a research project funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board at UNT through a subcontract from Texas Educational Research Center for Educator Preparation (TERCEP) at Stephen F. Austin University. The study proposed by TERCEP in 2007 involved analysis of statewide quantitative data using multivariate analysis,

regression modeling, and data mining techniques in order to look for trends and patterns associated with hard to staff schools. The proposed study also posited use of qualitative case study methods to examine educator experiences at hard-to-staff schools in different parts of the state. Subcontracts with institutional partners were made available in 2008. UNT and cooperating partners Stephen F Austin University, Lamar University, Texas Tech University, and University of Texas El Paso launched research about teacher recruitment and retention in hard to staff schools. Considering UNT's close proximity to major urban school districts and other participating institutions' relatively rural settings, the group viewed research conducted in an urban school district as most beneficial to the overall research agenda.

The research group was dedicated to understanding the factors that impact teacher retention. Three faculty members were active in leading the work of the group. Dr. Jimmy Byrd, Associate Professor of Teacher Education and Administration, brought a strong background in quantitative data methodology and analysis. Dr. Mary Harris, Regents Professor of Teacher Education and Administration, shared her experience in coordinating projects and facilitating the many aspects of the grant, research, planning, and presenting data. Dr. Jeanne Tunks, Associate Professor of Teacher Education and Administration, brought a wealth of knowledge around qualitative research methodology and analysis. Furthermore, Dr. Deborah Harris, Assistant Professor of Education at Prairie View A&M University, joined the research group after its first year and she brought her perspective as an administrator in urban schools.

The faculty invited graduate students to participate on the research team and nine doctoral students opted to participate. All of the nine participants were employed in school districts in and around the selected urban area. In addition to myself, the students included Mike

Burns, Yanet Cardoza, Patricia Cook, Standra Johnson, Katie Kordel, Allana Peterson, Mackie Spradley, Linda Tyrer.

The group met on Saturday mornings for about three hours every three weeks. At first, the course was structured as a class and students enrolled for one credit of independent study in Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010. Meetings to complete the work and bring the study to points of publication and presentation continued into Spring 2011 and Fall 2012; however, these meetings were not structured as a formal course and were less frequent, only two or three per semester.

With a combined interest in teacher retention, the research groups began to investigate the issue of hard-to-staff schools. First steps in the process revolved around defining key terms, reviewing literature, and identifying the research question and resulting methodologies. Based on the group's study of related literature and robust discussions, the group developed the following factors to characterize hard-to-staff schools:

1. Low socio-economic status (SES) of students, as indicated by the number of students who receive free or reduced lunch prices. More than 70% of students identified as economically disadvantaged on Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report.

2. Low student achievement, as indicated by student performance on state standardized tests. Schools rated by the Texas Education Agency as "academically unacceptable" for at least two of the last three years and schools that failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) according to at least one of the federal definitions for at least two of the last three years.

3. Low teacher morale, as indicated by annual staff attrition. Teacher turnover, identified in the AEIS report, to be greater than 20% for the last three years.

The research group developed the following research question: What are the latent indicators associated with teaching in urban, secondary, hard-to-staff schools in a selected metropolitan area?

The group developed a Likert survey with questions clustered around several themes, derived from reading and group discussion. These themes included professional development, assessment, induction processes, administrative leadership, teacher self-efficacy, personal efficacy, efficacy for cultural diversity, and efficacy for classroom environment. Following the piloting of the survey, the research group applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval both at UNT and at the selected school district and approval was granted by both in Fall 2011.

Based on analysis of findings from the pilot survey, the survey instrument was refined and questions were narrowed from 61 to 48. Furthermore, during this same span of time, the research group studied qualitative methods and analysis around the issue of difficulty of staffing urban schools. As part of this process, the research group members developed a set of standard interview questions, then practiced conducting, recording, and transcribing teacher interviews, and standardized procedures for collection of interview data.

In Fall 2011, the group gained research access to two urban high schools, both schools were included in the IRB and fit the hard- to-staff criteria. Criteria for selecting the schools pertained to data from the three years prior to 2009. School selection was partially based on failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), using federal ratings, and being rated academically unacceptable, according to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) rankings. Though both schools met the criteria set forth by research cohort when the research began in the Fall 2009, by Fall 2011, when the data was collected, the status of one of the schools had changed to

"academically acceptable." In spite of this, the group decided to continue with the research at this campus.

In Fall 2011, the refined survey was administered to 113 teachers at the two high schools. Surveys were administered during their professional learning community period by department heads in one school and by a member of the research group in the other school. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would be interested in participating in further interview research. Forty-four teachers indicated interest in the further research, and from these 44, the research group interviewed 23; conducting 30-minute interviews in November and December of 2011. In spring and summer of 2012, the interview data were transcribed, and the survey and interview data were examined and analyzed. The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data were reported by Harris and Johnson (2012) in a work entitled "Teacher Perception of Working in Hard to Staff Urban Secondary Schools: Final Report to the Texas Education Research Center on Teacher Preparation (TERCEP) of a Project," completed at the University of North Texas. The results and findings from this report are examined in more detail in Review of Literature (Chapter 2) and the Conclusions (Chapter 5).

Purpose of Study

Throughout my work with the Harris and Johnson (2012) group, one question continued to reverberate both with me and among the research group. What are the stories behind the numbers?

Although the survey established a primarily etic and objective approach, which is a useful tool in advising school administrators as well as policy-makers, any possible conclusions acquired from the data are limited to factors that are on the survey. Participants' stories and reasoning behind their responses could not be effectively studied in the survey. Though there are

advantages to the use of a survey, this research decision also created an opportunity for further qualitative and emic research. The research group's 30-minute interviews marked a move in this direction and these interviews gleaned more in-depth data on the teacher perspective, but even after these interviews, there existed a need to dig deeply into the experience of the teachers in this school and to go beyond asking predetermined questions. I wanted to know more. I wanted to hear the root of their passion by asking these teachers what they wanted to say about the true reasons behind their decision to stay or leave. This perspective has guided the development of this study's research question as well the data collection and analysis methods.

The purpose of this study is to extend the field of research on teacher retention as examined from the perspective of the teacher. Examination into prior literature reveals that the majority of research on teacher retention looks at the issue from economic, organizational, or policy perspective. Consequently, the majority of these works focus on quantitative methodologies, looking at teacher retention in terms of trends and correlations and in many cases examining factor that affects retention in isolation from other factors.

Within research examining the teacher's perspective, studies predominately take an etic perspective, which centers on asking teachers to complete surveys or answer short interviews with scripted questions. Among the limited research projects that do adopt a more emic perspective that use longer, open ended interviews, frequently the research centers on identifying and characterizing teachers who remain in high needs schools. Little is known about how teachers make meaning around their lived experiences and how these experiences impact the decision to remain in teaching and/or at their current campus. The current project sought to understand how participants make sense of their experiences as they relate to the decisions to stay in teaching and/or at their current campus.

This study is part of a larger study conducted by the Harris and Johnson (2012) group and is a next level of work adding to this group's understanding around the difficulty of staffing urban schools. Harris and Johnson (2012) administered a survey and then conducted 30-minute semi-structured interviews; this study is the next step toward a deeper understanding of the teacher's perspective. This study's design allowed the researcher to ask unscripted, follow-up questions, designed to seek meaning behind responses.

Statement of Problem

Dedicated and capable teachers are the most important element to student learning and to the success of every school. Teacher retention is essential to ensure that every school employs dedicated and capable teachers. However many schools struggle to retain such teachers. There exists a vast network of interrelated factors both outside and inside every teacher's life and school that affect the retention decision. This research examined these factors from the perspective of the teacher. This view was chosen because the perceptions and perspectives of teachers provide the best insight into why teachers leave or stay in their current positions. Furthermore, this study employed in-depth interviewing as a means to uncover how individual teachers make meaning of their experiences, and how these perspectives affect their decision to stay or go.

Research Question and Methodology

This study's research question is as follows: What factors in the lived experience of teachers at an urban, secondary, hard-to-staff school impacts their decisions to remain in teaching and at their current campus?

The research data was collected through a series of three, hour-long interviews spaced two weeks apart with four participants; a methodology laid out in detail by Seidman (1991) in his

book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. Participants were chosen based on a willingness to participate, experience in teaching, ethnicity, and gender. The interview protocol was designed to seek depth in participant response and to facilitate deep understanding of phenomena from the perspective of the research participant (Seidman, 1991).

Based on Seidman's process, interviews were planned to build off of each other and the questions asked could be altered both during the interview process and in between interviews. The three interviews focused, respectively, on life and career history, current teaching and school experiences, and how the research participant made sense of these experiences. Questions asked during the process encompassed a broad spectrum of possible factors. These factors fall into two groups: factors inside the school and factors outside the school. Factors inside the school include administrative support, discipline and safety, the induction process, personal efficacy, professional growth, professional efficacy, state and federal accountability pressures, and school climate. All of these factors and other subordinate factors inside the school impact teacher job satisfaction and, consequently, retention. Factors outside of the school such as the current job market, family, health, and job history can also impact how satisfied a teacher is with his or her current position. Though questions were sure to address a broad number of factors, the questions were posed in such a way so that findings and conclusions were derived solely from participant responses, not from the factors identified above.

Significance

This study provides a unique perspective on the issue of teacher retention in urban, secondary, hard-to-staff schools. In an effort to learn from those closest to the retention decision, the teachers themselves, and this study encouraged teachers to share their perspective

unencumbered by assumptions of causality. This study endeavored to uncover and unravel some of the complexity around teacher retention.

Methodology of the study and presentation of findings remain focused on understanding and accurately portraying the teachers' perspectives and how their lived experiences helped shape those perspectives. The stories of participants are central to findings and conclusions and the study's methodology values that the teachers in hard-to-staff schools are real people with histories, backgrounds, and a complex set of life experiences that shape their decisions. These findings contribute to the current body of academic knowledge on what is happening in our hard-to-staff schools, and more specifically, in the lives of teachers in these schools. Participant stories and perspectives were systemically categorized to find commonalities and themes that may inform educational stake holders, administration, teacher education programs, and teacher policy makers about areas for future focus and growth.

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations of the research include the small sample size, the employment of participants at the same school, lack of longitudinal data, and inherent limitations of phenomenological methodology.

In-depth interviews provide a depth of understanding and questioning not accessible through other forms of inquiry. However, the efforts in finding this depth also results in limiting factors. One primary limitation is the admittedly small number of research participants. This limitation is due to two factors. First, in-depth interviewing is a time intensive process for both researcher and participant. Participants are asked to dedicate three hours of their time toward the research process. Second, the process of recording, transcribing, and cyclical reviewing of transcripts looking for themes is time intensive. Although less time could be spent in this

process, this would not remain true to the existential phenomenological perspective sought. Accurate accounts of the participants' experiences serve to mitigate this limitation.

Another limitation of this study is all four participants are employed at the same school. Participant experiences will tend to provide a more confined view of factors affecting their decisions to stay in teaching than research that considers the experiences of participants from a broad spectrum of schools. In order to minimize this effect, among the small sample size of four participants, a variety of years of teaching experience, ethnicities, as well as both genders were represented in the sample of participants. While the focus on a small number of participants and just one school afforded opportunities for great depth in interviewing, it also served as a limitation for this study.

A lack of longitudinal data for analysis is another limiting factor. Participants were asked to reflect upon the experiences that led them to teaching; however, these reflections are limited to both what and how participants remembered their prior experiences. The study did not follow participants to see if they are still employed at the same school or in teaching.

Though the existential phenomenological perspective encourages depth and the chosen methodologies further encourage this depth, one person can never understand another perfectly. Learning gleaned from this study is limited to the comments and perspectives that participants chose to share. Given this limitation, accurate reporting, in-depth interview methodologies, and continued focus on finding common meaning in language can mediate this limitation. Controls to minimize the effect of this limitation centered on four steps, with each focused on both clearly communicating researcher perspective and accurately representing what participants say. The first step was the creation of a researcher identity memo included in Appendix A, in which I examine my own interest in this topic. This process is intended to illuminate possible biases and

preconceived ideas with the intention that they may be publically acknowledged and aid me in stripping away the prior perceptions in order to understand the perspective of the participant. Second, although there were standard questions prewritten before each interview, they were viewed as a jumping off point for further exploration and questioning. The ability to ask follow-up questions afforded me the opportunity to examine deeply the experiences of participants. Third, the process of coding and categorizing data in NVIVO 10 was purposefully designed to focus on the participants' perspectives and to allow me to confront these perspectives in order to reveal my biases as I sought to find the participants' true voice. Finally, presentation of findings is forthcoming and detailed, accepting that true objectivity is impossible.

One assumption within this work is that job satisfaction influences intention to stay in or leave a teaching job, which in turn influences actual behavior. Prior research shows that job satisfaction has the strongest direct positive effect on intent to stay (Heyns, 1988; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Stockard & Leham, 2004). This work assumes teachers who say they are satisfied with their jobs will also be more likely to stay in their current positions. Although factors outside of teacher job satisfaction, such as health or family needs, were examined as part of the interview process, the effect of these extraneous factors on teacher decision-making lies outside the realm of the questions posed.

<center>Key Terms</center>

Key terms relevant to this study include urban school, hard-to-staff, high needs, node and teacher attrition and retention.

An urban school is defined as a school in or near a major metropolitan area in which at least 80% of students live within a 15 mile radius of the school.

Schools are considered hard-to-staff when they exemplify all of the following three characteristics. First, the school has more than 75% of students identified as economically disadvantaged on the most recent Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report. A student is identified as economically disadvantaged when he or she is eligible to receive free or reduced lunch, based on annual family income. National standards require that 35% of students be identified as economically disadvantaged for a school to qualify to receive Title 1 funds; however, because more than 50% of schools qualify under this standard set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act, the more stringent standard of 75% was used to identify schools in this research project.

Second, hard-to-staff schools have low student achievement as compared to the average of all other public schools, based on student performance on state standardized tests. The sample school had been rated by the Texas Education Agency as "academically unacceptable" for at least two of the last three years and the school had failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), according to at least one of the federal definitions for at least two of the last three years.

Third, low teacher moral characterizes hard-to-staff schools, as indicated by annual staff attrition. Teacher turnover in the sample school as identified in the AEIS report, was 20% or greater for the last three years.

The criteria for hard-to-staff were applied for the previous three years in Fall 2009 to the chosen high school referred to as "Mockingbird High Schoo' in this study. These criteria were not updated after application was made to the school district. At the time of study Mockingbird HS no longer met the criteria for hard-to-staff because the school was rated academically unacceptable in only one of the past three years. Mockingbird HS did continue to meet the criteria for hard-to-staff in all other areas at time of study.

To prevent confusion around the term hard-to-staff, the term high needs is used in this study when referring to the work of other researchers who conducted research in similar schools as Mockingbird HS. Because the definition of hard-to-staff is specifically operationalized, use of this term to refer to schools in prior research could prove to be misleading. Though high needs schools tend to share all or most of the characteristics of hard-to-staff schools as defined in this study, the term *high needs* is used to describe schools that have a higher than average percentage of at risk student, lower than average achievement scores, higher than average teacher attrition, and are schools that serve a higher than average percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

The term "node" as utilized in this research is a specialized term, derived from NVIVO 10 qualitative data analysis software. Nodes refer to categories of data, or coding groups. Nodes group together participant comments and allow the researcher to track frequency of related comments across participants and interviews. Nodes were derived from review of data and nodes can be changed and refined throughout all steps of the research process.

Teacher retention refers to individuals remaining in teaching. Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) assert, if teaching represents the most attractive activity to pursue among all activities available to them, the teacher shall remain in teaching. Furthermore, the authors describe attractiveness of teaching as desirable in light of "ease of entry" and overall compensation.

Teacher attrition is examined as an opposite to teacher retention, examining how these same factors make teaching less attractive, resulting in teachers leaving the field of teaching. Teacher attrition is characterized by teachers who leave education all together, not teachers who choose to work in other areas of education.

Research Perspective

A desire to stay true to experiences of the classroom teacher and to place a value on the lived experience of the research participant drove my decision to adopt an existential phenomenological perspective in this study. The phenomenological approach requires a stripping away of preconceptions and a reconfrontation of the relevant phenomenon from a more objective perspective. This requires both an honest consideration of the biases of the researcher and ultimately removal of the identified biases. In order to do this, the findings reached must be based on the statements in the interviews and supported by data collected from participants.

The phenomenological research methods outlined by Seidman (1991) on which this study draws heavily, emphasize the importance of telling the story of the participants. Seidman suggests three, one and a half hour-long interviews spaced two weeks apart with four to five participants. The interview protocol is set up to provide a breadth of questions and topics for examination, while also viewing the interview questions as jumping off points for discussion, not as limiting factors in the interviews. The data analysis focuses on selecting constitutive details of the story, reflecting on them, giving them order, and then making meaning around these stories (Seidman, 1991). Implications of the phenomenological perspective are far reaching in this study and impact areas such as trust, interview length, participant numbers, and research rationale. This study attempted to examine these factors in a forthcoming and honest way. Although true objectivity is impossible in in-depth interviewing, honest dialogue and forthright presentation of data on the part of the researcher best mitigate the scientific flaws of human to human interaction. At the core of the in-depth interviewing process is a desire to create a rich, value free, description of the participant's responses.

Most essential to existential phenomenological perspective is to understand phenomena as they are viewed from the perspective of the participant and understanding how participants make meaning of these experiences. These methodologies seek to strip away layers of consciousness and discover the essence of a phenomenon, accepting that all people are immersed in their worlds and are therefore unable to become truly objective viewers of their own experiences (Gribch, 2007). Consequently, existentialism accepts that humans and their words cannot be viewed as truly objective realities. The research difficulties inherent to more subjective views of data are mitigated through in-depth questioning, accurate data collection, and accurate examination regarding how researcher perceptions might impact findings.

Summary

Education is the key to a successful economy and a successful nation; furthermore, all students should have an equal opportunity to the finest education possible. Quality education ensures the eventual prosperity of the student as well as of our schools and our nation. While these ideas are generally considered worthwhile, there is much debate about what this education looks like and about what constitutes a quality education. Throughout these debates there remain several constants. First, teachers are at the core of the educational experience. Second, research suggests that high needs schools, which need quality teachers most, are staffed by the least qualified teachers. Finally, teacher retention is a critical component to providing quality teachers because the teachers who stay in high needs school have time to learn how to teach effectively in those school, and also retention suggests that the teacher is dedicated to the school and students in it. Given these constants, the focus of this study was on understanding how the experiences of teachers shaped their decision to stay in or leave current school and/or education.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature is divided into three parts: Research Context, Existential Phenomenological Perspective, and University of North Texas Research Review. Research Context presents literature related to teacher retention; teacher retention in high needs schools and teacher perspectives on teacher retention in high needs schools. This summary of current research, though not exhaustive, examines the predominant themes in current research and situates this study in the larger body of research on the topic. Existential Phenomenological Perspective contains a review of literature to establish the theoretical perspective for the study and frames an understanding for the selected methodology and its philosophical underpinning. University of North Texas Research Review is a review of the work of the research group as reported by Harris and Johnson (2012), and is included because the current study is an offspring of this larger project and understanding of its findings is critical in later comparison with the findings of the current study.

Although Chapter 5 references prior research as it relates to findings from the current study, the existential phenomenological perspective necessitates findings derive solely from participant responses and not from these prior research findings. The purpose of this review is twofold. First is to situate this study in relation to similar studies, both in the field of teacher retention as well as in the field of existential phenomenology and second to establish how this study builds off the prior work and learning of the Harris and Johnson (2012) research, in particular. Although the review of literature established where the current study exists in the greater body of academic knowledge, the methodology and analysis in the current study focused

on findings derived directly from participant responses. Prior research did not pre-determine the categories of the findings.

<div align="center">Research Context</div>

Having a capable and dedicated teacher in each classroom is critical to the success of each student, school, and our nation's schools as a whole. Ensuring that every student, every classroom, and every school has such a teacher establishes a need for research on teacher retention. The majority of the research and work on teacher retention is predicated on the ideas that experienced teachers are more effective than novice teachers and that teacher attrition is costly for schools financially and in terms of human resources (Ingersoll, 2001b; Ingersoll, 2004; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). At the root of most research in teacher retention is a desire to identify factors causing teachers to stay in or leave teaching, with the purpose of recommending changes to retain quality teachers. This section addresses the major ideas and prevalent themes in current research on teacher retention, then narrow the focus to literature on teacher retention in high needs schools and finally, further narrow the focus to literature that seeks the teacher's perspective on teacher retention in high needs schools.

Teacher Retention

The push for "highly qualified" teachers as defined in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act puts a burden on school districts to find better and more qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). The problem of providing quality teachers in all classrooms is frequently connected to teacher supply; however, research suggests that retention, not supply, is at the center of ensuring that schools are staffed by quality teachers. As Ingersoll (2002) points out,

It is widely believed that schools are plagued by shortages of teachers, primarily due to recent increases in teacher retirements and student enrollments…. These data indicate

that school staffing problems are not primarily due to teacher shortages, in the sense of an

insufficient supply of qualified teachers. Rather, the data indicate that school staffing

problems are primarily due to a "revolving door"—where large numbers of qualified

teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement. (Abstract)

This opinion is echoed by Darling-Hammond (2003), who says, "The problem does not lie in the

number of teachers available; we produce many more qualified teachers than we hire, the hard

part is keeping the teachers we prepare" (p. 7). Furthermore, the National Commission on

Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) (2002) says, "… the teacher 'shortage' turns out to be

just the visible side of a coin, whose underside is high attrition rates" (p. 3). These authors and

researchers point toward the true challenge in maintaining quality educators in schools. Research

suggests that teacher attrition is highest in the first three years of teaching, yet sufficient

preparation and support in the first years of teaching has been shown to reduce the teacher

attrition rate (Darling-Hammond 2003; Ingersoll, 2007).

Multiple studies on teacher retention suggest that several key factors impact teacher

retention. As Moore-Johnson (2012) put it, "Teachers chose the profession because they

expected to make a difference in students' lives. When their schools made success not only

possible but likely, they stayed; when their schools were dysfunctional, making good teaching

difficult or impossible, they transferred to another school or left teaching altogether" (p. 68).The

predominant factors that affect teacher success in schools in the current body of research on

teacher retention center on teacher preparation and professional development, administrative

leadership and support, pay, and the cost of attrition.

Teachers who receive specific training in teaching, have student taught, and who are part

of a supportive preparation program encouraging self-reflection as well as constructive feedback

are most likely to remain in teaching (NCTAF, 2002). Conversely, many research reports suggest teachers with inadequate preparation are far more likely to leave teaching in their first years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Yost, 2006). Cook and Van Cleaf's (2000) research with 79 first year teachers suggests that student teaching experiences in schools with demographics similar to their first teaching positions showed a marked correlation with teacher satisfaction. Furthermore, new teacher retention has been shown to correlate with multiple opportunities for reflection and problem solving early in teaching (Yost, 2006). These increased opportunities for success as well as opportunities to reflect and problem solve have been associated with increases in teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Providing capable mentors to new teachers has also been shown to correlate positively with teacher retention (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003). Along with providing capable mentors, purposeful matching of mentors and new teachers impacts the effectiveness of this relationship. Kardos and Moore-Johnson (2010) in a study of 374 randomly selected first and second year teachers in three states found that new teachers often have inappropriate mentor matches and that appropriate matching of mentors is as important to the success of a new teacher as assigning a mentor.

Some factors that positively impact new teachers are the same as factors that impact retention for more experienced teachers. Research on teacher retention for experienced teachers suggests that ongoing professional development, professional autonomy, and increased opportunities to contribute in school wide decision-making positively impact teacher retention (Darling Hammond, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll 2007). Furthermore, both district-directed professional developmental activities (PDAs) and site-based PDAs have been positively correlated with increased teacher retention. District-based PDAs are reflective of traditional

central administration driven activities, while site-based PDAs are developed by local campus administrators and/or teachers.

District directed PDAs increase teacher efficacy by allowing teachers to learn with and through others because educators from different schools and school districts bring new ideas to share and colleagues become a resource as teachers learn from the trials and errors of others (Educational Commission of the States (ECS), 1996). Often these new ideas are brought back and used in the classroom; furthermore, networking enhances teacher learning and fosters future interactions by developing a sense of teamwork (ECS, 1996).

Site-base PDAs have been shown to increase participant ownership in decision-making, and research suggests that teachers, administrators, students, and parents will work harder to ensure the success of school initiatives when they are involved in decision-making processes (Bandura, 1986). Because site based PDAs allow teachers to be involved in the goal setting process, these activities are more likely to create long-lasting changes in teacher practice. Long-lasting change takes place at a deep psychological level and involves adjustment of attitudes, actions, and philosophical beliefs that have developed over long periods of time (Vaill, 1984). Along with a propensity to create long-lasting change, site based PDAs are often preferred by teachers. Hanson and Hentschke (2002) found that, "although members' workloads increased because of extra duties assumed, teachers unanimously indicated that they prefer this self-governed professional style of teaching and administration to the traditional 'central administration' style of management" (p. 1). This conclusion was based on a research project conducted in charter schools with a "teacher cooperative" management strategy. Despite the fact that approximately 20% of costs normally associated with administrative staffing was eliminated, the teachers clearly valued ownership in the school decision-making more than decreased work

load (Hanson & Hentschke, 2002). Along with a sense of empowerment, site based PDAs result in increasing student input into classroom decision-making (Hammond, 2006). Teachers who are involved in using research to make decisions and in goal setting processes are more likely to adjust teaching to student learning needs, base decisions on research in the future, and allow students to set their own learning goals (Hammond, 2006). As Mitchel (2000) points out, when teachers are given power in decision-making regarding discipline, they begin to work together to identify a series of student-centered activities that empower students to take responsibility for their own behaviors. This results in fewer discipline problems in the classroom, higher student engagement, and higher teacher satisfaction.

Along with professional development, administrative support is consistently addressed in literature on teacher retention. Reviews of literature on administration and teacher retention suggest that school leadership impacts a multitude of workings conditions that significantly impact teacher job satisfaction and retention (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll, 2002).

Teacher pay is another factor frequently addressed in the teacher retention discussions. Research suggests that salary matters more for new and early into teaching teachers, while more experienced teachers place an increased emphasis on working conditions as they effect the retention decision (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin (2004) found that based on data from the Texas student information data base, female teachers require larger salary differentials than their male counterparts to offset disadvantaged school populations. However, the overall results of this quantitative study indicate that teacher attrition is much more strongly related to characteristics of the students, particularly race and achievement, than to salary. Of the

50 states, 18 states mandate that schools pay teachers more based on their levels of education and 21, including Texas, require them to pay based on years of experience (Wiessmann, 2012).

Related to pay, research on teacher retention that adopts an economic perspective predominates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Croasmun, Hampton & Herrman, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll, 2007;Marso & Pigge, 1995). Though this strand of research adopts a largely etic perspective, unlike the emic perspective of this study, the pervasiveness of the economic perspective in current research necessitates a broad overview of the concept. The economic perspective is predicated on the idea that the entire hiring process, from posting a job opening through interviewing, hiring, and orienting new teachers is financially costly and requires investment of many hours of time of teachers and administrators (Brown & Wynn, 2009). Furthermore, this cost is magnified when teachers leave the profession completely because all schools lose the ability to capitalize on an initial investment in that teacher's recruitment and professional development. Darling-Hammond (2003) points out that the money and resources, invested by school administrators toward creating professional learning communities and retaining new teachers, pay themselves back when the high cost of attrition is calculated. Although providing mentoring for beginning teachers and creating a culture of continued learning as well as providing new challenges for experienced teachers cost districts initially, increased teacher retention serves to offset these expenses (Darling-Hammond, 2003).

Previous research that examines the issue of teacher retention from a more holistic perspective suggests there are several key factors impacting teacher retention across all levels of schooling. "Elementary and High School Teachers: Birds of a Feather?" (Marston, Brunetti, and Courtney, 2005) examines the similarities and differences between public elementary and high school teachers' motivation. Marston's et al. examination of the results incorporated the use of a

mixed-method approach. The study supported findings from 60 semi-structured interviews with findings from 169 responses to the Experienced Teacher Survey (ETS). These findings suggest eight factors impact teacher job satisfaction across all levels. These factors include subject matter, professional development, teacher efficacy, responsibilities, mentors, administration, factors outside of the job, and relationships with students, teachers, and administration. For both elementary and high school teachers, a desire to work with young people and creating a desire to learn and a love of learning in students were motivators that kept teachers in the classroom.

Current research on teacher retention suggests attrition of teachers, most notably new teachers is a core cause of teacher shortages. This research addresses a multitude of facets around teacher retention, including areas such as teacher preparation and professional development, administrative support, pay, the cost of attrition, and similarities in what motivates teacher across all levels of schooling. While teacher attrition is an area of concern across all of America's schools, nowhere is this concern more alarming than in our poorest and neediest schools.

Teacher Retention in High Needs Schools

The term hard-to-staff is a relatively new term in school literature although the concept that some schools consistently attract and retain the best teachers while others struggle to find and retain qualified teachers is not new. More common than the term hard-to-staff in research, is the term *high needs*. Research suggests that those schools with the highest needs are also those schools that are hardest to staff and that high needs schools also have the highest level of teacher attrition (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Ingersoll, 2001a; Ingersoll, 2004; Riley, 1998). Despite this troublesome observation, research on teacher retention in high needs schools suggests there are several prevailing characteristics of schools and administrators that retain quality teachers. These characteristics will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

A degree of employee turn-over is necessary to growing and improving any organization; however, the level of turnover present in schools exceeds a healthy balance (Ingersoll, 2004). While laws call for all students to have equal educational opportunity, research literature suggests that urban, minority, and low SES schools struggle to hire, and retain qualified and experienced teachers (Bradley &Loadman, 2005; Ingersoll, 2004). Ingersoll (2001a) points out that teacher turnover rates in high poverty schools can be 20% to 50% higher than in more affluent schools. The problem of teacher attrition is compounded by a shortage of experienced and qualified teachers willing to work in high needs schools. Ingersoll (2004) reports that in 1999-2000, schools in urban and rural high-poverty communities were far more likely to report they had difficulties filling math teaching positions than did schools serving low-poverty communities. Riley (1998) contends that communities having the highest need for quality teachers, those with high rates of poverty and large minority populations, are also those with the least qualified and least experienced teachers. Teacher experience is important to quality because Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) indicate that new teachers are on average lower performing than more experienced teachers. Furthermore, Dumler (2010) points out that after an inexperienced teacher leaves, "the new open position is again filled with the only teacher who will take the job, who is either naïve to what is required of them or under qualified and therefore willing to take any available position" (p. 31).

Current research does offer perspectives and views of how to reverse this situation and retain quality teachers in high needs school. Amrein-Beardsley (2007) reports three key incentives to enticing quality teachers to teach and remain teaching in high needs schools. These are a principal that is caring, supportive, open-minded, knowledgeable, committed to learning, and highly qualified; higher salary, increase opportunities for promotion and increased benefits;

and other teachers at the school that are caring, unified, knowledgeable, committed, and hold a belief that all students can learn.

The work of Petty, Fitchett, and O'Connor (2012) suggests "caring for students" was among the most important reason teachers identified for staying in their current high needs schools. Along with caring, exposure to similar schools in teacher preparation and non-pecuniary factors were identified as important to teacher retention.

Similarly the work of Rinke (2011) found, in a longitudinal study of eight secondary, science teachers in urban secondary, high needs schools, that participation in the school community, relationships with students and colleagues, and a sense of career direction contributed to teacher retention.

Furthermore, research suggests the leadership of administration impacts teacher retention in high needs schools. The work of Brown and Wynn (2009) looks at the issue of teacher retention from the perspective of school principals. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve principals in a small, urban school district characterized by higher than average teacher attrition rates. Brown and Wynn found principals who work towards shared decision-making with teachers and those administrators who view themselves as collaborators and facilitators, when compared to top-down administrators, were successful in retaining teachers. Further, Brown and Wynn suggest administrators are able to improve teacher retention by focusing on two key areas during the hiring process: a focus on hiring applicants who fit within the current team and a focus on hiring applicants passionate for reaching all students. Findings from this research also suggest providing mentors and teacher advocates for new teachers positively impacts retention. While this research found administrators had control over several factors that impacted retention, the administrators studied also acknowledged there were

many factors outside of the principal's control or over which the principal's leadership style has little or no influence. Principals may have been aware of needs in their buildings; however, they were sometimes unable to provide for these needs.

The schools with the highest need for quality, dedicated teachers have the most difficulty retaining quality teachers. Despite this, research suggests teachers share several common motivators for teaching in high needs schools. Among these are a sense of being part of a larger community, relationships with students, caring for students, supportive administration, and involvement in campus decision-making.

Teacher Perspective on Teacher Retention in High Needs Schools

Several common ideas and concepts emerge from current research examining the teacher's perspective on teacher retention in high needs schools. Because the focus of this section is narrowed and more closely tied to the research question of this study, review of this prior research is more in-depth than the previous two sections and these ideas are more frequently compared to the findings from this study as discussed in Chapter 5.

Adams (2004) investigated the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and experiences of five accomplished teachers in a high needs middle school. This study consisted of five case studies using data collected from semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and review of participant portfolios. This research found six common beliefs, values, and dispositions held among those choosing to teach in a high needs (referred to as Equity-plus) school. These six themes were:

- Knowledge of content

- Value for knowledge of content and students

- Belief that caring and respect for students and their families are essential

- High expectations and a belief in their students to be critical thinkers

- Practice equity pedagogy and cultural responsiveness and

- Experience learning to teach diverse learners as a journey

Garcia's (2008) research used a technique called photographic interviewing and categorical analysis to find that among four teachers in a high needs, secondary school, concern for students and their academic success were reasons for teacher retention. Findings from this research also suggest collegial support stimulated retention, as did confidence in teaching skills, school climate, and access to technology.

Ternes (2001) focused on persistent factors and perceptions that enabled public school teachers to remain for five or more years in urban, secondary schools with high teacher turnover rates. Ternes conducted one-hour interviews with 16 teachers who remained in four high needs, secondary, urban schools for more than five year. A district-wide teacher survey, a follow up questionnaire, and other school, and district documents provided additional information. Findings from this work suggest teachers were learners, solvers, dreamers, and leaders in the school. This work revealed five general themes. These themes include:

- Acquiring an "image" and "mission" of the teaching profession,

- Developing student and colleague relationships,

- Augmenting personal and professional development,

- Improving and developing people and programs, and

- Receiving intrinsic rewards through students.

The work of Appleman and Freedman (2009) ". . . explores a constellation of factors that contribute to the retention of teachers in high-poverty, urban schools" (p. 323). These researchers used a survey, semi-structured interviews, and a follow-up open-ended interview to collect data

attained from the perspective of the teacher participant, who included individuals in their fourth year after graduating from a teacher preparation program and who were still teaching at an urban school, still teaching but in a different school, or who had left education completely. The initial survey was sent to 25 participants; one-hour interviews were conducted with 8 of the 15 survey respondents. Of the 8 initial interviewees, 5 were selected for follow-up, open ended interviews. Findings indicated six factors positively impacted new teacher retention. These factors include:

- A sense of mission which is reinforced in the teacher preparation program

- A disposition for hard work and persistence

- Substantive preparation in both pedagogy and content knowledge

- Training in assuming a reflective stance

- The opportunity to effect change and still remain in teaching

- Development of an ongoing support network among the cohort of new teachers

Yost (2006) conducted qualitative research utilizing a combination of recorded and transcribed interviews with teachers, interviews with teacher supervisors, classroom video recording, and scripted classroom observations. Yost included 17 participants, three of whom left their teaching position in or immediately after the first year of teaching. Participants were in a variety of urban and suburban schools, with all three leavers in urban, high needs, schools. Yost (2006) interviewed participants and derived themes through a process of reading and rereading the data. Findings from this research suggest: pre-service field work and teaching experiences increase teacher efficacy and effectiveness, critical reflection helps teachers cope with the stresses of first-year teaching, mentoring programs significantly impact new teacher success, and a supportive environment, while not enough to support a struggling teacher, is a factor in new teachers' leaving their first schools to teach at less challenging schools.

In a study that examined why early career teachers stay in or consider leaving the urban schools where they currently teach, Olsen and Anderson (2006) conducted three two-hour long, semi-structured interviews, with 15 teachers in major, urban elementary schools. All 15 participants had previously gone through the same teacher preparation program prior to teaching. Olsen and Anderson's interview methodology, which is similar to this study, revealed two factors that positively impacted teacher retention. These included teachers who were able to adopt multiple education roles both inside and outside the school and teachers who received professional support during the whole of their careers.

Each of the studies described in this section adopted a similar methodology, depending heavily on interviews with teachers in high needs schools in order to learn how teachers saw their work. Common among the studies were themes of teachers' caring for students and the importance of relationships with students as a central motivation for retention. Furthermore, all three studies concluded meaningful professional development and personal investment in goals of the school resulted in increased sense of efficacy and in increased teacher retention in high needs schools.

This study contributes to and broadens the body of knowledge regarding what teachers in an urban, secondary, hard-to-staff school say impact their decisions to remain on their current campuses and in the field of teaching. Through the process of in-depth interviewing the current study delves into a broad array of factors which are determined by participant responses and seeks to understand how participant's life stories, as well as experiences in teaching impact the retention decision. Furthermore the current study examines participants with varied levels of experience.

Existential Phenomenological Perspective

The use of an existential phenomenological perspective is a defining characteristic of this study as it relates to other research in the teacher retention field. Although the majority of previous work on teacher retention establishes factors that might affect teacher retention prior to conducting research, this study strips away any preconceived notions about teacher retention and focuses on deriving understanding from the lived experiences of four teachers. This study starts with understanding deeply the lived experiences of participants, and through this understanding, seeks to derive common themes or retention motivation factors from the experiences. The history and core ideas of existential phenomenology shape how this is done. Review of related literature on existential phenomenology serves to establish how existential phenomenology is understood and how the philosophy frames this study's data collection and analysis methodologies.

Phenomenology can be defined as the study of the structures of experiences or the consciousness. More specifically, phenomenology is the study of phenomena as they are experienced and as the individual brings meaning to these experiences (Phenomenology, n.d.). Gribch (2007) suggests the use of phenomenology when seeking "rich detail" if the essence of a person's experience of a phenomenon is to be explored.

Phenomenology can be segmented into three broad categories: classical, hermeneutic, and existential, with the latter two developing out of classical phenomenology (Gribch, 2007). The phenomenological traditions that stem from Husserl's work in the late 1890s have been categorized into as many as eight traditions and as few as two (Stanford, 2011). A full examination of the history of phenomenology lies outside the scope and focus of this work; however, this section will seek to define existential phenomenology as it relates to this study and to establish an understanding of the process of bracketing in traditional phenomenology.

Classical/realistic/transcendental phenomenology as characterized by the work of Edmond Husserl focuses on "how objects are constituted in pure consciousness" (Gribch, 2007). The desired outcome of classical phenomenology and the bracketing process, also called phenomenological reduction, is to describe the structures of consciousness of everyday experiences as they are experienced firsthand (Gribch, 2007). As Gribch (2007) points out, an underlying assumption of phenomenology is while humans are conscious of their world, they are separated and have little awareness of the experiences of others. Gribich notes,

> The putting aside of experiences of the particular phenomenon and the placing of brackets around the objective world should eventually enable a state of pure consciousness to emerge which will clarify our vision of the essence of the phenomenon and enable us to explore the structures and "truths" which constitute it. (p. 86)

The desire to strip away layers of consciousness and discover the essence of phenomenon is central in all categories of phenomenology

In classical phenomenology, the method for discovering true consciousness is the process of bracketing and reduction. The procedure of bracketing is essential because it frees researchers from prejudices and secures purity of detachment as observers. This allows the researcher to encounter "things as they are in themselves" independently of any presuppositions (Husserl, 1962.)

Existential phenomenology focuses on understanding the entire lived experiences of participants. In this study, this perspective views the decisions of the teacher to stay in teaching as tied to their total lived experiences. These experiences are not limited to experiences inside the school; rather, they also encompass experiences outside the school and prior to teaching. As Seidman (1991) points out, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding

the experience of other people and the meaning that they make of that experience" (p. 3). "Existential phenomenology sees consciousness not as a separate entity but as being linked to human existence, particularly in relation to the active role of the body…" (Gribch, 2007, p. 90). Existential phenomenology works from the premise that people are immersed in their world and unable to become truly objective viewers of their own experiences. Rooted in the work of Kierkegaard, existentialism views human life from the inside rather than the outside, objective point-of-view (Boerre, 2011). Though existential authors vary greatly in use and interpretation of the basic philosophies put forth by Kierkegaard, they remain connected closely to the idea of *being in the world,* which carries with it several important assumptions. First, humans exist in the world in relationship with other people and with other things. Unlike a match that exists alongside other matches in a matchbox, humans exist in the world in terms of their relationships to other people, society, and things. Furthermore, humans are able to respond to situations, or the *givens* of their existence, i.e. their family, origins, race, or class. Unlike objects, humans have the ability to make meaning, reason, and exert their intentionality (Grbich, 2007, p. 85).

Existential phenomenology rejects the assumption that humans and their words can be viewed as truly objective realities. The role of the researcher and the participant as beings in the world prevent true objectivity. Dialogue around these issues and clear explanation of how one's own existence impacts the experience of the phenomenon are necessary. An emphasis is placed on the importance of individuals and their freedom to participate in their own creation and experience of phenomenon.

The history and core ideas of existential phenomenology shape this study's methodologies and provide a rationale for the selected approach. The concepts help guide every research decision from the development of the research question, to the selection of participants,

interview questions, and methods of analysis. The adoption of an existential, phenomenological perspective is a defining characteristic to situate this study in the broader context of academic research and is also key to expanding on the research reported by Harris and Johnson (2012).

<center>University of North Texas Research Review</center>

The goal of the University of North Texas research group as reported by Harris and Johnson (2012) was to uncover issues facing teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Furthermore, the group wanted to investigate how well current literature matched what teachers reported as the reality of working in hard-to-staff schools. As reviewed in Chapter 1, initially the group focused on developing a survey, but as the quantitative portion of the work proceeded, the group decided to broaden the research methodology and included data derived from teacher interviews. These interviews were structured, 30-minute interviews. This study's methodology is best described as a next level of work, expanding the scripted 30-minute interview, into three, one-hour interviews, in which data collected from the earlier interview questions were viewed as a jumping off point for discussion. While the findings from this study are derived entirely from participant responses, the findings of Harris and Johnson (2012) serve to validate and at times draw into question the findings of this study as is evident in Conclusion (Chapter 5).

Harris and Johnson (2012) report the group first developed and refined a survey of factors, identified in the literature as associated with the difficulty of staffing urban schools, to 61 questions. The foci of the questions were on administrative leadership, the induction process, teacher professional development, teacher self-efficacy, teacher personal efficacy, teacher efficacy related to cultural diversity, teacher efficacy in the classroom environment, and assessment of student learning. The survey was piloted with a convenience sample of 127 participants. Respondents were selected based on easy access by the doctoral students in the

research group, and the pilot schools did not meet the research team's criteria as hard-to-staff. The pilot survey was completed by 110 high school and 17 middle school teachers. Results were analyzed using principal component analysis followed by Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. The pilot study confirmed many of the principal components built into the survey, and 13 questions were removed based on their not contributing to any of the principal components measured.

Based on the results of the pilot study, the final survey consisted of 48 Likert questions and 13 demographic questions. (See Appendix B for survey that was administered). The surveys were then administered to 113 teachers all of whom were employed at two urban, hard-to-staff high schools. The survey data were entered into Qualtrics, which generated descriptive statistics for the 13 demographic and 48 substantive items. Also, the data were analyzed using a factor analysis. The quantitative portion of the study yielded six factors that emerged from the surveys. These factors were labeled overcoming, professional support, use of assessment, valued professionally, student learning, and student achievement. (See Appendix C for complete table of factor analysis results)

Analysis of survey responses suggested the respondents saw themselves as competent teachers who were responsive to the diversity of learners in the schools. The teachers perceived themselves as participating willingly in professional development, though there was moderate teacher disagreement around the usefulness of professional development activities. Notable disagreements were around administrator support and response to teacher needs, as well as support from the wider school community.

Results of the factor analysis indicated responses to questions in a category labeled as Overcoming by the research group, exhibited by far the strongest inter-correlations among questions. Administrative leadership and all types of teacher efficacy questions were present in the category, and items centered on daily work of teachers as it shaped the schools' visions, missions and purposes as well as perceptions of the administrative leadership of the campuses. The research group labeled the category Overcoming because they thought this term captured the central conclusion connecting hard work, commitment, and effort to school success.

The other factors, which encompassed far fewer questions, suggested other reasons important to teacher retention included resources that support teaching, using data to support instruction, a feeling that the teacher is valued by administrators and community, student motivation and learning, and aspiring for high achievement for students.

On the first page of the survey, which was detachable and turned in separately from the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in further interviews. Of the 113 teachers surveyed, 44 volunteered to be part of interview research, and of those, the research team was able to schedule and complete 23 interviews, a portion of which were at the campus where this study was conducted. All of the interviews took place on the participants' campuses and during the school day, usually during a conference period, and were approximately 30 minutes in length.

The group's research utilized a semi-structured interview protocol. All interviewers asked the same four questions, and interviewers also asked follow up questions when they thought more information or clarity would add to researcher understanding of the participant's perspective. The structured interview questions included:

1. What is it like to work at this school?

2. What are the challenges of working in this school?

3. Why do you think teachers leave this school?

4. What suggestions for improvement would you make for this school?

The interviews were recorded, transcribed professionally, and analyzed using the NVIVO 9 research software program. Research team members met and agreed on how to code data uniformly. After data coding, searches within NVIVO 9 were conducted to find common topics, phrases and terms, based on the most prevalently shared participant comments or ideas.

Interview findings centered on what participants said about working in an urban school, the challenges of working at their campus, suggestions for improvement, personal feelings toward the school, and reasons other teachers leave the school. After these categories were determined, interview transcripts were reviewed to examine what this told researchers about the perspectives of teachers about what it is like to work in a hard-to-staff school. In reviewing these categories several themes prevailed across all five categories.

Teachers are frustrated by their workloads. This frustration was said to be caused by a variety of factors, including state accountability testing pressures, administrative pressures both at a campus and a district level, unequal and overfull classes, district and campus policies, and unproductive use of professional development time. Teachers frequently commented that a lack of time combined with a lack of resources contributed to an overwhelming work load. Participants mentioned frequently two recommendations to make things better would be to improve administrative support and reduce class size.

Furthermore, teachers expressed a fear of being negatively evaluated and dismissed. Fear of administrators' documenting ineffectiveness for the purpose of firing with no consideration of past success or administrative support to improve teaching, led to a perceived decrease in morale

among teachers. Negative teacher evaluations issued by administrators, limited administrative support for teachers, ineffective discipline procedures, contradictory communication from administrators, and delayed communication from administrators further explicated teacher negative perceptions of campus administration.

Motivating students was mentioned in the interviews as a daunting task and participants attributed this to a variety of factors. One factor was students lacked an awareness of a world outside their neighborhoods and homes so that teachers found it difficult to get students to see the importance of their education as a tool for greater success in life. Compounding this issue, participants commented often student families did not value education and students faced pressure to work and support the family before graduation. Part of this was attributed, as well, to a gap in cultural understanding between the largely non-Hispanic teaching population and the largely Hispanic student population. Participants mentioned younger teachers and teachers of Hispanic ethnicity were better able to understand and overcome these cultural gaps, and female teachers faced challenges in gaining respect from Hispanic male students. Furthermore, participants indicated they believed teachers, not students, were held accountable and students berated teachers and disrupted the learning environment without appropriate consequences from administration. Participants also reported often students were unprepared for the rigor of work at the high school level and social promotion was attributed as one cause of this problem.

When asked why teachers leave the campus or teaching, participants did not blame the students for teacher turnover. As addressed in the above findings, teachers' leaving was attributed to a lack of administrative support, intense workload, and the need for more parental involvement.

Conclusions reached in this study through analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative

data suggest the role of administrators was very important in teacher satisfaction. Teachers expressed a desire for increased collaboration in decision-making, as well as increased trust and support from administration. Furthermore, while teachers were faced with an overwhelming fear of job cuts and layoffs, teachers had a strong sense of self-efficacy and were willing to stay in the school despite the challenges faced. One noteworthy conclusion from Harris and Johnson (2012) was teacher efficacy matters less in schools where student achievement is viewed as outside the control of the teacher. This is noteworthy because in looking both at the quantitative and qualitative pieces, the frustrations and factors that caused teachers to leave the school were generally outside the scope of what an individual teacher can meaningfully influence.

Final conclusions from the work suggest administrators and teachers work together rather than apart. Support for teachers should come in the form of providing time management structures, disciplinary consistency, and resources.

Summary

When discussed in conjunction with related literature, where this study lies in the landscape of literature on teacher retention becomes clearer. This study sought out the teacher's perspective in hard-to-staff schools in order to provide a unique and needed perspective in the body of literature on teacher retention. The philosophical perspective and methodology of this study built on the work and learning of prior researchers from an existential phenomenological perspective. This perspective impacted all of the methodological decisions, as well as the analysis and presentation of findings and was a primary contribution to the study's uniqueness. Furthermore, this work represents a next level of the research reported by Harris and Johnson

(2012). The findings from Harris and Johnson (2012) as well as prior research serve to establish how the current study's findings compare and contrast with other works in the field.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Though a myriad of community members and school employees can inform research on

teacher retention this study focused on teachers as the informant group. Teacher retention was

examined through the experiences of four teachers who work in a hard-to-staff school. In

particular the study explored how these teachers build meaning about their experiences. The

research question was: What factors in the lived experience of teachers at a hard-to-staff urban,

secondary schools impact their decisions to remain in teaching and at their current campus?

The research examined the issue of teacher retention from an existential

phenomenological perspective, utilizing in-depth interviewing for collection of data. In order to

examine both the phenomenon of teacher retention and how teachers make sense of it, this study

sought rich detail in explanations of how teachers' experiences impact who they are as

individuals and as teachers. This approach adopted an emic perspective, focused on allowing

each participant to tell his or her story, and even how each makes sense of the story as it affects

the individual's decision to remain in a current teaching position or in teaching altogether.

This chapter presents the methodology for this study including participant selection, data

collection, methodology, and analysis of data. Explanations of the research methodology and

data analysis are followed by explanations of research decisions and explanations of other

considerations in the study design.

Participant Selection

School Selection

All participants were teachers at the same secondary, urban, hard-to-staff school, referred

to with the pseudonym of Mockingbird High School. Mockingbird HS is located in a major

urban school district in the southwestern United States and met all the criteria of a hard-to-staff school as defined in Chapter 1 and by the Harris and Johnson (2012) research team. These criteria for selection of a hard-to-staff were based on data collected from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) 2008-2009 report unless otherwise noted. The process of choosing applicable schools, gaining access to the schools, and seeking IRB approval began in 2009-2010. In 2009-2010, the 2008-2009 AEIS report was the most current report available. Of the two schools whose teachers participated in the Harris and Johnson (2012) survey, Mockingbird HS was selected due to access and because the number of teachers who volunteered to be interviewed established a broader pool of candidates.

Two hard-to-staff criteria were low socio-economic status (SES) of students and ethnic minority populations of students. Mockingbird HS served high poverty students within its total student population of just fewer than 2,000 students. Of the total student population, more than 75% were economically disadvantaged; more than 20% were limited English proficient, and more than 75% were classified as at risk of failing or dropping out, according to the definition of the Texas Education Agency.

Another hard-to-staff criterion was low student achievement as indicated by student performance on state standardized tests. Mockingbird HS was classified by the TEA as "academically unacceptable" in two of the three school years before its selection for this study (2006-07, 2007-08, and 2008-2009); the school missed federal AYP standards for each of these three years. After initial selection of the campus, but prior to the data collection for this study, Mockingbird attained an "academically acceptable" rating. However, at the time Mockingbird HS was selected for this study, it met low student achievement criteria for selection.

A third criterion for hard-to-staff schools is low teacher morale as indicated by annual staff attrition. Teachers at Mockingbird HS had high annual turn-over. From 2006-2007 until 2008-2009, Mockingbird had a mean teacher turnover rate of more than 20%, and more than 8% of teachers were in their first year of teaching in the 2009 school year. In 2009, more than 30% of teachers had fewer than five years of experience, more than 15% had between six and ten years of experience, and more than 40% had over ten years of experience.

Given these three criteria, Mockingbird HS was determined to be a secondary hard-to-staff school in a district classified as urban by the TEA.

Population and Sample

Four participants were selected for interviewing. All participants were employed at Mockingbird HS during the spring semester of 2012 when the interviews were conducted. Prior to these interviews, the participants had been asked to complete a 54-question survey, administered in November 2011. On the survey, participants indicated a willingness to participate in further research interviews. All participants who indicated a willingness to be part of additional studies were e-mailed explaining the purpose of this study, time commitment from participants, and the honorarium. Honoraria included $25 for the first interview, $25 for the second interview, and $50 for the final interview. All of the participants e-mailed were also participants in the 30-minute interviews conducted by the Harris and Johnson (2012) group; however, the transcriptions from these interviews are not included in this study because a key to the indepth interviewing process is a building of trust and understanding done through allowing participants to first share their personal histories. These 30 minute interviews did not utilize this methodology and were therefore, not included in this study.

Of the people who indicated a willingness to participate in additional interviews, participants were chosen based on years of experience in teaching, ethnicity, and gender. One participant had fewer than five years of experience; one participant had between five and ten years of experience; one participant had between 10 and 15 years of experience; and one participant had more than 20 years of experience.

According to the 2008-2009 TEA AEIS report, at Mockingbird HS 47 % of the teachers were male and 53% female. The reports showed 27% of the teachers were African-American, 22% were Hispanic, and 43% were White. Working to reflect these data in participant selection, one participant was a Hispanic female, one a White male, one a White female, and one an African American female.

The University of North Texas (UNT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved modifications to the study titled TERCEP (Texas Educational Research Center for Teacher Preparation) Study of Teacher Perceptions of Urban Schools in the spring of 2012. These modifications included adding four interviews and offering compensation for the interviews. The chosen school's district granted IRB approval for survey and interview research, which encompassed both the work of the Harris and Johnson (2012) group and this study in November of 2011.

After selecting the four participants, each participant was notified of his or her selection via e-mail. Each participant was given a two-week window in which the interviews would be conducted and each confirmed this window was acceptable. A follow up e-mail was sent scheduling the first interview and follow up e-mails confirmed times and locations of interviews. The interviews were conducted in less than the original allotted eight weeks and the final participant was willing to move her window up to accommodate this time adjustment. Initially

three days were allotted for transcription of interviews; however, all interviews were returned within one day.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Data collection consisted of conducting three interviews with each of four participants in a two-week window. Interviews were spaced apart at least three days to allow time for the researcher to listen to the prior interview, have the interview transcribed, and review the transcript prior to the next interview. Interviews were transcribed by an outside transcriber, and each transcript was reviewed by the researcher prior to the next interview.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. During interviewing, non-verbal communications that seemed important to the presentation of ideas were handwritten on a notepad and were reviewed during the analysis of data. Examples of significant non-verbal cues might include the participant's looking at the recording device, indicating anxiety about sharing an idea being recorded, or rolling his or her eyes to indicate a comment was said with sarcasm.

Following each hour-long interview, interview questions were adjusted for the next interview of each participant, based on areas identified for further exploration or clarification. During each interview, I asked participants questions and provided ample time to respond while demonstrating active listening. I sought clarification only after a participant had clearly reached the conclusion of the initial response. The dialogues were recorded both digitally and on a traditional tape recorder (a safety protocol should the digital recorder fail). Following each interview, recordings were reviewed within 24 hours of the interview, with a focus on hearing ideas or perceptions that could inform or improve the next interview. Each recorded interview was then submitted to a transcriber and after transcription the script was reviewed before conducting the subsequent interview. The process of hearing each interview two times and

reading it once before the next interview served two purposes. This ensured points were not belabored by continuing to bring them up in questions and helped me recognize when ideas were repeated, which later aided in identifying possible categories during the initial analysis step.

The times and locations of the interviews were pre-arranged with participants via e-mail or phone. In planning these details, the primary concern was finding times and places that were convenient for the participants and allowed for uninterrupted conversation with minimal background noise. Four of the interviews, three with one participant, and one with one other participant, took place off campus at cafés close to the participants' homes. The other eight interviews took place in the participants' classrooms at Mockingbird HS. Six of these interviews were conducted after school hours and two were conducted during one participant's conference period and extended into after school time. On a few occasions, interviews were interrupted by a parent who stopped by to ask a question or students who came by to ask the teacher a question. In cases of interruption, the recording was stopped and continued after the interrupting conversation ended.

<center>Interview Methodology</center>

Interviews began with a basic introduction that included the goals of the research, explanation of the research procedures, and assurances of confidentiality. Participants were notified their names would not be used in reports of findings and identifying information would be coded in a way to protect their and their school's identities. Seidman's (1991) three step interview process was used as a framework for the development of interview questions. The process seeks to build trust with participants by laying out research goals, inquiring into participants' histories, and maintaining confidentiality of participants. The research protocol and beginning research questions benefitted from suggestions from committee member, Dr. Ron

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Wilhelm, and from a pilot interview process. (See Appendix D for a complete list of the pre-written interview questions.)

Pre-written interview questions centered around three areas including background experiences, current experiences, and how participants make sense of these experiences. The first hour-long interview focused on life and career history and was designed to establish a broad understanding of the participants' history and motivations, as well as to establish trust and rapport between researcher and participant. The second hour-long interview focused on experiences of research participants in their current positions. The final interview examined in more depth how the research participant made sense of his or her previous experiences.

Interview questions asked participants to share their perspectives on a variety of factors inside the school and outside the school, using factors prevalent in literature on teacher retention and which one might reasonably assume could have an effect on the retention decisions. Factors inside the school included discipline and safety, the induction process, administrative support, student culture, parental support, autonomy, professional growth, professional efficacy, state and federal accountability pressures, curriculum, teaching resources, and school climate. Factors outside of the school included reasons for entering teaching, the current job market, family, health, and job history.

More traditional research approaches commonly have research sub-questions; however, this study purposefully did not establish such sub-questions prior to the interviews. Because the research takes an emic perspective, the study examines participants' understanding of their experiences as they emerge from their comments during the interviews. Sub-questions were not used because they tend to limit topics rather than allow the participants the freedom to discuss their experiences. Furthermore, the decision not to develop sub-questions ensures interviews do

not become entangled with a desire to make certain all questions are answered before the interview time is done. Rather, the interviews remain free flowing and open to follow-up questions that are based on the interviewee's comments.

Two pilot interviews were conducted with secondary teachers not employed at Mockingbird HS. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to provide practice with use of technology for recording, managing interview time, and questioning technique, particularly in regards to asking follow up questions. The process of conducting pilot interviews and reviewing those interviews helped to clarify the overall research goals and process. Conducting the pilot interviews further advised how best to ask questions that seek depth in understanding the experiences of participants while building trust and rapport.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

The process for determining common factors among interviewees' perspectives sought to understand the essence of how participants make sense of their lived experiences by stripping away any bias or preconceived ideas held by the researcher and instead focusing on the voices of participants as they view their experiences and make sense of them. This process involved several steps, and throughout the process, the interviews were systemically reviewed, and categorizations or nodes were frequently refined to keep the findings focused on the participant perspective.

The qualitative data analysis software, NVIVO 10, was used in order to organize and analyze the interview data. The analysis of data process consisted of six steps.

1. Review of interview scripts scanning for information that would reveal participant identity.

2. Review of each interview and creation of primary nodes. Participant responses are divided into data chunks that consisted of a one to eight sentences, categorized within one to three data categories referred to as nodes. Identification of these nodes as primary nodes, is because this initial step constitute the broadest set of categorizations, with subordinate categorizing developing though the refining process.

3. Review of primary nodes and refine nodes and organization of data within nodes to reflect participant voices most accurately.

4. Review of primary nodes and creation of secondary nodes summarizing participant words. During this step, the primary nodes were also refined as appropriate.

5. Review of each interview, primary nodes, and secondary nodes to ensure participant voice was accurately maintained in the categorization process.

6. Review of nodes and prevalent participant perspectives that resonated throughout the analysis process.

All interview responses and questions were first imported into NVIVO 10 and categorized according to participant and interview, that is, "Participant 1, Interview 1" And so forth. Following the import of data, each interview was reviewed in its entirety one time. During this review all information that identified participants, schools, or others in the school was changed to protect participant identity, and participants were given pseudonyms (Step 1).

Next, each interview was reviewed in its entirety from first to last and data were coded in chunks from a sentence up to a paragraph. All chunks were coded into a minimum of one node and into a maximum of three nodes, and nodes were determined based on participant responses (Step 2). After initial coding of the three interviews for one participant, these three interviews

were reviewed and data chunks as well as nodes were refined in order to reflect the participants' responses most accurately (Step 3). For example, if a participant said, "I think the biggest thing that motivates me to get up and go to work are my kids. It's not the principal. It's not the administration. They're not that fun. They're kind of serious all the time. Definitely the kids." In the initial coding of nodes (Step 2), a node for "administration" had not yet been created, and this response was coded as "student-teacher connection." In the second review phase of the nodes (Step 3), a node entitled "administration" had been created and so, because this comment does reference campus administration, the statement was also coded in the "administration" node as well as the "student-teacher connection" node. Along with reviewing and recoding participant comments within new nodes, the review of nodes themselves was further refined as well (also part of Step 3). For example, in this process, it became apparent within the node titled "Administration," participants were referring to two different groups of administrators, campus and district administration. Once this separation was identified, nodes for both district and campus administration were created and the responses within the "Administration" node were coded as they fit within the two nodes "administration\campus administration" and "administration\district administration." The process of first coding all interviews and then reviewing the nodes (Step 2 and 3) resulted in the creation of 25 primary nodes.

After categorizing all interview statements into primary nodes, each primary node was reviewed by data chunk to guide the creation of secondary nodes that summarized the participants' words (Step 4). In most cases the participants' actual words were used in the creation of the secondary node. For example, Kathleen said during her second interview that she relates to her students all the time because she did not have a good relationship with her dad and a lot of these kids do not have a good relationship either with their mom or dad. This was coded

into the primary node of "Student-Teacher Connection," and then a secondary node was created titled "I relate to students because of my relationship with my father."

Following the creation of the secondary nodes (Step 4), each of the secondary nodes was reviewed in the context of the interview and refined to reflect the participant's voice accurately (Step 5). For example, in reviewing participant comments, a participant said, "I wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for kids." Initially this secondary node was coded into a secondary node entitled, "I wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for kids". Upon reviewing the context of this comment, it was noted that the question proposed to the participant was, "If you had to pick one thing you value most about being a teacher, what would it be?" The participant responded with, "I value the student most of all; I wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for kids. Who would I be educating, myself?" Review of the entire comment and taking into consideration the question this secondary node was revised to "I value the student most of all." While both the original and revised nodes were directly said by the participant, the updated secondary node more accurately reflected the voice and perspective the participant shared. Review of secondary nodes (Step 5) aided in identifying the participants' voice, ensuring research conclusions remained centered around participant lived experiences and how the participants made sense of these experiences.

Creation of secondary nodes (Step 4) and review of primary and secondary nodes aimed at ensuring participant voices were accurately portrayed. Step 5 aided in ensuring conclusions were derived exclusively from participant voices. Furthermore, this step ensured creation and categorization of comments into nodes was not influenced inadvertently by researcher bias, and this step was a useful tool to help me step back and identify what was the main idea being shared by multiple participants across multiple interviews.

Creation of primary and secondary nodes (Steps 2-5) facilitated the process of determining themes around given topics because all secondary and primary nodes could be reviewed simultaneously in NVIVO 10 (Step 6). The process of coding, re-coding, and reviewing all of the data multiple times, though time intensive, served a purpose of examining the data from a bias-free perspective and allowed me to focus explicitly on what was shared by participants. Throughout the creation of the nodes and refining of nodes, the focus of the process remained centered on identifying what participants were truly saying and connecting how their lived experiences contributed to the formation of their ideas and opinions.

Explanation of Methodology

Seidman (1991) suggests that many educational researchers remain skeptical of qualitative methodologies and "doctoral candidates choosing to do qualitative rather than quantitative research may have to fight a stiffer battle to establish them as credible," (p. 6). Although qualitative research has gained ground in the last 20 years, electing to conduct a qualitative study required careful consideration, and the decision was driven by the overall research question.

In-depth interviewing from an existential phenomenological perspective is a useful form of inquiry, given my research question, for several reasons. First, teacher retention is impacted by numerous factors, and decisions are often not effectively reduced to cause and effect relationships. Second, teachers are the key participants in this decision-making and are able to communicate reasons for their actions through their words. Finally, the approach allows exploration of reasons that might otherwise remain unexplored by more traditional positivist methodologies. Unlike, quantitative research methods, in-depth interviewing is not constrained by limiting variables and finding cause and effect relationships, nor is this methodology limited

by controlling variables or testing hypothesis in the traditional sense. Each teacher has a story with many factors potentially impacting retention in play, and the chosen approach allowed me to examine the story and themes across participant stories. As Seidman (1991) explains,

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 3)

This research approach validates that the human decision-making process is complex and often nonlinear and this complexity is best examined through a straightforward method of talking with the key players in the phenomenon.

As Seidman (1991) points out, efforts by educational researchers to imitate the natural sciences ignore the one basic difference between their subjects of inquiry. In educational research the subjects can talk and think. Unlike machines, chemicals, or stars, if given the chance, people are able to talk about what they are thinking and explain the rationale behind their thinking. The existential phenomenological perspective values the opinions and thinking of the participant.

The decision to use an in-depth interviewing methodology is rooted in three guiding strengths. First, teacher retention is affected by a variety of factors, and understanding these factors can be effectively achieved through in-depth interviewing. Second, understanding teacher thinking is best done when teachers explain themselves in their own words and as they make sense of their own experiences. Finally, this methodology allows the research to examine aspects of retention and causes that may remain covered in other methods.

Explanation of Data Analysis

The work of previous researchers serves as useful tool for explaining the data analysis techniques used in this study. Gubrium and Holstein (2000) point out the pendulum of qualitative inquiry analysis is constantly in motion. This pendulum swings between naturalist analysis, which focuses on detailed descriptions of social worlds, and scientific analysis of processes by which these worlds are socially constructed. Paramount in the process of determining how data will be analyzed and presented is examination of the overall research question and then using the research question as the guide. The current study focused on what is happening, with the answer to this question guiding further exploration about how participants view phenomenon.

Research questions can be divided into three categories centering on *why*, *how*, and *what*. *Why* has long been the hallmark of quantitative research and the abundance of current quantitative research on *why* teachers leave teaching substantiates this assertion. Qualitative research traditionally has focused on *what* and *how*, and for quite some time , qualitative research has been focused on documenting processes by which social reality is constructed, or *how* questions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Husserl's (1962) focus on bracketing led the way in the field of qualitative research for answering *how*. This study reflects a new set of concerns that focus on *what* is happening, and analytic techniques in the project reflect this focus. As Seidman (1991) suggests, when answering *what*, analysis of data must accurately portray the perspective of participants, and should use the words of research participants as much as possible. The analysis of results will look for salient points both in individual interviews and in identification of connections between interviews (p. 28).

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state, "Triangulation of data… reflects an attempt to secure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 5). Although objective reality can

never be truly captured, the combination of multiple perspectives in a single study adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Seidman (1991) emphasizes that telling the story of the participants and their experiences in the truest and most accurate terms possible is essential to portraying results as they were meant by the participants. Seidman suggests theory must not impose meaning on words but meaning must emanate from the words of research participants. The work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasize this point; however, as Seidman (1991) suggests, it is naïve to believe any researcher approaches data completely free of a theory that biases understanding. Theories of behavior and motivation, as well as leadership, impact how a researcher might view the analysis of the data. As Schwandt (1997) points out,

> It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form
> of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings
> of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by
> interviewers and respondent. (p. 79)

Fantana and Frey (2000) say, "We are beginning to realize we cannot lift the results of interviews out of the contexts in which they were gathered and claim them as objective data with no strings attached" (p. 36). Consequently, this study focused on understanding participants' perspectives, sharing participant stories, and examining how participants' lived experiences impacted their perspective.

The research analysis that draws data from in-depth interviewing is often rooted in grounded theory as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In a general sense, grounded theory can best be described as the opposite of the traditional scientific process. The scientific process as seen from a positivist perspective involves first identifying a theory or hypothesis and then

systemically eliminating variables to test the hypothesis. Conversely, grounded theory starts with a research question and then seeks the answer to it. Through the process of collecting data, and then coding and categorizing, the data are analyzed simultaneously as the theory or hypothesis is refined (Glaser, 1992). This process of coding and recoding continues until there is no apparent new information to be contributed. As Glaser (1992) points out, categories emerge upon comparison in the grounded theory methodology.

As Grbich (2007) explains, "A phenomenological approach would require you to get as close as possible to the essence of the experience being studied while displaying the comments of those being researched in their own voices…" (p.19). Should data be rigorously segmented and tracked, phenomenology might carry a closer connection to grounded theory; however, research that seeks to maintain the authentic voices of the research participants, as this study attempted to do, marks a separation from traditional grounded theory research.

Building on the prior contributions of Grbich (2007), Glaser (1992), Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and most notably Seidman (1991), this study focused extensively on what is happening and on sharing the perspectives of participants, their lived experiences, and how participants make sense of these lived experiences.

<div align="center">Considerations</div>

In all research there are countless decisions the researcher must make to move the work forward, while also accepting these decisions have an impact on every aspect of the overall study. Because the effects of these decisions are far reaching, it is critical to give each decision due consideration. The following section outlines the thinking and considerations around the chosen methodological decisions taken in this study. As part of this consideration the work of prior researchers and their decisions will be compared and contrasted to the current study.

Number of Participants and Length of Interview

The need to limit the number of participants and length of interviews is a necessity in research because one cannot effectively tell the story of *every* teacher, in *every* position, in *every* high school. The inherent cost of the narrowing process (fewer participants and interviews) results in a decrease in the generalizability of the findings. The research goal of Appleman and Freedman (2009), as well as Brown and Wynn (2009), emphasizes accurately portraying the perspectives of participants, and these researchers limit their interviews to eight and five participants respectively. Furthermore, these researchers use 60-minute interviews. Seidman (1991) recommends a 90-minute format, suggesting interview times shorter than an hour do not allow for depth in questioning and true dialogue and interview times of more than two hours are laborious and begin to exhaust the participant (p. 13).

Participant Selection

By selecting participants with all levels of experience and multiple ethnicities and both genders, the effect of a limited sample size is partially mitigated because participant selection is not based on criteria that directly impact the retention decision. For example, Marston, Bruneti, and Courtney (2005) limited interview participants to those who indicated high levels of job satisfaction in the ETS survey administered prior to interviewing participants about retention decisions. However, job satisfaction is a primary indicator of teacher retention because a teacher who is satisfied with his or her job is more likely to stay at the job than a teacher who is not satisfied (Ingersoll, 2004). Selection of research participants who were both satisfied and dissatisfied would contribute to creating a broader variety of opinions on the various factors that impact retention. Furthermore, Marston et al. (2005) limit research participants to teachers who are experienced. Limiting research participants to those with many years of experience may tend

to limit the possible range of perspectives shared, as teachers who are experienced have chosen to stay in education and might have a very different perspective from those who are new to the field.

Interview Questions

Approaches for development and use of interview questions ranged between Marston et al. (2005) and Yost (2006), who used a semi-structured protocol of questions, with little explanation of follow up questions, to Appleman and Freedman (2009), who used a series of impromptu, probing *why* questions. Seidman (1991) suggests having a set of questions to guide the interview process; however, he also cautions these initial questions be viewed as the jumping off point for the interview, not as limiting factors. Seidman's (1991) life history approach builds rapport with participants, encouraging them to "open up" and tell their entire story. This approach acknowledges the complexity of factors that impact a teacher's decision to remain in teaching.

Appleman and Freedman's (2009) and Marston et al. (2005) used a pre-determined list of questions for the interviews; however, the researchers indicated the questions were open-ended, and teachers were encouraged to elaborate upon their ideas, and follow-up questions were used to aid in further reflections. The use of a set of questions ensures all ideas related to the research questions receive attention during the interview process and keep both the researcher and the participant on track. Furthermore, use of predetermined questions allows the researcher to write questions that build rapport and trust, both of which are necessary for the researcher to tell the entire story of the participant. Allowing the researcher to ask follow up questions and seek more in-depth answers provides a humanistic aspect to the data collection process. Researchers are more than recording devices, and often participant body language and tone impact the meaning

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of their messages. By allowing the researcher the freedom to acknowledge these clues in the participant's answer and follow up with impromptu questions, the actual story of what is happening is more likely to be discovered.

Summary

Identifying the research question and identifying phenomenological existentialism as a primary paradigm for this research constituted the first steps in choosing the best method for the study. Analysis of related research suggests researchers limit participants to a number that will allow for depth in interviewing. For research about teaching, length of experience in teaching should be a primary participant selection criterion. Furthermore, although it is advisable for the researcher to have some questions prior to the interview, it is imperative these questions be viewed as a jumping off point for further dialogue and questioning. Finally, prior work suggests interviews between an hour and an hour and a half are best suited for these purposes. In analysis of data, it is wise to look at the issue or phenomenon from multiple perspectives while also acknowledging the context of the research.

Analysis of data involved multiple steps of reading and re-reading interview transcriptions to identify the emergent themes and ideas common across participant perspectives. Paramount to the analysis process was the importance of keeping the experiences of participants and how participants made sense of those experiences as the core of findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Entering the data collection phase of this research, I resolved to listen openly to the perspectives of my participants. I wanted to understand on a deep level how each participant viewed his or her own experiences and the factors each most associated with decisions about staying in his or her present school and in teaching as a career.

I initially feared participants would focus only on the problems in their school or that they would be hesitant to share their true opinions with a stranger. Both the nature of participants' comments and the candidness of their responses in the course of the 12 hours of interviews dispelled these fears. As interviews proceeded, the challenge moved from my initial fear of not having enough data to accurately reflecting the perspectives of participants while presenting only what was most essential to my research question. My interview transcripts often included a one or two sentence question followed by a half page or more of explanation from the participants. Participants were eager to share and often intertwined their personal stories, their professional stories, and statements about their values and beliefs. This depth can be attributed largely to the methodology laid out by Seidman (1991).

The depth and quantity of the data required a decision about whether to report on each participant separately or to look at results by theme across participants. Reporting by participant would present each participant's perspectives in isolation from the others, as in traditional case studies. Primary advantages of this approach are an increased ability to *tell the story* of each participant in detail, as well as development of more detail about how lived experiences shape perspectives of individual participants. The second method, finding themes across all four

participants and reporting these emergent themes, would enhance the possibility for generalizing the findings. Furthermore, this method for thinking systematically about the findings had the potential to suggest major themes as shared conceptions that could not be easily dismissed as the opinion of an outlier.

Because both the individual and the thematic approaches were inherently helpful in answering the research question, a hybrid of the two was used. In order to increase understanding of the individual participants' perspectives, each participant is first introduced and his or her experiences and stories are shared in the sections that follow. After these introductions, this chapter examines the protocol established to determine topics for further analysis, and then examines participant's perspectives which emerged as most common among participants.

Participant Introductions

Initial reviews of interview scripts and recordings revealed the significance of personal stories and perspectives. While personal in nature, these stories and perspectives are essential to understanding the commonalities in the comments shared by participants later in the analysis. Introducing each participant individually provides important details as a framework for understanding each participant's perspective. Due to the nature of in-depth interviewing, each participant shared far more than is necessary to gain a general understanding of the background and general perspective of each. The introductions that follow draw from each set of interviews a sample of attributes and characteristics, chosen to inform the reader about the participant's perspective as it relates to the findings.

Angela

Angela, a Hispanic female, had fewer than five years of teaching experience, all at

Mockingbird HS. Angela started teaching immediately after college. Due to her age, her

ethnicity, and her background, Angela saw one of her greatest strengths as an ability to relate to

her students and their struggles. When Angela was in middle school, she and her mother moved

from a poor performing school in a major, urban district and an abusive home situation to pursue

better opportunities and a chance at a better life. She said in her interview this change was

shocking when she first arrived in her new home because she was surprised by how happy

everyone was. As she put it:

> It's like, holy crap, these people are smiling, and they're leaving their door unlocked;
>
> garage doors are open… And so I had to adapt… I definitely became softer, more aware
>
> of other people and their feelings. And I definitely had to change my attitude… these
>
> people aren't mad. Why should they be? They live a nice, middle class life. Everybody
>
> has a car. They have food. No problems.

In her new school, everyone had enough money, they were safe, and they had cause to be

happy. Despite this, Angela was not a model student. She was extremely rebellious and refused

to work. With time and caring teachers (especially one whom she credits with helping her come

out of her shell), she developed interest in writing and began to gain confidence in herself

academically. Eventually, Angela decided to go to college. While at college, she was an average

student and did not have a plan for what she would do after graduation. The tragic death of a

nephew, who in her words had "done nothing with his life," made her realize she was also

wasting her time. At this same time, she found teaching could be her calling. She started teaching

that year and has felt her passion for teaching only increase since then. Although Angela does

not see herself teaching at Mockingbird HS the rest of her life, she does believe she will always be involved in teaching.

When asked why she got into teaching, Angela said:

I got into it mainly because I wanted to help people like my nephew… really misunderstood kids who are just looking for someone to talk to.… My philosophy is you have to win a kid's heart before you can win their head.

Angela frequently referred to individual students and talked about the need to connect with and understand students to be successful in teaching them. She also commented frequently that one of her greatest frustrations was some teachers "don't even like kids" and "they don't enjoy working with kids."

Robert

Robert is a white male with more than five and fewer than ten years teaching experience. Teaching was not Robert's first career; he led a non-profit organization out of state before family obligations required him to relocate. Robert sought a teaching certificate because he thought it would be easy to find a position, especially since he was planning to teach in a difficult to staff subject, mathematics. At first Robert substituted in surrounding districts, and after a semester of substitute teaching, Robert started teaching at Mockingbird HS.

When asked about why he taught, he said he gained a passion for teaching only after he had been teaching awhile. Robert was drawn to Mockingbird because he found the demographics interesting and in his own words, "There are some very poignant anecdotal things" that got his attention when he first started teaching. Robert shared a story about a student who was incarcerated, and the story brought him to tears as he told it. This anecdote reflects Robert's

sense of purpose in teaching, which he views as helping students to find out who they are and also to identify their own humanity.

As Robert puts it, because he did not view teaching as a long-term career, in his first two years of teaching, he was very confrontational with administration in his school. However, as he came to realize he was going to be a teacher long-term, his attitude towards administration lightened, and he began to see their perspective more readily.

Robert's parents divorced early in his life, and he spent his years prior to high school with his mother, changing schools frequently. In fact, Robert did not go to one school for an entire school year until he started high school. Robert believes because of his family situation, he is better able to relate to students, and Robert says he never liked teachers and he never would have guessed he would become a teacher. He says he never really had a lot of confidence academically and in the back of his mind, he doubted his own intellect because of his struggles through school. Despite these struggles and his mobility, several teachers had a significant impact on Robert, and in these cases, teachers tapped into his passion and interests, despite his still not liking the classroom.

Kathleen

Kathleen, a white female, has been teaching for more than 10 years and fewer than 15. Kathleen started teaching immediately after college and taught in a variety of schools and levels before moving to her current position within the last three years. Kathleen believes teaching is her purpose in life, and since childhood she can remember wanting to be a teacher and making her siblings play school when they were growing up.

Despite this lifelong desire to teach, Kathleen was not always a good student. During her freshman year in high school, Kathleen began to rebel and failed classes. This experience was a

wake-up call for her, and as she put it, "It was like a light went on," and she realized she had to stop slacking off and behaving poorly. Part of this rebellion she attributes to her growing up in what she describes as a dysfunctional home with financial and emotional difficulties. Kathleen does think she is better able to relate to her students because of her own family's struggles, and also this guides her belief that education is a "ticket out of hell" for both her own siblings and for her students with difficult home lives.

Throughout the interviews Kathleen referred to the power of encouraging students. Several key figures outside of the home encouraged Kathleen, including key teachers and a mentor who gave her words of encouragement when she nearly failed high school and when she doubted her own abilities early in her teaching career. Kathleen believes teaching is meaningful because she has the power to encourage students and other teachers and make a similar difference in their lives. Also prevalent throughout the interviews was Kathleen's faith in Christ and her belief that "Christ was a servant to all people," as teachers are servants of the students.

Kathleen also spoke passionately about curriculum. In reviewing the transcripts, I saw that often Kathleen's discussions of lesson ideas or designs were the longest, most detailed portions of her interview data. Kathleen said she is good at curriculum; the part she continues to struggle with is classroom management and getting all students to complete the work.

Jackie

Jackie is a veteran teacher with more than 20 years of teaching experience at Mockingbird and at another high school within the same school district. Jackie is an African American female, and when asked why she chose to go into teaching, she said she attributes this decision to pressure from "my father to get a job after college" and her own gradual realization while tutoring in college that she had some talent in teaching others.

Jackie identified her passions as reading and history and reported reading came naturally to her. Jackie says her strengths are in writing and speaking. As Jackie put it, "I was never shy about speaking out," as a student.

Also evident through the interviews was an emphasis on her relationships with her parents and grandparents. Jackie identifies herself as a good student, and when asked why she was a good student, she said, "I guess it must come from my parents. I think a lot of it must really come from my parents." Jackie's father did not graduate from high school, and Jackie's mom graduated from high school and got her associate's degree when Jackie was in junior high school. Despite her parents' educational levels, it was clear to Jackie growing up that her parents expected her to go to college. In her own words, "It was never, 'if you go to college.' It was always, 'when you go to college.'"

One defining experience in Jackie's career and life was her brief stint working out of the classroom in what she describes as the corporate world. Midway through Jackie's teaching career, Jackie became dissatisfied with the pay and long hours required by teaching, and she began working in sales. Despite the better pay, Jackie says one of the reasons she came back to teaching was her other career was too all-consuming. As Jackie puts it,

> I didn't have a personal life anymore. And so I think it's important that you have that balance. And I believe that if you are a person that can enjoy teaching, this is a career that can give you balance and perspective.

Furthermore, Jackie said her experiences outside of teaching showed her that teaching is not very political. She said, "You don't really have to be careful of what you do. I think as a teacher, you have a lot of autonomy. And you're free to be creative in your own way."

Participant Stories Summation

All four participants brought a variety of experiences and varied perspectives to the discussion of factors that contributed to and hindered their decisions to remain in their current teaching positions. These perspectives were shaped by each participant's experiences as a student and a teacher, as well as by gender and ethnicity and family circumstances. The reader is encouraged to refer back to the introductions as needed to help shape and guide interpretation of findings and analysis.

<div align="center">Criteria for Analysis of the Data</div>

As explained in Chapter 3, the process of coding data into primary and secondary nodes consisted of six distinct steps, each of which helped to accurately identify and explain participants' perspectives as they relate to teacher retention. The process of reviewing, coding, and recoding participant responses produced a myriad of primary and secondary nodes. However, not all of these nodes were so pervasive as to suggest they impacted the retention decision. Therefore, a protocol for determining nodes for further analysis was necessary.

The node selection protocol took into consideration both the number of interviews with content referring to a concept as well as the total number (frequency) of references to the concept. Total number of references is the total number of data chunks or participant responses that fit within a node. The total sources refer to the number of interviews from which these data chunks were derived. For example, although teacher preparation is referenced four total times in all the interviews, these four references were from just one source, one participant's second interview. Although teacher preparation was clearly a concern for this participant in the second interview, the pattern of references did not necessarily suggest this was a concern of all participants. Because of observations such as this, from the total of 25 primary nodes identified, I

selected to discuss in more depth those nodes that consisted of 12 or more total references from six or more total sources. The list of primary nodes, references, and sources is found in Table 1. The selection of nodes was the single most important step of the data analysis leading to findings.

Table 1

Primary Nodes with Number of Sources and References

Node	Sources	References
Administration	12	53
Administration / Campus Administration	12	43
Administration / District Administration	7	10
Campus Decision-Making	4	16
District Lay-off and Firing Practices	4	5
First Years in Teaching	5	11
Gossip	3	4
Parents	7	14
Pay – Compensation	6	8
Personal Experiences	4	15
Philosophical Belief on Education	7	24
Planning and Assessment	8	19
Planning and Assessment / District Curriculum	7	13
Planning and Assessment / Teacher Team Planning	3	6
Professional Challenge	9	12
Resources Books	3	4
Resources Technology	3	5
School Culture	9	11
State Testing	7	11
Student Behavior	4	7
Students	6	17
Student-Teacher Connection	7	23
Teacher Preparation	2	4
Teacher Work Load	1	2
Unwritten Rules	4	6
Ups and Downs in Teaching	4	6

(See Appendix E for a complete list of all primary and secondary nodes including number of

sources and references).

Using Table 1 as a guide and focusing on those nodes referenced more than 12 total times

with more than six total sources, nodes to analyze in detail included:

Administration

Philosophical belief on education

Student-teacher connection

Planning and assessment

Students and parents

Professional challenge

Along with those nodes that fit within the selected screening criteria, several other nodes also

warrant discussion because either the participant comments in the secondary nodes directly

addressed their decision to remain in or leave teaching, or because review of the secondary nodes

suggested a high level of continuity among participant perspectives. These nodes that did not fit

the screening criteria but warranted further discussion included:

Resources

First years in teaching

Unwritten rules

Pay and district lay-off and firing practices

The process of establishing secondary nodes within each of the primary nodes allowed

the research to easily identify what participants had to say about a given node because the summarization of their comments using a selection of their own words (secondary nodes) was listed below the primary nodes in NVIVO 10. Although review of secondary nodes simplified the process of gaining a general sense of what participants were saying, this step alone did not provide a deep understanding of each participant's perspective and voice. In order to understand each participant's perspective, each data chunk summarized by a secondary node was reviewed in the context of the original interview script. The process of finding these responses in context and with knowledge of the original questions as was a capability efficiently enable by the use of the NVIVO 10 software. By clicking on the participant's words or on a data chunk, I was able to see the original interview and context of the participant's words.

Factors that Influence Teacher Retention

What follows is an examination of each of the primary nodes as determined by the criteria explained above. The primary goal of identifying these factors in this way is to present data that conveyed the perspectives and voices of participants while also focusing on what these voices said about teacher job satisfaction and retention. The process of creating secondary nodes within the primary nodes aided in identification of the participants' voices and in presenting findings as accurately as possible from the participants' perspectives and throughout the examination of findings, participant quotes are used to support this goal.

Administration

Review of the interview scripts made apparent that participants frequently discussed campus and district administration, suggesting administrators in the school had a significant role in participant decision to remain in the current teaching position. Campus and district administration were referenced more than twice as many times as any other topic. Interview

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scripts reveal some commonly held beliefs among the four participants about administration: administrators are not the sole source of tension and distrust.

One of the overarching ideas from all interviews was that no campus administrator or principal alone was to blame or the sole source of a tension and distrust which existed between teachers and administration. A combination of district and campus administrative decisions created both some positive and some negative feelings for participants. Among these were reactions to previous principals on the campus, pressure on administration for immediate results, and teacher rebelliousness.

One prominent theme among participant comments was that frequently changing principals at Mockingbird HS has led to distrust between administration and teachers. The two participants who were at the campus the longest both commented that they had not had a principal for more than two years in a row in the last six years, and previous principals have come and gone for a variety of reasons. One prior administrator was removed for scandalous activities outside of school, and he was followed by an interim principal. Angela said, "The interim did what he could, but you could definitely tell, mommy is not home, daddy is not home." The next principal, Mr. Jones, was there less than two years; he was promoted for "doing too good of a job," and the current principal, Mr. Simmons, had been in place for just under one school year at the time of the interviews. The lack of consistency at the campus level, mixed with a several changes in superintendent, has created considerable anxiety and fear among teachers. As Angela commented, "[After Mr. Jones left] we were out an assistant principal. We were out a dean of instruction. We were out a principal. You're taking out a major chunk of administration that helps run this school." Further complicating this transition at the campus level, the district had also been without a superintendent for an entire year. As Angela noted, "We still don't have

a superintendent. We've been without a superintendent for an entire year. So that's a big hoopla. Does the interim superintendent deserve the job? Do they know how to do their job? There's lots of favoritism."

During an interview with Jackie, when the topic of administration came up, it was noted the Jackie started to act uneasy, thinking through each comment very carefully before sharing. Her demeanor and body language suggested she was holding back and she asked that the tape recorder be stopped. This interaction suggests there is a lack of trust between teachers and administration at Mockingbird HS. As Kathleen put it, "We haven't had a stable principal since Mockingbird opened. It's hard to create a culture and that family unit when you don't have consistency."

However, all participants agreed Mr. Jones knew and cared about teachers and also helped the school to focus its effort and get out of school improvement as part of the Adequate Yearly Progress measures in No Child Left Behind. Also participants thought Mr. Simmons was making efforts to improve the culture of the school and get to know all of the teachers and students. Participant comments suggested the assistant principals at Mockingbird were "very busy," and participants indicated administrators did not deal with discipline concerns in a timely manner and major infractions were sometimes not dealt with at all. Angela and Kathleen both thought the assistant principals' inability to speak Spanish inhibited their effectiveness in dealing with student discipline and parent concerns.

All four participants affirmed that much of the anxiety about job security and work-related stress was a product of frequent turnover in the principal position. This anxiety was justified because administration did not know the teachers or what teachers were doing in the classrooms. Kathleen said, "Administrators rarely come into my classroom," and Robert

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commented that the principal "was just so busy just trying to catch up. There was no time to meet with the teachers." Angela mentioned that a principal mistook her for a student at least four times before learning her name and figuring out she was a teacher. Also, it was hurtful that when one of her coworkers decided to resign, the principal had to ask for the employee's name and what he taught. As she put it, "You devote so many hours, so many years, at a school, and the person who's supposed to be your leader doesn't know who… you are."

Each participant agreed administrators were rarely in their classes; however, their perspectives on how they felt about this absence and why varied among participants. Angela was somewhat relieved that administrators were not in her class often because she was a new teacher. She said if the district had to conduct further lay-offs, administrators would need documentation on new teachers, who would be the first to get laid off. Infrequent observations eased her worry of being laid off. Robert thought that because he taught a non-core course that is not tested on state tests, his teaching was not a focus for administration, and this was why his class was infrequently observed. Because his class was not offered in a traditional format, he was glad administrators did not walk through often. When Robert did receive feedback from administrators, he viewed it as not constructive due to lack of understanding of his approach. Jackie was similarly content that her classes were rarely observed, though she did not expound on this idea. Kathleen indicated she wished administration was in her classroom more, and she believed she needed more feedback.

All four participants mentioned they thought Mr. Simmons was doing a good job, and although he was new to his position, he was working hard, he was smart, and he was trying to do some good things. The fact that participants said administrators did not know them, yet also seemed to be working hard and doing a good job created a paradox among participant

statements. This paradox suggests that a variety of factors around administration, not simply the administrators themselves, contributed to the sense of uneasiness and anxiety about administration among participants.

Along with inconsistency among administrators, pressure on administration to produce immediate results and the resulting culture around write ups and teacher feedback were discussed by participants as key elements affecting their feelings towards administration. As Robert put it, at the root of some of the pressure and decision-making is state mandated testing, and "the tests cause administrators to act in a peculiar way," and he also commented, "I'm not blaming the administration. It's the environment that causes this." Angela mentioned "Administrators have a lot of pressure on them, and so they have to kind of pick who they're going to save and who needs to go." She also commented that administration is looking for things to write people up for, and this is not a culture where one can make a mistake and get a 'slap on the wrist.'" Jackie supported this idea, commenting, "Regardless of whoever creates the problem, it seems like the trouble always falls on the doorstep of not just the teachers, but anybody that's employed by the district." Despite this, Angela also commented that there are teachers on campus who in her opinion did not care about kids, and she believed cuts needed to take place.

This pressure on administration and teachers for immediate results was confounded by the unanimous opinion of participants that administration rarely observes classes or gives instructional feedback. As Kathleen put it, she would actually like more feedback and to have administrators in her class more so she might improve as a teacher. She reasoned:

I could be this awesome person, but if you don't check on me every once in a while, and I don't feel like I'm accountable to somebody, I'll slack off, too. I mean the great can become good, but the good can become low-performing. So that's human nature.

Both Angela and Robert commented that while they do not get observed often, they do understand administrators are very busy. Kathleen commented that administration is responsive and addresses the problems she brings to them and also that she believed the school was in control due to good administrative presence.

Despite Kathleen's supportive comments, Angela, Robert, and Jackie all asserted that there were teachers on the campus who were defiant to administration. Angela said there are, "Many teachers are so strong-willed and strong opinioned that they will blatantly go against the principals." Jackie echoed this idea, commenting that teacher might go against an administrator's idea "regardless of whether they might be right or wrong." Robert, who admitted to having challenged administration frequently early on in his teaching career, added that part of the root cause of this issue is the top-down model of decision-making. As Robert explained, "They've got all these little committees and things… but that's not what's happening." Rather he suggests that most programs and decisions are mandated from the district level, and teachers have little voice in this decision-making. He says, after several years of not being heard by administration, teachers have to say to themselves, "You know what? If I want to get through this, I just got to quit caring so much, and that is the beginning of becoming a bad teacher." Angela offered, "You definitely see some disgruntled teachers or a teacher who really don't like the administrators and goes out of their way to do the wrong thing."

Reviewing the comments and statements on administration, one question continued to remain at the center of the discussion: to what extent is administration a factor that directly impacts a teacher's decision to remain on the campus or in the field of teaching? Kathleen said she had left a previous school because she felt uncomfortable when several administrators were fired and teachers were fired, leaving her with the feeling that there was "very little job security."

As she put it, "The teachers and the students were great;" however, the "leadership was a little faulty and sketchy" and so she "didn't feel secure there, so that's why [she] moved on." Furthermore, both Kathleen and Angela mentioned they had moved to a school to work for a particular principal. Robert and Jackie, who have been at the campus throughout multiple administrations and principals, suggested they would not leave the school because of administration alone; however, throughout the interviews it was apparent administration did play a key role in teacher satisfaction in their current teaching positions.

Based on their statements, participants did not associate any one specific decision or administrator with the sense of uneasiness and anxiety they often felt. Rather they attributed factors such as inconsistency in administration, pressure for immediate results, and teacher rebelliousness as contributing to their opinions regarding administration.

Philosophical Beliefs about Education

All participants expressed beliefs that teachers have the capacity to impact the lives of others and that education is imperative to giving students a better opportunity at success in life. As one might anticipate, these participants' perspectives were intertwined with their personal histories.

All four participants indicated they drew extensively on their own personal experiences in education and that these experiences were important factors in helping them decide to become teachers. Furthermore, three out of four participants readily shared that they had not done well in high school, and they themselves struggled to succeed in school. In all three cases, the sources of these struggles were outside of the school and were related to family issues. Despite this, people within their schools were integral in helping the participants. The encouragement and support of educators helped to shape the paths of the participants. Participants' personal stories connected

with their perspectives about motivations for teaching and the importance of connecting with students. Consequently, each participant's perspective on the transformative power of education will be presented separately, culminating in the presentation of common findings across all four participants.

Angela noted that her motivation and drive started with her own family; she learned both from her mother, who continued her education while Angela was growing up, and from realizing her own purpose in life following the death of her nephew. Angela says:

> I have a lot of angry students. I don't know why they're angry. But they're angry. They're mad at something. Rebellious students. And I always feel a need to reach out to them, just kind of figure out what's going on. And I heard kids, "Oh I can't wait 'til I turn 18 so I could drop out." I'm like, "What is wrong with you?" and just really being conscious of my nephew because he did die at a really young age. And these kids haven't experienced anything. What a shame it would be to not live and not experience something greater than this city.

Angela consistently sees herself in her students and feels a strong desire to help them succeed. In fact, Angela suggested that one of the primary reasons that she stayed at Mockingbird the year of the study was to see a student through to graduation.

Similarly Robert spoke about how at this point in his career he believes he has a strong sense of purpose in what he is doing. This does not mean Robert did not doubt at times the value of his work and whether teaching was the right path for him. Rather Robert said:

> If I hadn't had those doubts, maybe I would be doing something that would [be] perceived as something more significant; however, I'm not really sure now, that I would necessarily see another career… as more significant than what I'm doing now.

Robert did mention that he did think he could make a more significant impact on students' lives and on the development of the curriculum at a different campus, and he had considered moving campuses several times for this reason. Robert shared powerful stories about a student in his class. During this description, Robert's enthusiasm in watching the student was apparent both in his tone and rate of speech. Robert said:

> I mean these kids…don't have a lot of resources. In fact [one student] lives with a single mother in an efficiency apartment. She sleeps on the sofa. They have nothing. But she comes in with the best attitude, and…she's eager to learn. I don't know what happened. She must be immune to public education *(laughter)* because she's eager to learn. It makes me feel good to see her so happy to learn, and that makes me feel good. I probably have nothing to do with it, but I'm glad.… I see school as really a smorgasbord, and these kids are starving, and it's so ironic that they are resisting coming to the table. But she's somebody –who says, 'Oh, my God, look at all this food!' and she's gorging herself. That just makes me happy.

Conflicting with this satisfaction, Robert also expressed frustration with not feeling he is able to make the changes he sees as necessary. As he states, "I really like [Mockingbird]… the demographics are very interesting, and I have a sense of purpose here. But just having a sense of purpose isn't good enough. I have to feel like I'm actually accomplishing something." Robert thought that unfortunately the one young lady whom he saw *gorging herself* on learning was far too uncommon. He envisioned an educational system that taps into each student's personal interests, stories, and strengths, though he sees little in the current school system that achieves this goal.

Kathleen expressed satisfaction derived from getting to know students and impacting their lives. Kathleen says, "I value the kids. I mean I wouldn't have a job if it wasn't for them…. But it's all about the kids…. I mean kids have value and you gotta respect them." Along with valuing the students, Kathleen's personal story focused on the transformative power of education in her own life and the lives of her siblings. During one interview Kathleen had a strong surge of emotion culminating in tears when talking about how her own siblings had graduated and gone on to post graduates degrees. Also, important to Kathleen, is that she leaves a positive mark on each of her students, and as she put it, that she "leaves a legacy" through her students. Finally, Kathleen associated this passion for the transformative power of education with her own feeling of professional efficacy. Kathleen said she loves coming to work every day because she believes she understands her students and is more in control of her own teaching. As she explained, if she feels confident in her abilities as a teacher, that is always a good thing.

As Jackie noted, "I know that there is no other profession where we have the opportunity to touch greatness." Furthermore, Jackie talked in detail about her own path in education, how her family encouraged and supported her path into teaching, and how her own family members continued their educations.

For all four participants, their personal experiences in education shaped their continued motivation to remain in the field of teaching. Furthermore, all four participants suggested teaching as a career allows them to shape the lives of others. Their belief in this power provides a sense of purpose for their work. Furthermore, this sense of purpose is a primary motivator to remain in the field of teaching. Though all four participants view themselves as lifelong teachers, their responses did not indicate they were equally invested in remaining in their current teaching positions. Although all participants indicated that they planned to remain at Mockingbird for

another year, their strongest motivation derived from their role as a teacher, not from their role on a specific campus. Participant comments suggested that this greater sense of purpose could be fulfilled at other schools or in other districts.

Student-Teacher Connection

Connected closely to participants' philosophical beliefs about education, participants also spoke frequently about their personal connections to students. Throughout the interviews participants shared individual stories about students and situations. In each of these stories the caring the participant had for the students was evident. Evidence of this caring was supported by the frequency of stories about individual students shared by participants, the personal connection participants made between their own lived experiences and those of their students, and the passion in participants' voices as they told about individual students.

All four participants told about at least two students whose stories they believed had impacted their own identities both personally and as teachers. Angela, Robert, and Kathleen each thought their own difficulties growing up helped them to connect with and understand the struggles of students; however, each of them approached this connection differently. Angela found motivation in helping students get to college. She mentioned that while her commute was long, and she had considered moving to a school closer to her home, but one reason she was still teaching at Mockingbird was because she felt obligated to stay at the campus until a close student of hers, Jenny, graduated. Angela had Jenny in her class her sophomore year, and though Jenny was not in Angela's class her junior year, Jenny stayed after school, and Angela continued to tutor her and help counsel her through several difficult situations including abuse and mistreatment in the home. Angela's own story, which is similar to Jenny's, created a strong bond that made Angela want to stay and teach one more year to see Jenny graduate. The pride Angela

felt was apparent in her smile and affect as she proclaimed that in just a few weeks, Jenny was going to graduate.

Angela and Kathleen both spoke about how powerful it was to them when a student opened up to them and told them about abuse in the home; they both mentioned that when a student trusted them enough to tell them this, it came with a great sense of responsibility and trust. Though these admissions put them in the difficult situation of having to tell an administrator or Child Protective Services (CPS), the trust that the students communicated was considered an honor, not a burden. As Kathleen recounted the story of Maria, she cried. Maria's father was an alcoholic, and one night when he was intoxicated, he hit Maria's mother, hurting her considerably. The next day, Kathleen noticed Maria was distraught and not herself. Not wanting to push her, but also wanting to be sensitive, Kathleen told Maria she noticed something was wrong and if she needed someone to talk to she could come by after school. After school, Maria told Kathleen about the fight in her home, and Kathleen made the difficult decision to contact her administrator and CPS. Kathleen recounted that it was amazing to her that this girl, whom she did not know particularly well, would trust her enough to tell her about something so personal. She also commented that a teacher cannot always fix the problems students bring and this exacts an emotional toll over time.

Angela talked about making her classroom a place where students feel they can come and just hang out, as this is part of building trust with students. Robert, while he saw a lot of himself in students, believed it was important for him to avoid the drama of their lives. Rather, he believed that through his curriculum he could connect with students on a personal level. Despite this espoused separation, some of Robert's comments and stories suggested he had a strong connection to some students. He both cried and spoke with great enthusiasm about individual

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students. His range of emotions seemed connected with Robert's background of having a few

selected teachers in his own life that tapped into his talent and helped him as he formed his

identity. Robert spoke of a 5th grade math teacher who did nothing more than find math puzzles

for him to solve. Robert enjoyed the challenge of the math puzzles, and the teacher provided him

with as many as he wanted. Fortunately, this was one of the schools Robert stayed at longer than

usual, and while he worked on the puzzles during class and after school, the teacher took an

interest in him. This teacher told him he was good at puzzles and boosted his confidence in other

academic areas, which increased Robert's confidence in his own abilities.

Similar to Robert, Kathleen found that through her classes and teaching, she often learned

about student stories and could see a lot of her own struggles in the lives of her students.

Kathleen added to this that while she believes she knows her students academically, she does

wish she could get to know them more personally. Kathleen says:

Maybe it was mandated or something to where I would get to know them more

personally, you know? I … wish there was some kind of element included in our

curriculum where it was like more of a mentoring, you know, big-brother-big-sister type

of relationship where you could still pour into them but be more encouraging because, I

mean, I have a lotta students and … I mean I may know, like, a few of them, like, their

family issues, like, one girl, she's always absent. Like, "Why are you absent?" "Well

my mom, you know, she has trouble breathing," or "I have to take care of her and that's

why I'm never here because my mom" – or whatever. I don't know if it's breathing

problems. I'm just saying– her mom has, like, some health issues so she's the only one

who can take care of her mom, and it breaks your heart. You're like, 'Well, where's your

dad?"… So on different occasions I do get to know them in a deeper way, but I don't

know all of them like I wish I could.

Although Jackie's connection to students did not seem to be rooted as deeply in her own history as it was for the other three, she did say she noticed her students are frequently worried about whether somebody cares about them. Furthermore, she asserts all students have "the same heart and want to learn."

Participant comments suggested student-teacher connection had a primary effect on the teacher's decision to remain in the field of teaching, with a lesser degree of impact on the participant's decision to remain in the current position or at the current campus. This excludes Angela, who explicitly said one reason she remained at the current campus was because of a connection with an individual student.

Planning and Assessment

Planning instruction and assessment of learning were related areas frequently addressed by participants. In order to provide an appropriate context for the participants' perspectives around planning and assessment, one must first understand the campus procedures and structures. Although I did not observe any planning or assessment meetings on the campus first hand, through the descriptions of participants, I was able to gain a basic picture of how the teacher teams and committees were structured from the remarks of the teachers.

The district provides an online curriculum teachers can access, and this curriculum is more robust for teachers of core disciplines than for the enrichment or elective subjects. All core teachers have a professional development period along with a conference period, and non-core teachers have a conference period only. Classes are on a block schedule with A days and B days and a schedule with all classes on Fridays, meaning a core teacher teaches six out of eight periods and a non-core teacher teaches seven out of eight classes. Recent adoption of the State of

Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) test led to increased district-directed testing for the core curriculum areas in 2012-13. For example, all core teachers who worked with students taking the STAAR test were administering district assessments every six weeks. Part of the daily professional development period for core teachers was spent reviewing these data for the district and for their campus, classes, and individual students.

The opinion of those participants who taught in core areas was that the district curriculum was *good, not great*. While all participants who utilized the district curriculum said they liked its general framework, they also thought it had to be personalized, and in the words of Angela:

So we have a curriculum…and we have to follow that curriculum. I mean you try, but, of course, the curriculum never really follows what happens at a school day to day. They don't factor in a tornado. They don't factor in fire drills. They don't factor in people being absent. So it's pretty loose. Using that curriculum it's supposed to support day to day activities. You have lessons already in there, but here at [Mockingbird] HS we really do push teachers to create their own curriculum. So at the department [level] we create our own curriculum. We get data to look at other districts, look at their exams, try to make ours more rigorous, more at a higher level.

Furthermore, Angela added:

 I guess it depends on the teacher. I look at what they give me, and I try to put a little of me in whatever assignment. So, I might use what the district gives me, but I don't actually use the exact assignment. I edit it to fit my own needs. But [Mockingbird] HS specifically really does push having those personal connections with students, making sure that you [connect with]… students whenever possible. So having a curriculum, yeah, it stresses teachers out. I think it does hinder connecting with kids just because you

have so many forces pushing you in every direction.

Similarly, Kathleen suggested:

So I pull up the [curriculum], and they basically have it laid out like for six weeks… like they have the unit for six weeks, this is what you should cover. They call it a guide because, at times, you may deviate from it… At the end of six weeks was a test that went with that curriculum. So, if we deviated from – you know, just a little bit, then the kids may or may not know what to do on that test. So we use that as a guide for the most part, and then you always want to put your own experience and your own, you know, pacing, based on the students' needs. You know, you find some classes … work a little slower, and then some classes are … really quick, , So you're going to have to have an extension for those kids.

When first asked about how they worked with their co-teachers during the professional development period, participants said they worked well with their groups. After further discussion and dialogue, some of the words used seemed to oppose this positive assertion. For example, Jackie said she only meets with one other teacher and these meetings are infrequent, only occurring when required by administration. Angela said sometimes other teachers in her content area meet, but she pretty much does her own thing. Finally, Kathleen mentioned that while the goal of the meetings is for the teachers to have common activities and lessons in class, sometimes people on the team wanted to do their own thing, and others did not want to contribute ideas, which made working and planning together difficult. Kathleen says:

I really like collaborating with other people. Now, the problem comes in sometimes when you have people that do not want to interact or they don't want to share ideas, and you still have to find a way to try to get some good out of them. That's the only problem,

sometimes, of collaboration because it's like teamwork. It is teamwork. Everybody has

to do a higher percent, and if not, then I'm going to do 100%... and they're going to do

50% and that doesn't work out.… I think, at times, people, deviate and want to do their

own thing. Yeah and that's really frustrating for me … I know what it takes to make a

great team, and I know that, for the most part, if everybody stays on track and you have

like five goals for that six weeks. You know, this, this, this and this and you meet those

goals. Somehow, someway, you meet them 90 percent of the time.

Despite these frustrations, Angela and Kathleen mentioned they liked to look at their

students' data, and they use these data and student scores as a measure of how successful they

are as teachers. Furthermore, all participants, except Jackie, indicated a desire to provide students

with interesting and meaningful curriculum, although their comments about the curriculum

suggested that because of pressures exhibited by state testing on what they should teach, they

could not confidently say the curriculum was interesting and meaningful.

Of all four participants, Kathleen spoke most passionately about her lessons and the

curriculum. Kathleen also shared she frequently helps other teachers develop lessons, and as a

member of the School Improvement Committee (SIC), she had more of a voice in what the

curriculum looked like than did the other participants, none of whom were ever on SIC. This is

reflected in her frustration that, while she did meet with her planning team, it seemed to her that

other teachers would do their own thing or would not contribute to the group.

Frustration that other members of the team did not contribute or participate offers an

indication that participants were unhappy with the functionality of their planning teams.

Furthermore, participants in the study addressed the required curriculum with neither enthusiasm

nor disdain. However, the overall perspective of participants in core teaching areas was that, they

had accepted the frustrations in working with others and the required curriculum as unchangeable and acceptable but not outstanding. Although curriculum and assessment were a source of frustration, participant comments suggested that these were not primary factors that effected their decisions to remain in or leave teaching.

Students and Parents

Although students and parents were categorized in separate nodes, review of participant statements around these topics revealed that these ideas were connected and best presented concurrently. Students and parents were referenced more than 12 times in the interviews when considered together. Participant responses suggested that a key to the success of students was letting them know they were cared for; however, student motivation was a struggle for teachers. This low student motivation was attributed to a variety of factors including low teacher and parent expectations and lack of emphasis on academics in student homes. Contributing to this finding, participants suggested that while parents are generally supportive of the school, lack of understanding about the educational system and low levels of parental involvement contributed to the difficulty of motivating students.

One pervasive idea shared by participants emphasized caring for students and showing students and parents that the students are cared for. Jackie shared the following comment about the students at Mockingbird HS:

> One of the things that I think that has really impressed me about this school is I don't think I've ever worked in a school where I could say the teachers are as dedicated to what they're doing as the teachers are here. It seems like the teachers here work really hard to get things right. If I talk about my student population, I think that the kids have – they appreciate things that people do for them.… I know that they appreciate the sacrifices

that the parents have made. The kids are really aware that their parents work really hard.

And so I appreciate that about them.

Jackie further says:

If everybody would realize that the heart and soul of all the kids are the same, whether

they go to school in urban school districts, whether they go to school in rural school

districts, whether they go to school in suburban school districts, whether they go to elite

private schools, that the heart and soul of all the kids is the same. They all want to learn;

it's just that maybe some of them may be turned off by some of the things that they see.

It seems like it really matters to the kids if we care about them. I've said to people in the

building, not even teachers necessarily, why are these kids so worried about if somebody

cares about them? Their favorite thing to say is that you don't care about me. I have been

guilty of saying 'you need to care about yourself', and thinking when I was in school, I

never worried about if some teacher cared about me. But then when I thought about it, I

realized that wasn't true. There were some teachers who I said they did care about

students. I think that maybe the difference was their caring or not caring.

Along with this caring, Jackie and Kathleen mentioned that many students enter the

classroom with severe deficits in learning. Furthermore, all four participants mentioned that

students often are dealing with situations outside of the home that affect their academic

performance. Kathleen and Angela commented that because their students have seen such

dramatic events outside of the classroom, they have to work harder to try to engage their students

and keep the content interesting enough to engage all of their students in the classroom.

Participants concurred that a common obstacle to their teaching was low academic

expectations of students both from the teachers and from students' families. Participants'

responses suggested that these low expectations resulted in a lack of student motivation. As Robert explained, "There is a problem when a student is making all A's and B's in classes but fails a basic level assessment such as the TAKS test." He suggested that perhaps this was simply an issue with grading; however, he asserted that it probably had more to do with low expectations of the students. Kathleen and Jackie confirmed that they believed their students were capable of much more than they produced and that teacher expectations of the students across the school were too low. In response to these student issues, all participants suggested that getting to know students, showing them you cared, and also accepting that they have high needs and then working to address those needs is the best course of action.

During the interviews, Jackie, Robert, and Angela all mentioned the same student, James, as an example of the type of motivation and interest that they would like to see in all of their students. During one interview with Jackie and another with Robert, James came by their classrooms to work on something after school. Perhaps because he had stopped by recently, both participants later spoke about him and his motivation. All three participants who spoke about James, considered him an exceptionally motivated student and shared that he was considerably more motivated than the majority of students at Mockingbird HS. Interestingly, Robert, who knew James's back story, that he had immigrated to the U.S three years earlier and that he did not like being at home, saw this as one of the primary reasons he hung out around school, asking teachers for more work.

The fact that three of the four participants talked about the same student was a striking phenomenon. Though this could be attributed to coincidence, it seemed improbable, considering that the three teachers taught different subjects and grades. This phenomenon seemed rather to suggest that James was the exception to the norm of students at Mockingbird. Participants

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revealed, however, that although James was not exceptional in his intellect or talent, his desire to put in extra work and stay after school to learn made him an exceptional student. Jackie, Robert, and Angela expressed a similar opinion that although there were exceptional students such as James who gave extra effort, this was a rare attitude and not the norm for students at Mockingbird HS. Kathleen encapsulated this idea in the following comment:

It's like you have to find ways to motivate them (students) to want to do more because they're good, but you want them to be great. And so it's a challenge to – because they're good.... Nobody argues with good, but you want them to be great. And you want them to do more. You want them to… meet a certain goal. So that's always a challenging part, making them better than what they are.

Connected to the student motivation issue, participants' comments about parents suggested further underlying causes for student apathy. Although participants generally viewed parents as supportive, they said parent involvement was low on the campus. In many cases, the lack of involvement was partially attributed to cultural norms and language barriers. Angela commented:

I think some parents don't care if [students] have homework. Students need to go to work. I have kids that work, and they're not of age to work. They're working at construction sites and it's dangerous, and they're out there doing what most 25 year olds wouldn't want to do, but they have to. So you've got to… have those personal connections. You have to figure out who's out there doing that dangerous stuff and you need to call CPS, and you've got to figure out if the parent just doesn't understand that this is how it works here.

Angela suggested she often believes she has to explain the U.S. system to families of immigrant students. Often these families expect the students to work and attend school part time; furthermore, there is little understanding of college and what comes after high school. Compounding this lack of knowledge, all four participants mentioned two barriers to communication: language and conflicting work schedules. Robert said:

> I mean the biggest problem with the parents is they're absent. It's really difficult to get a hold of them in any case. And because of the demographics of where we are, on the rare occasions when I can reach a parent when I want to reach them, there's a very good chance they don't speak English. That can be difficult. But as I've also said before, once I actually am able to communicate with a parent, I find them generally pretty supportive and respectful of what I'm trying to do.

Participants thought that once the language barrier was overcome, parents fell into one of two categories. The first category was those parents who had recently immigrated to the country and did not know enough about the educational system to help. Often in these families, because the child was the only bilingual person in the home, the child had increased power over what the parents heard and believed. The second category was parents who said they could not do anything to motivate the student either. Jackie encapsulated this idea:

> I'll call parents on an as-needed basis, but what I'm beginning to find is calling parents doesn't really change that much. For instance, maybe you're a student in my class, and I call your parents because you don't do your homework, you don't bring your books to class. I've called student's parents, and nothing has changed.

Contacts with both groups of parents led to a frustrating cycle that, as Jackie lamented, led back to all of the responsibility's falling on the teacher and the school.

Despite the general perception that parents are supportive of teachers on the campus, Jackie reported an experience with one parent the previous year that made her want to quit teaching. In her words, the parent "was a terror, and everybody knew about her reputation, except me." After a counselor explained to her what to say to the parent, Jackie was able to appease the parent, and the student finished her class; however, this was clearly stressful for Jackie. Although she did not leave the campus, she did comment this event made her want to quit teaching altogether.

In discussing both students and parents, participants indicated that both generally lacked understanding about the American system of education, and this contributed to low expectations for educational performance at home and at school. The teachers found language was frequently a barrier in communication with the home. Each of these factors may seem small; however, when taken together, the participants felt powerless to change these problems on a large scale. These factors were evident as frustrations and contributed to reasons one might consider a move out of the teaching field or the current teaching position.

Professional Challenge

Professional challenge was addressed by one question in the interview protocol; however, it was discussed by all four participants on 12 separate occasions. In regards to being challenged professionally, participants concurred that continued inquiry and learning was important to them. They wanted to be professionally challenged and to continue to grow and improve their practice. Even though participant experience in teaching spanned from fewer than five years to more than 20 years, all participants identified a common reason why they valued professional growth. All participants suggested that professional development was important because remaining challenged helped them avoid becoming stagnant in their teaching practices. Furthermore,

participants indicated that they liked to be involved in new learning led by the administration.

Robert suggested that professional challenge is important as it relates to having a purpose for one's work. He said,

> But I mean I think – I mean for me, it's having that sense of purpose and feeling like there's something I want to accomplish. And I think if you want to retain teachers, they need to feel like there's something they have to accomplish…. I think that if you wanted to keep the good ones, they need to have that sense of purpose, and it wouldn't hurt if people would listen to them from time to time to make them feel like they might be able to accomplish something toward that purpose.

Both Angela and Kathleen mentioned multiple times that teaching could become boring and mundane, and they enjoyed making conscious efforts to fight this monotony. Angela said, "some teachers, they like that. They love the fact that they know the subject in and out. They create a lesson in their head on their drive to work. That's boring to me. So, monotonous doesn't work."

Both Angela and Kathleen said they were constantly developing and experimenting with new lessons and looked forward to teaching new courses. Robert's perspective varied from that of Angela and Kathleen. Robert acknowledged he secretly enjoyed the struggles within his own profession, and he had known when he entered public education, he would be fighting common misperceptions about his field and teaching in general. Robert said:

> [Developing my content area] represents a challenge to me. I feel like … adolescents aren't my only students. I feel that I have a lot of adult students in my job.
> …. I have something to teach the administrators, as well, and my fellow teachers… I think I mentioned earlier that when I thought that I was just going to be teaching for… a

couple of years, … I specifically didn't want to be teaching this content because I knew I

would get caught up in all the politics and the aggravation that goes along with that. But

I'm also starting to get to know myself a little bit better and realizing that I sort of enjoy

the battle. So that's not quite maybe as virtuous as my first response but maybe a little

more honest.

Jackie's comments on professional challenge suggested a need for continual study within

the school, especially around curriculum. Although she said, "The district is not heavy on

continual improvement," she has noticed that young administrators and teachers bring in new

methods and teaching ideas, which she likes. All four participants invited more professional

development and thought the professional development is a worthwhile use of time.

Further Node Analysis

Although several nodes and ideas did not fit the criteria for in-depth analysis laid out by

the protocol I established, their prevalence and connection to understanding the overall

perspective of participants suggested they should be addressed. Even though the nodes and

concepts described in this section are not as well supported in the data as those above, these

findings add to an accurate portrayal of participant perspectives.

Resources. All four participants suggested both technology and classroom resources were

inadequate, and they thought better resources in the classroom would allow students greater

access to the concepts taught. Robert shared that he taught a class that required a specific

program; however, he had waited for an entire year and a half to get the computers and the

program set up, and it was still only enough for a half of the class to work at one time. Angela

suggested that learning her content would be much easier if students had iPads, and Kathleen

indicated she could do better and more interesting projects with her students if they had access to

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computers both in the school and at home. While Mockingbird HS did have a library with banks of computers, participant comments suggested that they had to be reserved far in advance and that the computers frequently failed. Furthermore, Robert suggested that if he could provide more access to resources outside of school such as theatrical performances and museums, he could better help students understand his content.

Jackie indicated the books in her classroom were inadequate and not relevant to students. Kathleen said because she did not have the books she needed, she frequently bought her own. Kathleen, Angela, and Robert all said they frequently bought supplies and resources for their classrooms and that the expense of providing supplies for classes was frustrating considering the pay of teachers.

Furthermore, both Angela and Robert suggested there was inequity in how resources were allocated and a fellow teacher had more access to needed classroom resources than they did. In fact for Robert, while he was waiting a year and a half to get the program he needed on his older, barely functioning computers, another teacher received an entire bank of new, fully functioning computers. Although Robert was frustrated by the inequity because he was instrumental in helping the new teacher get the resources, he believed this inequity was a product of happenstance and not intentional favoritism.

In reviewing participant comments, it was apparent that participants believed that Mockingbird's teachers suffered from a lack of resources that affected how they taught as well as from low morale related to a perception of inequitable allocation of resources.

First years in teaching. Angela, Kathleen, and Jackie each commented that although their first years in teaching had been difficult, they were helped by a mentor or fellow teachers whose support and leadership significantly impacted their decisions to remain in teaching. Jackie

remembered a fellow teacher and an attendance clerk who helped her in her first year of teaching to decorate her room to pacify her principal who said her room was too barren and needed more posters. Kathleen shared a story about a teacher whom she admired because of how he spoke to the students with wisdom and common sense. When Kathleen doubted herself, this teacher encouraged her and told her she was going to be a good teacher. Kathleen commented:

When I got [to my first school], I was like, "I'm quitting. This is way too overwhelming." I mean I was like, "Forget about my dream, you know?" I was discouraged a lot a couple years there. Probably the first two or three years I was really discouraged. I remember different people, like, "No, you can't quit, you can't quit, you're gonna get better, you're gonna get good at this," you know, but it was so challenging. I don't know, it was just very overwhelming … One of the leaders or directors, she had been a teacher and now she was, like, in administration. She had really good strategies, and then there was another teacher there who had really great strategies, I mean, phenomenal strategies, and I was like, "Oh, my God!" And I was just at her feet just taking notes, like, "What did you do to make 'commended' and all these awesome scores, you know," and I learned from her, and I just started learning, really starting to learn how to teach, like, my craft.

Similarly Angela remembered struggling in her first year as a teacher, and she told about a fellow teacher who guided her through daily lessons, the politics of the school, and also listened openly to her concerns. Angela said:

I used to have a very strong mentor – that I could tell anything. "I hate this person, I hate that person," "This person was really unprofessional with me. What do I do?" I want to make a complaint." I felt like I had that in my mentor, and then she left

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this year. Losing her has made it difficult 'cause I don't feel like there's a lot of people you can trust, sometimes.

Worth noting, Robert was the only participant who did not start teaching immediately after college, and he said during his first few years in teaching, he did not think he was going to continue teaching; therefore, his path was unique compared to the other participants.

Common to the participants' perspectives, however, was the view that it is important to remain open to learning new things, especially in the first years of teaching. Kathleen spoke about how in her first three years she was constantly in learning mode trying to learn as much as possible as quickly as possible. Similarly, Angela shared that a constant desire to learn was what kept her position from becoming mundane. Jackie spoke about how, early in her career, she recognized her students had significantly lagging reading skills and did not enjoy reading as she did. Her desire to improve students' reading helped motivate Jackie to improve her teaching practice.

While participants consistently acknowledged that they remembered their first years in teaching as tumultuous and times of great personal and professional change, fellow teachers who served as mentors helped keep them going. Furthermore, these mentor relationships helped participants keep their struggles in perspective.

Unwritten rules. Among all participants, two unwritten rules within the school were acknowledged. The first rule was not to fail *too many* students. Participants shared a variety of opinions about why not to fail too many students, and these centered on administrative paperwork and drawing negative attention. Robert commented," If a teacher has more than a certain percentage of their students with a failing grade, it creates more work for the teacher, and teachers don't need any extra work, so eventually, the teachers realize, "Okay, these are the

number of kids I can fail without having to do extra work, and so this is the way I'll adjust my bell curve to make that happen." And then, of course, administrators are evaluated upon graduation rates and passing rates and all those things. And so those are probably the primary factors behind the skewing of grades."

Reaction to this unwritten rule seemed to contradict the participants' opinion that often expectations of students were too low. No teacher defined specifically how many is too many; rather, as is the case with unwritten rules, not failing too many was more a shared concept than an actual number or percentage.

The second rule is that bad teachers, or teachers who are not viewed as effective by administration, have to complete more paperwork than those who are considered proficient. Throughout several of the interviews, participants referred to extra administrative work when talking about teachers who had been either fired or who elected to leave, presumably due to pressure exerted by administration. Common among participants was the idea that paperwork was used more as a tool by the administration to persuade teachers to leave than as a means of improving teachers or their practice.

Participant comments suggested that the two unwritten rules at Mockingbird HS, though not directly connected to their decisions to remain in teaching, prevailed as common ideas that impacted other, more directly related, factors.

Pay and district lay-off and firing practices. Participants indicated that pay was not a primary factor in their decisions to remain in teaching or at their current campus. While all participants indicated that higher pay would be welcomed, they concurred that pay was not a driving motivator.

Though pay was not generally emphasized as a motivating factor for teachers, sweeping

district personnel cuts through which large numbers of teachers had been dismissed did contribute to uneasiness among teachers, especially those with little experience. Angela, the teacher in this study with the least experience, suggested that she often felt uneasy knowing that she did not have a lot of experience because in past years, the layoffs were based on years of experience as much as on evaluations. Three out of four participants commented that sweeping layoffs had contributed to the culture of distrust between administration and teachers. Participants shared that the teachers' perception was that administrators came into classrooms and documented teacher performance only for deciding who should be fired or laid off in the future. This finding was supported by the comments of participants about lack of trust of administrators, lack of feedback from administration, and the unwritten rule among teachers that bad teachers had to do more paperwork, which primarily served to document reasons for later employment termination. While a portion of this distrust was due to inconsistent leadership in the principal's role, the sweeping layoffs served to multiply the negative effect of administration on the teacher/administrator relationship. While participants believed feedback from administration should focus on improving their practice and helping them become better teachers, they did not trust that this is what this was the true purpose of such documentation.

Robert, who had more experience, suggested the district did not "fire bad teachers; they fire bad employees." Although he did not specifically address whether this perception was a function of district or campus administration, review of the context of the statement suggests its meaning is that teachers who do not draw attention to themselves and who do not contribute to conflict with administration, stand less chance of being fired than those who do challenge campus and district administration. Robert's comments suggest this effect is separate from how effective the teacher is in the classroom.

Summary

Each participant brought to this research a set of life experiences and resulting perspectives. Essential to understanding each of these perspectives is identification of key characteristics of each participant and experiences that shaped their individual perspectives. Although knowing another person fully is impossible, an introduction of each participant defined broadly who each participant was and how their major life experiences shaped their individual perspectives. The chapter identified six nodes for in-depth analysis and four nodes for less in-depth analysis. Among these six primary areas, administration was by far the most prevalently discussed. Participants indicated that administration does have an impact on their decisions to remain at their current campus and that inconsistency in administration, pressure for immediate results are areas that commonly shaped their perspectives on administration. All participants also expressed a belief that the ability of a teacher to impact lives and help students persuaded them to remain in teaching. Participants valued their personal connections with individual students, and these personal connections motivated them to remain in teaching. Planning and assessment were addressed frequently by participants; however, these factors seemed to have little effect on these teachers' decisions to remain at their campus or in teaching. While parents were generally perceived as supportive of the teachers and the school, the teachers saw lack of parental knowledge about the educational system and devaluing of education in the home as contributing to low student expectations and motivation. Although low expectations were a common frustration for teachers, this did negatively impact job satisfaction. Each of these factors, along with professional challenge, personal experience, school culture, first years in teaching, unwritten rules, pay, and district layoff and firing practices, played a part in shaping the opinions and perspectives of the participants.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Common among the discussion on hard-to-staff schools is a conception that high needs schools are primarily staffed by under qualified teachers, and the schools themselves are damaged organizations that struggle to recruit and retain quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2002). However, data from this study suggests that the four teacher participants who were teachers in a hard-to-staff school chose to teach in this high needs school because of intrinsic motivations connected closely to their core values and beliefs. These teachers shared common beliefs in the transformative power of education that through teaching they could make a difference in the world. Fostering strong and long-term relationships with students also offered powerful antidotes to the minutia of teaching. In fact, this research suggests that the core beliefs and the experiences of these teachers provided the intrinsic rewards which made the difficulties of the job worth the struggle.

Findings from Harris and Johnson (2012), suggest there exist a multitude of factors within the scope and control of district and campus administration that impacted the retention decisions of teachers. The quantitative findings from this study were puzzling, presenting one major factor related to teacher retention that was contributed to by many different items related to teacher efficacy and administrative action. The brief teacher interviews that were conducted in Harris and Johnson (2012) teased out details of this somewhat contradictory factor that included teaching loads, the pressures of state accountability testing, administrative pressures for results both at the campus and district levels, large and unequal class sizes, unproductive use of professional development time, and lack of resources. The present study, based on more in-depth interviews with four teachers, enabled more nuanced findings to emerge. Examination of

the factors that kept these teachers in the field and/or at their campus revealed strong connections between teacher core beliefs and values which motivated their day-to-day work. Examination of the factors perceived to drive teachers out of schools, suggested there are strategic and concrete decisions that the campus and district administration can make to avoid losing capable and skilled teachers from hard-to-staff schools.

As a current campus administrator, I found the results of this research enlightening and empowering. As discussed in the introduction, academic research relates a myriad of factors to teacher retention. Much like the fumes of the ditto machine at the school where I first taught, I found that the process of conducting this study took me back to my earlier teaching self. Concurrently, my role as a campus administrator allowed me to view these early experiences and the experiences of participants from a new perspective. My previous and current roles as teacher and administrator intertwined to inform the conclusions and recommendations.

Essential to this study was that the methodology provided a much needed voice for all teachers through the words and ideas shared by the four participant teachers. Their words reminded me that there are concrete actions an administrator can take both to encourage teachers to stay and to lessen the effect of the factors that drive the teacher out of hard-to-staff schools. Throughout, the interviews, these teachers suggested that those who make decisions which impact them, i.e. administrators, rarely hear their perspectives. Beyond this, mechanisms specifically designed to encourage communication and input from teachers and campuses are undermined by top-down decision-making. The voice of the teachers provides a foundation for the suggestions and conclusions reached in this study. The conclusions and resulting suggestions advise administrators on approaches and ideas which may positively impact teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools. Whether these suggestions are followed remains a determination for

district and campus administration; however, this study offers a perspective centered on the belief that those closest to the retention decision, teachers themselves, know what should be done to increase teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools.

What follows is a brief overview of the study, its origin, and process, presented as a frame for understanding the conclusions and recommendations. This is followed by interpretation and discussion of each of the study's major findings along with findings from previous research, including the work of the Harris and Johnson (2012) research group. Examination of findings leads to recommendations and suggestions for retaining teachers in hard-to-staff schools drawing from my own personal experiences as a campus administrator to advise campus and district level administrators.

Study Overview

This study developed from a project sponsored by the Texas Education Research Center on Educator Preparation (TERCEP) at Stephen F. Austin University (SFA), which began in 2009. The overarching goal of the UNT research team was to expand knowledge around factors that increase teacher retention in urban, secondary, hard-to-staff, schools. This articulation reflects the belief that teachers are key to the success of each student and school and that retaining quality teachers is beneficial to the overall system of education.

Given these general premises, the Harris and Johnson (2012) research group conducted a mixed-method study of teachers in two urban, secondary, hard-to-staff schools aimed at determining the latent indicators of difficulty in staffing. Research data consisted of results of a survey and transcripts from semi-structured 30-minute interviews. One recommendation from this work was for further in-depth examination of teachers' perspectives around factors of teacher retention, and this study is a product of that recommendation.

This study examines what factors in the lived experiences of the teacher at an urban, secondary, hard-to-staff school impacted their decisions to remain in teaching and at their current campuses. The research project adopted an existential phenomenological perspective and used in-depth interviews, consisting of three hour-long interviews, with four teachers at an urban, secondary, hard-to-staff school. The interviews focused on each participant's decision to remain in or leave teaching based on how each made meaning and understood his or her lived experiences. Interviews focused on a deep understanding of participant perspectives, and this goal was supported by both the structure of the interviews process and free-flowing follow up questions. Four total participants were interviewed for three hours each, and participants represented all levels of experience in teaching from less than five years to greater than 20 years. Furthermore, participants' ethnicity and gender mirrored that of the school demographics to the extent possible. The perspectives and comments of participants drove the selection of prior research presented in Chapter 2 as well as the categorization and interpretation of findings. Presentation of the findings in Chapter 4 included an abbreviated biography of each participant intended to inform the reader of their perspectives and the results from coding of data within NVIVO 10 software to determine factors most prevalently addressed by participants. This process led to identification of six areas for in-depth analysis and four areas for broader analysis. Through the analysis process, several key factors emerged as impacting teacher retention, some of which encouraged retention, some of which discouraged retention, and some of which had neither effect.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Conclusions from the research are presented in three categories. These focus on factors that keep teachers in the field and/or at their current campus, factors that drive teachers out of the

field and/or their current campus, and factors that while important to participants and prevalent in prior research, seemed not to impact the retention decisions of the participants. Each conclusion is connected to a recommendation, designed to inform district and campus administration in decision-making and planning.

What Keeps Teacher in the Field and/or at Their Current Campus?

Several key ideas or factors kept participants coming back to their jobs each day. These emerged throughout all three interviews for all four participants. Key factors included a belief in making a difference through the work of teaching, value in building personal relationships with students, establishing an ongoing sense of professional challenge and growth among teachers. Finally, establishing mentor teachers and partnering with new teachers emerged as a factor worth mentioning; however, this factor was less frequently mentioned than the three listed above but did emerge organically from the interviews.

Belief in making a difference. Participants indicated they had considered moving to other campuses. Some had changed campuses in their careers, and two had worked outside of education, with one moving out and then back into the field of education. Despite this, all four participants communicated a strong sense of commitment to the field of teaching. The teachers attributed their commitment to a belief that by teaching; they were making a difference. All four participants connected their belief in the power of teaching to their own personal stories as students in school. For all four participants, school as an institution and individual teachers were recalled as having significant impact on their personal paths, and participants viewed education as having improved their own lives. Furthermore, participants shared a vision of education as a powerful tool for creating opportunities in life. Participant responses suggested that their decisions to work in schools were closely connected with their own life stories and resulting

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views of education as crucial to success in life. Participants shared stories about their work at Mockingbird HS that contributed to their continued belief in the value of their chosen career. They also shared stories of individual students whom they believed they had positively impacted. Three out of four participants shared that they worked to develop lessons they believed would help students later in life. Participants shared that in many ways, their personal histories, the stories of their students, and the life lessons they taught students made easier tolerating the negative parts of being a teacher.

These findings are supported by Ternes (2001). This study suggested that a teacher who remained in high needs schools for more than five years acquired an "image" and "mission" of the teaching profession. Appleman and Freedman (2009) identified "a sense of mission" as a key factor contributing to retention for novice teachers.

These findings suggest that district and campus administrators facilitate activities and efforts which encourage teacher to focus on these motivating factors. For example, teachers may be asked to reflect on their role as a teacher as it impacts individuals, the community, and society as a whole. Furthermore, during professional development time or staff meetings, teachers may be asked to identify their reasons for teaching and develop statements for why they believe their course is important. These belief statements could serve as a tool for reflection and dialogue throughout the school year, keeping teachers centered on the purpose of their work.

Personal relationships with students. This study found that a relationship with students was a key factor in keeping teachers at their current campus. One participant shared that she had considered moving due to the length of her daily commute; however, a desire to continue to work with an individual student motivated her to stay at her current campus one more year. All

four participants spoke passionately about individual students and the positive feelings they felt when they thought about the impact they had on these students.

Findings about relationships with students are supported by the work of Brunetti (2001), Adams (2004), and Ternes (2001). Brunetti (2001) conducted a qualitative study of participants who had been at their current campuses for more than 15 years and found that, "most teachers stated that working with young people was the most important motivator that kept them in the classroom" (p. 477). Adams (2004), in a case study of five accomplished teacher in hard-to-staff schools, found a belief that caring and respect for students and students' families was essential to choosing to teach and remain teaching in a high needs school. Ternes (2001) found that developing student and colleague relationships was a common theme among teachers who remained in a high needs, urban secondary schools for more than five years.

In the current study, the general sense of enjoying building relationships with students was complicated by participant comments about parents and students at the campus. Participants indicated that they thought it was important for students and parents to see that the teachers cared for the students. However, participants also shared that parental involvement in the campus was low and that many parents lacked an understanding of the educational system. Therefore, while participants suggested that parent and student perception of caring is important, the mechanisms for communicating this caring offer logistical and resource challenges at the school level. Overcoming the challenge of establishing and communicating caring relationship with students to students and parents was seen as a factor in teacher success and retention. This conclusion was supported by the work of Petty, Fitchett, and O'Connor (2012) who suggests that caring, along with developing an understanding of school culture through exposure to similar schools in

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teacher preparation were among the most important reasons found among teachers who chose to stay in their current high-needs schools.

As participants expressed in the research, establishing and maintaining strong relationships with students is fulfilling for teachers. Furthermore, when teachers establish caring relationships with students, these teachers gain insight into the cultures of their students. Prior research suggests the information that teachers gain from getting to know the students can impact effectiveness and consequently serve to motivate teachers to remain in teaching. Rinke (2011) found in a longitudinal study of eight teachers in high needs schools, that participation in the community and relationships with students and colleagues were two of three factors that contributed to teacher retention. This is consistent with the research on job satisfaction for teachers new to the field which suggests that a student teaching experience that places future teachers in schools similar to the schools in which they will later work positively correlates with teacher retention (Adams & Martray, 1980). Furthermore, job satisfaction for first-year teachers correlates with how well new teachers understand the lives of their students outside of school and with the new teachers' involvement in the school community (Cook & Van Cleaf, 2000). Understanding students, both individually through relationships and collectively by involving oneself in the culture of the students, during student teaching has been identified as a critical component of successful teaching.

Kathleen offered a suggestion for campus administrators to help foster meaningful relationships, suggesting that time be scheduled in the school day for teachers to talk with students and get to know them. This work could be facilitated in a variety of ways such as setting up an advisory period within the school day or developing school wide assignments or tasks that facilitate teachers' learning about students and students learning about teachers. For example, all

students might be asked in their first period to write about their families. The teacher could then review each story, gaining insight into each of his/her students lives, and in turn, share his/her own story with the class. A follow up to this might be a scheduled time for teachers to talk with students individually and/or in small groups about what was written. Further administrative steps might be to ask teacher to reflect on students whom they have helped or for whom they have made a difference and then share these stories through a variety of formats, including presentations at meetings, sharing with a partner or teacher planning team, or publishing in weekly or monthly newsletters. Students are more likely to listen and engage with teachers and the lessons of teachers whom they know and value on a personal level. Furthermore, when teachers build relationships with students, their motivation to continue working with students in a positive and productive manner is increased.

Remaining professionally challenged. All four participants concurred that remaining challenged professionally was important to them. Although professional challenge was a factor that participants addressed readily in interviews, findings of this study placed it lowest among six major factors that cause teachers to stay in teaching. Participant responses suggested that remaining professionally challenged helps ensure that instruction does not stagnate and that teachers view professional growth activities as worthwhile use of time. Participant's perspective on professional development as conveyed by Harris and Johnson (2012) suggests teachers willingly participated in professional development activities; however, teachers were skeptical about the value and purpose of campus and district professional development activities. Although the findings of this and the earlier study indicate that teachers value professional challenge and willingly participate in professional development activities, participants shared

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limited experiences that exemplified what they perceived as valuable professional development that contributed to remaining professionally challenged.

The findings of prior researchers suggest that involving teachers in campus decision-making and establishing systems for high levels of teacher engagement in professional development keep teachers professionally challenged. Kennedy and Shiel (2010), who focused on a case study in which teachers were treated in a collaborative fashion when it came to professional development, concluded that when teachers felt they were part of the decision-making process, this had a positive impact on student achievement. Castle, Fox and Souder (2006) found that among 90 teacher candidates engaged in pre-service teaching, those candidates who were involved in professional development schools that encouraged them to engage with other teachers and reflect on practice and analyze student performance data were more focused on students and student learning than their peers who had not been at such schools. Furthermore, prior research indicates that both district-directed and site-based professional development activities increase efficacy and effectiveness in the classroom (Educational Commission of the States, 1996; Hanson & Hentschke, 2002).

More closely connected to teacher retention, Ternes (2001) found that augmenting engaging personal and professional development were themes among 16 teachers who remained in high needs, urban, secondary schools. Furthermore, interviews with 15 elementary teachers in a high needs, urban, elementary school revealed that professional support during the whole of the teacher's career was critical to teacher retention (Olsen & Anderson, 2006).

Previous research shows teachers who are engaged in professional development are more likely to be student focused and more successful at affecting student learning. Participant perspectives in this and the Harris and Johnson (2012) studies suggest that teachers yearn to be

professionally challenged and are open to involvement in professional development activities. Prior research suggests keeping teachers challenged professionally and involving teachers in professional development activities may positively impact their decisions to remain in teaching and at their current urban, secondary hard-to-staff schools.

Administrators can facilitate keeping teachers professionally challenged through a variety of engaging professional development activities centered on establishing meaningful dialogue and decision-making processes. As Robert suggested, essential to these processes is that teachers feel their work has a purpose that can be actualized. Increasing communication between teachers and administration and among teachers, accomplished through dialogue, is also essential. Administrators can facilitate this by providing multiple and varied opportunities for teachers to discuss professional practice and reflect on improving their own practice. The specifics of how this might look depend on the individual campus and the structures already in place. For example, at Mockingbird HS, teachers already had a time in the day when they met other teachers in their subjects. Recommendations for this campus could be to establish a leader of each of these meeting groups who could meet with administration on a bi-weekly basis to review activities and discuss topics for future professional development.

Furthermore, involving teachers in campus decision-making at a multitude of levels can improve communication and mitigate staff resistance to new initiatives. Again, specifics of how this might look depend largely on structures already in place. At Mockingbird HS, a School Improvement Committee (SIC) already existed; however, the perception by several participants was that members of this committee were chosen specifically because they would not create conflict with administration and were merely the vessels for communicating to staff expectations and requirements of the administration. The perception among participants was that decision-

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making was top down and that decisions of the SIC were poorly communicated to the rest of the staff. This perception might be diminished by a sub-committee structure that gave teachers more direct access to SIC members. Such systems which involve all staff in the discussions and soliciting feedback, increasing the likelihood of the decisions' successful implementation, while also improving communication and understanding around new directions and initiatives. The format and specific topics of these discussions might vary widely; however, involving teachers in as many decisions as possible improves the potential for their continued professional challenge.

Essential to these recommendations, is for administration to establish a clear plan for teachers to have ongoing professional dialogue and maximum involvement in and communication around campus decision-making.

Professional partnering of new teachers with mentors. In the interviews, participants were never directly asked about mentors, assigned or unassigned; however, three of the four participants commented on and discussed the powerful impact that fellow teachers had on their teaching early in their careers. The fact that mentoring emerged in three out four participant comments, despite lack of questions in the interview, is notable. Prior research suggests that partnering teachers with mentors can be impactful in retaining teachers, especially new teachers. Though addressed here, it is necessary to note that this factor was mentioned with less frequency than the three factors discussed earlier; and it did not meet the criteria for selection of nodes for further analysis in Chapter 4.

Three participants indicated the powerful effect that mentors had on their remaining in teaching. In none of the three cases was this mentor officially assigned to them. Quantitative data from Harris and Johnson (2012) suggests that only half of the participants surveyed in two hard-to-staff schools, including Mockingbird, agreed or strongly agreed that they were assigned a

mentor in the first two weeks of teaching. Participant statements in the current study suggested that their informal mentors served two roles that impacted their desire to stay in teaching. In all three cases, the mentor teacher served as a key figure in encouraging them as new teachers, letting them know they could do this and that their struggles were not uncommon. Second, the mentor teachers provided resources, shared lesson plans and lesson ideas, and gave critical advice on student relationships, parent communication, and classroom management. These actions by the mentor teachers and the fact that participants brought these important mentors up without direct prompting suggests that having mentors is important for the teacher retention decision.

Partnering new teachers with experienced, engaged mentors has been shown in previous research to correlate with retaining teachers new to the profession. Ingersoll and Smith (2004) found, through their research on teachers in their first year of teaching, that partnering novice teachers with a mentor was a key support component critical to long-term retention. Garcia (2008) found that collegial support stimulated retention in a study of four teachers in high needs schools. Kardos and Moore-Johnson's (2010) work adds another layer to this conclusion, suggesting that not just assigning, but meaningfully matching, mentors with novice teachers is critical to the success of the mentor relationship. Although participants in the current study were never officially assigned a mentor, the *de facto* mentor teachers who helped participants in their first years of teaching remained key figures and were key influences on their decisions to remain in the profession.

Administration can encourage mentoring partnerships explicitly and implicitly through campus systems. Explicitly, administrators can partner new teachers with experienced teachers, provide time for them to meet, and provide a set of questions and topics for discussion and

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reflection as they meet. Implicitly, administrators can work with all staff to encourage dialogue among peers, hire staff with varied levels of experiences and expertise, structure staff collaboration times so that experienced and inexperienced teachers are working together, and make assignment that these mentor relationships organically.

What Drives Teachers out of the Field and/or Their Current Campus?

This study found several factors that helped keep participants in teaching and factors that had the opposite effect. Factors that drove teachers out of the field tended to be more directly associated with the individual campus and district than the broader, philosophical, factors that kept teachers in teaching. Among the factors shared as frustrations in participants' current positions was lack of consistent campus leadership from year to year. This inconsistency was related to two other primary frustrations, low morale related to lack of trust between teachers and administrators and lack of teacher control over campus decision- making. Also, though to a lesser degree than inconsistent administration, low student motivation and lack of resources emerged as frustrations that could negatively impact teacher retention.

Inconsistency in administration. Lack of consistent leadership on the campus and at the district level emerged as key factors that created a watershed effect, merged into a lack of trust by teachers of administration as well as a perception by teachers that their opinions and ideas were not valued in decision-making on the campus.

Lack of consistent leadership contributed to teacher distrust of administration as evidenced by the participants' opinions that administrators did not know them or what was going on in their classrooms. Further, participants shared that the district had recently conducted sweeping layoffs in order to meet budget constraints. The participants thought these layoffs, along with having a new principal who did not know them, led to a common perception among

teachers that classroom observations by administrators were primarily tools to decide whom they

should fire and whom they should keep on campus. Participants indicated that documentation of

classroom observations was viewed by teachers as a mechanism for later terminations as

opposed to an unbiased evaluation for improving practice. Three out of the four participants

indicated that, for this reason, they preferred less frequent observations, and the participant who

did not prefer less frequent observations commented that she had noticed among many co-

teachers a heightened sense of anxiety regarding observations.

Harris and Johnson (2012) noted this same connection between teacher unhappiness and

fear or stress of being let go and concluded that district hiring, firing, cuts, and politics impacted

teacher confidence in the leadership. Participants in the current study affirmed that the

administrator's role was to observe problems and document them, if needed, for lay-off

purposes. The tension observed between administration and teachers around the topic of

observation and evaluation was similar in both studies that included Mockingbird HS.

Lack of consistency in administration also contributed, according to participants, to a

general sense that teachers had little voice in campus decision-making. Participants believed that

although they were asked for suggestions, their opinions and ideas were not truly valued. Robert

phrased it best when he acknowledged that although there were many committees and meetings

at the campus, in reality the teachers had very little power to change things on campus. All

participants except for Kathleen, who served on the SIC, shared a similar frustration that their

voices carried little weight in decision-making on campus. Participants shared a consensus that

much of what is really done in the classroom and at the campus was driven by a combination of

district top-down decision-making and pressure to achieve better on standardized test scores.

Participants expressed frustration that often new ideas or initiatives were hastily implemented

and too quickly abandoned. Although participants suggested that several of these initiatives were good ideas, they were not uniformly implemented or understood by teachers. Lack of results led to abandonment of the initiatives. Further, participants shared that administrators' demanding compliance without proper explanation of the rationale behind new initiatives contributed to tension and distrust between teachers and administrators. This issue was compounded when there was a new administrator because of the perception that new administrators at Mockingbird HS were under considerable pressure to comply with and quickly implement district initiatives, as well as to produce immediate results in terms of student testing performance. This increased the perception that teacher-derived initiatives were unlikely to have priority with campus administrators.

These conclusions closely mirror those of Harris and Johnson (2012) that while teachers held the work of their administrators in high regard, they longed for collaboration, trust and security. These participants shared frustration about how often teachers are told to follow a new district initiative only to find the initiative fail due to hasty implementation and a lack of training and support.

Previous research indicates that teacher involvement in site-based decision-making is related to higher levels of teacher job satisfaction (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Brown & Wynn, 2009). Despite the complexity of shared decision-making, literature suggests that the advantage of establishing shared decision-making in a school justifies difficulties with implementation. The Charlotte Advocates for Education (2004) examined common characteristics of principals in schools that had low attrition and high achievement and found that they included having a clear vision for the school that was well articulated and a focus on giving constructive feedback to teachers and getting to know teachers on an personal level (as cited in Brown & Wynn, 2009).

Of the many attributes of successful principals, fostering collaborative working conditions and allowing teacher's involvement in meaningful decision-making were perceived to be most important. This conclusion is supported by Yost (2006), who found that teachers with a strong sense of professional efficacy and ownership in their school's goals are more likely to reflect critically on their own teaching practices and change their teaching throughout their careers.

Prior research suggests that teacher involvement in decision- making as well as building trust between administration and staff are key factors in retaining teachers. However, findings from this and the Harris and Johnson (2012) study suggest that developing trust is a struggle at Mockingbird HS because it requires that administrators remain in place long enough to build relationships with personnel in the school.

Therefore, it is recommended district administration plan to keep campus administrators, most notably principals, in place for extended periods of time. District administrations would benefit from carefully selecting campus principals with the assumption and expectation that they would remain in their positions for a minimum of three to five years. Furthermore, district administration would benefit from establishing with campus principals realistic and achievable campus goals. When principals feel pressure to create immediate and drastic improvements, their focus moves away from building relationships, and pressures for compliance and production of immediate results manifest themselves in distrust between administration and teachers.

As recommended above, involving teachers in site-based decision-making and on-going professional development depend on long-lasting and trusting relationships between teachers and administrators. Recommendations for increasing trust, along with consistency of administration, are to increase visibility of administration in low- stakes decision-making situations and increase administrative presence in all classrooms with frequent, less formal, feedback to teachers.

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Increased efforts to involve teachers in site-based decision-making processes are best supported by district commitment to continue both campus and district derived initiatives.

Student motivation. Participants in this study spoke about what they perceived as a culture of low expectations for students and a resulting struggle to motivate students. Lack of student motivation was the most commonly addressed student behavior that frustrated participants both in this study and in the Harris and Johnson (2012) report. Participants blamed apathy in part on low expectations from both the school and from families of the students.

Participants suggested that low expectations in the home are a product of a lack of understanding among students and parents about the education system, as well as a devaluation of education among student families. All participants suggested the students at Mockingbird HS did not see education as critically important to their lives. Although all participants shared stories of students who were exceptionally motivated, they suggested many students at Mockingbird HS were pressured by their families to quit school and to work to help support the family. All non-Spanish speaking participants indicated frustration when contacting the parents of unmotivated students because frequently the parent did not speak English, and finding a translator in the school was difficult.

The struggle with low expectations was also related to unwritten rules about the number of failures. Participants suggested if a teacher fails too many students, he/she will draw the attention of administration, resulting in additional paper work and reflecting poorly on the teacher in the eyes of administration. Two out of four participants in this study indicated that students understand this unwritten rule, and because students know that teachers cannot fail too many of them, the overall expectations of students are further lowered.

Conclusion related to low expectations of students were supported by Harris and Johnson (2012), whose participants mentioned that family pressure to begin work instead of graduating from high school, as well a general devaluation of the importance of education was common among students and their families.

The conclusion that low motivation and expectations of students are frustrations for teachers is supported by findings in previous research. Singh and Billingsley (1996) suggests that one important determinant of teacher satisfaction is workplace conditions as they are related to expectations of student behavior and performance. Some research suggests that the impact of low expectations begins as early as pre-service teacher education and is connected directly to ethnicity. Payne (1980) found that pre-service teachers who were from more affluent cultural backgrounds than their students frequently held lower expectations of their poor, minority students. Furthermore, Adams and Martray (1980) found that when a novice teacher from a more affluent cultural background than his or her students encountered inappropriate classroom behaviors, he/she frequently demanded uniformity and conformity from students. When the students refused to conform, the teacher struggled with classroom management, and lowered classroom expectations. These struggles and lowered expectations led to lower degrees of teacher job satisfaction (Adams & Martray, 1980).

Low expectations of student performance and a resulting struggle to motivate students emerged as a source of frustration, negatively impacting teacher job satisfaction for participants in this study. Prior research supports these conclusions, connecting low expectations of students with student and school culture, student behaviors, and teacher job satisfaction.

Recommendations for campus administrators include careful selection of teachers and paraprofessional staff, structuring time for students and teachers to build relationships, and increased community outreach and parent education/involvement.

This and prior research suggest that hiring teachers who understand the students and their struggles and have a realistic view of where students are coming from, both personally and academically, reduces teacher disillusionment and frustration and may also improve student motivation. Teachers who understand the struggle inherent in teaching in a high needs school are more likely to persevere without lowering expectations. Furthermore, because language is a common barrier to teacher communication with parents, hiring teachers and paraprofessional staff who speak both English and the predominate language or languages in the school can aid in communication with community and parents. While it is preferable to hire teachers who understand the challenges of teaching in a high needs school prior to employment, this is not always possible, but once a teacher is hired, teacher understanding and knowledge of students can be facilitated by campus administrators. By scheduling systems and times that encourage teachers to build strong, caring relationships with students, teachers gain understanding of the lives of the students outside of the classroom.

Additionally, findings from this study support broadening the impact of the school on the community. Participants shared that frequently parents and student families lacked knowledge of the educational system, and that language was often a barrier in communication with parents. Consequently, one recommendation for campus administration is to increase efforts to education the community about the educational process and the importance of education in America. This could be established by creating a community room where parents can get information about how their student is doing and learn about the educational process. Furthermore, administrators

can help teachers and other staff and teachers learn to share information effectively when opportunities present themselves. For example, when a parent brings in a note for an absence excuse or calls to take a child to an appointment, more information can be shared and communicated with the parent than just what is requested. Administration can also encourage staff and teachers to visit students' homes, to offer school functions at variety of times and locations, and to provide childcare and food when parents are asked to come to the school after work.

Lack of resources. Participants shared that they wished they had more access to technology and that their instruction would be better if their students had better access to computers. All four participants said that portions of their pay checks went to providing classroom supplies. Along with technology, lack of access to books, cameras, lab equipment, and basic supplies was a constant, nagging struggle both in planning and teaching.

This conclusion is supported by previous research. The National Council of Education Statistics reports that, according to teacher survey data, access to necessary resources declines proportionally in schools as the number of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch increases (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 1997, p. 86).

Recommendations resulting from these findings include that administrators evaluate the allocation of resources. Where providing a computer or I-pad for each student is financially unreasonable, many students may already have a smart phone; however, district policy and network limitations prohibit use of these devices. Allocating time to educate teachers on how best to utilize these devices as learning tools and development of a school wide wireless network with appropriate filters could help teachers utilize the resources students are already bringing to school.

What Factors had Neither Effect?

Participants infrequently addressed issues about time management or workloads, in contrast to Harris and Johnson (2012), who heard frequent complaints about workload. Both sets of participants shared the perspective that many time-laden tasks that had little effect on student learning were required of them. Participants perceived that much of this extra work was caused by the state testing and accountability systems and special education legal requirements. Despite these common perceptions, demands on time and workload did not emerge as a significant theme among the four participants in the current study.

This discrepancy may be a product of the differences in interview style and questions used in the two projects. The Harris and Johnson (2012) interviews were 30 minutes long, and the questions specifically sought out issues within the school. Consequently, if a large percentage of the 23 participants stated workload as a concern even once, it would have emerged as a theme in the data. All four of participants in this study stated that teaching requires a lot of time and that they work far more hours than they are paid for. However, workload did not emerge as a major factor in the retention decisions.

This study focused on teachers as the informant group regarding issues of teacher retention. Through examination of participant perspectives and comments, four key recommendations emerged. These recommendations center on establishing mechanisms for teachers to reflect on successes and identify their impact on students as well as encouraging building of strong relationships with students. Further findings include that district leaders focus on consistency in filling administrative positions, and that both district and campus administration increase teacher involvement in professional development activities, develop

site-based decision-making processes, and improve community involvement and outreach programs.

Reflections on the Research Process

As with any research endeavor, along the path of discovery there are choices that must be made, and each selection of question, method, or article to reference may limit the scope and outcomes of the research. Though these limitations are unavoidable, it is only by acknowledging and discussing them that the clarity of a study can be established. .

One limitation of this research is its lack of direct access to the truly lived experiences of participants. Even though participants provided large amounts of data about their perspectives, I only knew what they wanted me to know. This study did not go to the homes of participants; it did not include families, administrators, or students of participants, and I did not observe the teachers in class or examine the performance of their students. Each person encounters a complex series of experiences in life that shape their path and perspectives, and this study is limited to the perspectives of four volunteer participants reflecting on their lived experiences.

The findings of this study are also limited by the number of participants, time to conduct the research, and resources available for conducting the research. The budget for this research was limited to what one graduate student could afford both financially and in terms of time. While the review of prior research and connection of findings to prior research serve to broaden its applicability, this study does have a small sample size, and the sample is from only one school.

The limitations of this study are a product of methodological decisions made throughout the research process as well as practical limitations. They are in part mitigated by incorporating

the findings of previous research to help substantiate and support the findings derived from this study.

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

The methodology and findings of this study suggest that there are areas for future research, and this study represents just the tip of the iceberg of study of the teachers' perspective on retention. Further research and reports of findings that share the teachers' perspectives would help these stories gain power that could impact the decision-making of education leaders and policy makers. While numbers and quantitative data are often used to support educational decisions, the stories behind these numbers have the potential to connect with decision makers on a deeper, affective level. The stories of what teachers in high needs schools encounter, what drives them out, and what makes them stay are often powerful and can engage readers emotionally. Furthermore, these stories often dispel myths that teachers in high needs schools are disheartened, angry, and unemployable elsewhere. Rather, as was discovered from this study , teachers choose to work in hard-to-staff schools because they feel they can have an impact and improve the world through their work. Stories which reflect this desire to make a difference and to feel that one's work is helpful to the world are powerful because they connect closely to one's core values and beliefs. Further work that seeks to deeply listen to and share teacher stories is needed. Future research that tells the stories of teachers in urban, secondary hard-to-staff schools, with all of the details, good and bad, would help to create stories that resonate with readers. Furthermore, the findings of this research suggest that deeper investigation be conducted into how to help teachers identify and focus on their motivations for remaining in the field of teaching and at their current campuses.

In reviews of the literature, particularly reviews of survey research, there is an assumption of complexity in the nature of what impacts teacher retention; however, when one takes the time to listen to the stories and try to understand the perspectives of teachers, their motivations and frustrations share some striking commonalities. These commonalities are not easily understood outside of the context of each participant's story and perspective. Additional research that focuses on understanding participant stories and interweaving the complex myriad of factors that affect retention decisions as they exist in their real world context is recommended.

Although the current research found that beliefs in the power of education and relationships with students were primary motivators that kept teachers in hard-to-staff schools; more research is needed regarding how to make this happen. The work of teaching is centered on the classroom. The probability of teachers' having fewer teaching hours and fewer students (both essential to developing relationships with students) seems an unlikely solution. Therefore, further exploration and development of models that encourage relationship building and celebrate successes among teachers will serve to mitigate some of the pressures applied by the realities of school budget constraints.

Summary

At the beginning of this dissertation, I shared how my first years as a teacher illustrate the complexity of the teacher retention issue. In a school where student needs were high, one would anticipate that teacher retention was low; however, this was not the case. In fact, 13 years later, more than half the staff is still teaching at my first school.

My research and investigation into the issue of teacher retention began as part of my work with the UNT research group, and the work of this group established both a frame and a need for more research. While reviewing the literature, I found that other similar dissertations

featured the stories of small groups of teachers (Adams, 2004; Garcia, 2008; Ternes, 2001). The current research is unique, however, in featuring an emic view of the perspectives of four teachers in an urban, secondary hard-to-staff school, how these teachers made sense of their lived experiences, and how this reasoning impacted their decision to stay in their current position or in the field of teaching. There are many other ways to look at teacher retention, but this view offers a unique insight by going directly to the source of the retention decision, the teacher. Furthermore, the existential, phenomenological approach allowed each participant's comments and perspectives to be presented using the voice of the participant.

When looking at this study as a whole, perhaps the most compelling quality of the conclusions that emerged was that when teachers were asked, they shared many positive comments that kept them in teaching. While the participants found strong motivations for teaching and remaining in teaching, they were not naïve to the problems in their school. In fact, they understood the problems with remarkable clarity. Participants shared their frustrations, their understandings of what caused problems, and what they believed they had the power to change and what they did not. Will they stay in teaching? I do not know for sure. In fact, that may be something to keep track of and share in five or ten years. However, what can be gleaned from their perspective is that schools would be well served to help teachers identify and remain focused on elements of motivation and belief in education that are core to teachers' decisions to teach.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCHER IDENTITY MEMO

During college registration for my junior year, I needed to register for an elective class and because it was the shortest line in the gymnasium that day, I chose Education 25. As part of the course we had to meet once a week with a student from the elementary school that was across the street from the college. My student was Andre, a 5th grader and most weeks we would sit on milk crates in the shade while he would drink 5-8 milks(depending on how much change I could scrape together before we met) and then I would take him to the all-purpose field beside the school and we would throw the football. I still remember meeting with Andre, though I'm sure, 14 years later, Andre does not remember me. I still remember these meetings because it was these meetings that helped me develop a deep appreciation for the importance of letting people tell their stories. Like all students, Andre's story was a unique story, and he was willing to share. The knowledge that I gained from listening to him, helped me to know how best to help him, and helped me to understand how behind each set of numbers there are individual stories. While quantitative data creates objectivity and provides meaningful data, frequently, numbers do not tell the entire story. As a life-long educator and as a doctoral student in education, frequently my research questions revolve around people and I believe all people have complex set of values and beliefs that guide each action that they take and each decision that they make. Quantitative statistics provide valuable insight into trends as well as correlations between various variables. However, as an educational researcher, I must be ever mindful that behind each number is a person, with a story and with a set of values and beliefs that guide their actions and decisions in a profoundly personal way.

It was also these meetings with Andre that initially spurred my interest in becoming a teacher. This desire was further strengthened as I entered the classroom as a student teacher, and

new teacher. Furthermore, these initial exposures to teaching continue to frame and shape my paradigm on teaching and learning. Though I have read many books and continue to grow and learn, nothing is a more important in our schools than the teacher. It is this belief in part that leads me to research on teacher retention in the first place. Furthermore, either explicit or deeply hidden, I believe there remains an unwritten contract between parents, children, and teachers. In this contract students and parents agree to take part in the educational process so that the student can live the life they desire. Teachers agree to educate students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in life. I believe my role as an educational researcher is to help identify how best to honor all sides of this unwritten contact. Within this contract there exists a complex network of interrelated factors. For example, factors such as school culture, teacher morale, teacher retention, standardized test scores, administrative support, school funding and many more factors each impact and are impacted by each other. I believe that in order for research to be useful, it must seek to fully understand and acknowledge these complexities. Research which addresses both context and content is of far more value in research on education than research which seeks simple cause and effect correlations, with no account for context.

My first teaching position was at a small charter school in downtown Dallas. All our students were economically disadvantaged, and majority got themselves to and from school via public transportation.

While this might seem a bleak introduction to public education, several factors made it a powerful positive experience. The first and probably most powerful of these factors was getting to know my student. I got to know my students not only as students in the classroom but also by allowing them a place to hang out after school and by reading their writings which provided a window into their passions and lives. These experiences reinforced in the importance of listening

and allow people to tell me their stories, and also taught me that it takes time to truly get to know someone. When people reveal their true thinking there is an element of trust, and trust must be built. This lesson shapes continues to guide my work as a researcher. I must be always mindful that participants choose what to share and how to share information based on the how much they trust me, and how well they understand the intentions of my study. When interviewing participants, it is also worthwhile to invest some time into getting to know them and their story. While interview data will always remain limited to what participants choose to share, dedicating time towards getting to know participants well increases the depth of understanding I can achieve as a researcher.

Another experience early in my teaching career which profoundly impacted my identity as a researcher revolves around my development of class curriculum. Because I was teaching in a charter school with a non-traditional approach to the classroom and there was little pressure from state accountability tests at the time, my teaching team and I had no pre-developed curriculum to work from. Several colleagues and I, along with my principal; had a vision of how project based learning could improve the learning experience of our students. We planned daily together and developed an entire project based curriculum over my first three years of teaching. The downfall was that every project, every lesson, every field trip, and every assessment had to be created from scratch, many times the students were even involved in this creation. However, this downfall was also a powerful experience that shaped who I am professionally today. A popular saying is that anything worth doing is not easy, and while developing this curriculum was not easy, it was worth doing. This idea applies in research as well. While the easy path to find data may be administering a survey; I don't believe this always tells the whole story. The hard work involved in spending time listening to participants, and in developing questions, trying them,

refining them, and trying them again creates more work for the researcher. However, this additional effort means that the data is more reflective of participant beliefs.

Following my first teaching position, I moved to the Flagstaff, Arizona and taught primarily Navajo students in Winslow, Arizona. Following a similar project based curriculum our small school of 100 students and 4 teachers focused on developing projects that were hands on and required students to apply the skills they learned in class in real world applications. My most significant learning from this experience that shapes my identity as a researcher was that culture matters greatly. My Winslow students had well developed skepticism of any "white man" who was trying to tell them what they needed in order to succeed and I was not able to truly get to know them and to help them until I first understood their culture. Their histories and culture impacted every decision and interaction. This experience taught me that as a researcher I must be ever mindful of the impact of culture. Furthermore, I must be careful to avoid assumptions about what others value. Rather than assume cultural values both between participant and researcher and across different participants, I must listen and question carefully to truly understand the root cultural values of each individual participant.

As a researcher, my identity is defined by my prior experiences I believe that it is these experiences which shape how I approach research. As I mentioned above, I strongly believe that there is value in learning about people as individuals. Furthermore, getting to know their stories, and investing time in building trust are essential elements of success qualitative research.

APPENDIX B

TERCEP FINAL LIKERT SURVEY

Information about UNT research study

Our project is entitled Teacher Education Research Center for Educator Preparation, Hard to Staff Schools. ***The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of teachers about urban high schools that meet the criteria for "hard to staff." What we learn will be contrasted with data from schools in other settings. Your insights will be used to develop teacher and administrator preparation programs.***

Your signature below indicates that you agree to the following conditions.

1. Participation requires completion of a 48-item survey with demographic information that will take less than 15 minutes.
2. Names are not collected and demographic information is general so as to protect the identity of individuals.
3. Data will be reported using descriptive statistics.
4. There are no known risks to the participant.
5. My consent is optional and voluntary. My decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice my present or future relations with the University of North Texas nor the Dallas ISD.
6. I may withdraw from the project at any time and that I may choose not to answer any question that I do not want to answer. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary.
7. If I participate, I can get information about the project and copies of the survey from Dr. Mary Harris, principal investigator at UNT, mary.harris@unt.edu, 940 565-4327.
8. I understand that, while this project has been reviewed by the Dallas ISD, Dallas ISD is not conducting the project activities.

My signature below indicates that I have read and agree to participate in this research study. My consent may be withdrawn by contacting the researcher. I may keep a copy of this form for my records.

Signature_____   Date_____
            Teacher/Staff Member

Signature_____   Date_____
            Researcher

Teacher Survey

Sign both copies. Carefully remove the top one for your records.

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Signature_____   Date_____
       Teacher/Staff Member

Signature_____   Date_____
       Researcher

1. How many years have you taught at this school, including this year? _____

2. How many years have you been a K-12 teacher, including this one? _____

3. What grade levels do you currently teach?

K-5   6-7   9-12   K-12

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

4. Original Program Certification Type

○ Alternative   ○ Traditional/Standard

5. Gender

○ M   ○ F

6. Ethnicity

○ Anglo
○ Asian
○ African American
○ Latino

7. What subjects do you currently teach?   Please list subject areas, not specific courses.

8. Do you coach?

○ Yes   ○ No

9. Are you certified in all subject areas that you teach?

○ Yes   ○ No

10. Highest degree earned?

○ Bachelors   ○ Masters   ○ Doctorate

11. What percentage of the professional development you attended last year was delivered online?

○ 1-25   ○ 26-50   ○ 51-75   ○ 76-100

12. Please rate each of the following statements according to your level of agreement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I received professional development that helped me understand the culture and diversity of my students.	○	○	○	○
2. I am able to easily get community support for my teaching area.	○	○	○	○
3. I received the resources necessary to prepare effectively for classroom instruction within two weeks of reporting to my campus.	○	○	○	○
4. I pursue professional development activities outside of my contractual obligations (i.e., summer).	○	○	○	○
5. The school administrators understand the cultures of the population that the school serves.	○	○	○	○
6. I am able to remain excited about teaching even if I have felt personal defeat in the classroom.	○	○	○	○
7. I use benchmark assessment data to inform my instruction at the	○	○	○	○

beginning of the year.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. Professional development is designed by examining current benchmarks and/or formative assessment on my campus.	◯	◯	◯	◯
9. I respect my campus administrator.	◯	◯	◯	◯
10. I use benchmark assessment data to inform instruction throughout the year.	◯	◯	◯	◯
11. I was made to feel I was a part of a team within the school.	◯	◯	◯	◯
12. I am able to teach difficult concepts in my content area.	◯	◯	◯	◯
13. I am able to find solutions for problems I face in the classroom.	◯	◯	◯	◯
14. I received support from the principal during the first two weeks of reporting to my assigned area.	◯	◯	◯	◯
15. My campus administrator gets things done.	◯	◯	◯	◯

16. My relationship with students motivates them to meet my expectations.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. I am able to motivate students from diverse backgrounds to learn.	◯	◯	◯	◯
18. My mentor was resourceful and provided necessary support during the school year.	◯	◯	◯	◯
19. Administrators provide student discipline assistance that supports my teaching.	◯	◯	◯	◯
20. I am able to teach effectively if I have all the resources provided for me.	◯	◯	◯	◯
21. I am able to get universities and local colleges involved in working with our students.	◯	◯	◯	◯
22. I understand the role of my mentor.	◯	◯	◯	◯
23. Professional development enhances my ability to improve student learning.	◯	◯	◯	◯
24. Administrators help create a safe and academically focused	◯	◯	◯	◯

environment.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
25. I am able to teach effectively in teaching environments that are different from my expectations.	◯	◯	◯	◯
26. I am able to engage learners from various cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds.	◯	◯	◯	◯
27. I was assigned a mentor teacher within two weeks of reporting to my assigned campus.	◯	◯	◯	◯
28. I am able to overcome stress created by day-to-day teaching experiences.	◯	◯	◯	◯
29. I impact the student dropout rate in my school.	◯	◯	◯	◯
30. I understand my administrator's expectations.	◯	◯	◯	◯
31. I attend professional development training in my content area each year.	◯	◯	◯	◯
32. The administrators are visible and accessible in my	◯	◯	◯	◯

building.

33. I have the resources I need to successfully prepare my students for state assessments.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
34. I am able to identify which students understand the concepts that I am teaching.	◯	◯	◯	◯
35. I use data from prior year TAKS assessments to make instructional decisions in my classroom.	◯	◯	◯	◯
36. I understand the mission, vision, and goals of my assigned campus.	◯	◯	◯	◯
37. My administrator behaves ethically and morally.	◯	◯	◯	◯
38. I feel prepared to teach students the objectives measured on state assessments.	◯	◯	◯	◯
39. I received information on my students' content areas performance within two weeks of reporting to my assigned campus.	◯	◯	◯	◯
40. My campus administrators believe my	◯	◯	◯	◯

opinion matters.

41. I am able to adjust my teaching strategies if my students are not successful.

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

42. I received information on campus level state assessment performance within two weeks of reporting to my assigned campus.

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

43. The professional development I attended deepened my content knowledge and skills that in turn improve student achievement.

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

44. My administrator establishes a positive and professional environment.

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

45. I am able to assess my students throughout a lesson.

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

46. My campus administrators have an understanding of what takes place in my classroom.

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

47. I am able to make important decisions about the curriculum and

$\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$ $\bigcirc$

instruction that occurs in my classroom.

48. The local community is highly concerned with the performance of our school on state assessments.

    ◯   ◯   ◯   ◯

Thank you for completing the survey.

And there is more!   Please participate in a 30 minute interview.

The interview will be conducted at school during a period when you are not on duty. It will be conducted by UNT doctoral student.Safeguards will be taken to protect your identity and that of your school.

Your participation will offer an opportunity to reflect on your career in teaching and may help other teachers.

Are you willing to participate in an interview?

◯ Yes   ◯ No

If yes, please provideinformation below.

Name   (Please print) _____

Years at this school_____

Time of planning period_____

E-mail address _____

Phone number _____

Detach this sheet and hand it in separately from the survey

APPENDIX C

UNT TERCEP FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS

Factor Analysis Results Grouped by Latent Indicator

Factor 1 Overcoming	Loading	Item code
22. I respect my campus administrator.	0.7269	Administrative Leadership
49. I understand the mission, vision, and goals of my assigned campus.	0.6731	Induction
28. My campus administrator gets things done.	0.6608	Administrative Leadership
58. I am able to assess my students throughout a lesson.	0.6586	Self-Efficacy
54. I am able to adjust my teaching strategies if my students are not successful.	0.6377	Self-Efficacy
25. I am able to teach difficult concepts in my content area.	0.6182	Self-Efficacy
40. I was assigned a mentor teacher within two weeks of reporting to my assigned campus.	0.6108	Induction
57. My administrator establishes a positive and professional environment	0.6072	Administrative Leadership
50. My administrator behaves ethically and morally.	0.6042	Administrative Leadership
36. Professional development enhances my ability to improve student learning.	0.6041	Professional Development
43. I understand my administrator's expectations.	0.5986	Administrative Leadership
42. I impact the student dropout rate in my school.	0.5905	Efficacy in Environment
26. I am able to find solutions for problems I face in the classroom.	0.5748	Personal Efficacy
18. The school administrators understand the cultures of the population that the school serves.	0.5731	Administrative Leadership
39. I am able to engage learners from various cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds.	0.5629	Efficacy for Diversity
30. I am able to motivate students from diverse background to learn.	0.5404	Efficacy for Diversity
24. I was made to feel I was part of a team within the school.	0.5374	Induction
53. My campus administrator believes that my opinion matters	0.5351	Administrative Leadership
47. I am able to identify which students understand the concepts I am teaching.	0.5131	Personal Efficacy
38. I am able to teach effectively in teaching environments that are different from my experience.	0.5101	Efficacy for Diversity
Factor 2 Professional Support		
16. I received the resources necessary to prepare effectively for classroom instruction within two weeks of reporting to my	0.6202	Induction

campus.		
37. Administrators help to create a safe and academically focused environment.	0.5543	Administrative Leadership
27. I received support from the principal during the first two weeks of reporting to my assigned area.	0.5525	Induction
21. Professional development is designed by examining current benchmarks and/or formative assessment on my campus.	0.5305	Assessment
51. I feel prepared to teach students the objectives measured on state assessments.	0.4938	Assessment
Factor 3 Use of Assessment		
20. I use benchmark assessment data to inform my instruction at the beginning of the school year.	0.6890	Assessment
48. I use data from prior year TAKS assessments to make instructional decisions in my classroom.	0.6608	Assessment
23. I use benchmark assessment data to inform instruction throughout the year.	0.6300	Assessment
55. I received information on campus level state assessment performance within two weeks of reporting to my assigned campus.	0.5307	Induction
Factor 4 Valued Professionally		
15. I am able to easily get community support for my teaching area.	0.6152	Efficacy in Environment
59. My campus administrators have an understanding of what takes place in my classroom.	0.5043	Administrative Leadership
35. I understand the value of my mentor.	0.5343	Induction
53. My campus administrator believes that my opinion matters	0.4598	Administrative Leadership
Factor 5 Student Learning		
52. I received information on my students' content area performance within two weeks of reporting to my assigned campus.	0.5344	Induction
29. My relationship with students motivates them to meet my expectations.	0.4346	Personal Efficacy
Factor 6 Student Achievement		
34. I am able to get universities and local colleges involved in working with our students.	0.5165	Efficacy in Environment
48. I use data from prior year TAKS assessments to make instructional decisions in my classroom.	0.4948	Assessment

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW STARTING QUESTIONS

Introduction

Share goals of the research,

Explanation of in-depth interviewing,

> Please tell me a story, listen more, talk less; follow up questioning; seeking clarification; explore don't probe

Share research question,

> In an urban, secondary, *hard-to-staff* school, what factors are related to a teacher's decision to remain in their current teaching position and/or in the field of teaching?

Assurance of privacy

Questioning format and length of interview

Honorarium schedule

Interview One: Focused Life History

What is your current teaching position?

What made you want to be a teacher?

How would you describe yourself as a student?

How would you describe yourself as a teacher?

How important is pay to your decision to teach?

How important is being challenged, either professionally or personally?

Have you ever considered leaving teaching? Why or why not?

Describe your teacher preparation program.

Do you feel that the program adequately prepared you to teach?

What excites you most about teaching?

How would you describe your current school?

Interview Two: The Details of Experience

Take me through a typical day in your classroom.

Explain how you plan for instruction.

What is your opinion of the curriculum you are required to teach?

Do you believe you have sufficient resources such as media, equipment, library   resources, etc. to deliver instruction? Why or why not?

Do you feel supported by the parents of your students? Why or why not?

How would you describe the climate / culture of your school?

If you could change any part of the culture of your school, what would it be?

How would you describe your current students?

How would you describe the politics of your school?

Describe your administration. Do you feel they support you?

How are decisions made on your campus?

Do you believe that you have a voice in decisions on your campus?

      Why or why not?

How much of your personal identity is tied to your identity as a teacher?

Do you think that you have adequate knowledge of the content in your classroom?

Do you think that you have adequate knowledge of pedagogy in your classroom?

Do you believe that you have people at your school whom you can trust to ask a question?

Interview Three: Reflection on Meaning

How long do you see yourself teaching? Why?

What do you value most about the process of teaching and learning?

If you were to describe teaching as a song, what song would that be and why?

In your opinion what is the role of the teacher in schools?

Looking back what was your best moment in teaching?

If an artist were to draw a picture of you as a teacher, what would the draw? What things would be included, what colors, what lines, what things would not be included?

Looking back what was your worst moment in teaching?

What do you value most about being a teacher?

What would you tell someone who is going into teaching about being a teacher

APPENDIX E

NODES AND NUMBER OF SOURCES

Primary Node	Secondary Node	Sources	References
Administration		N/A	N/A
Administration / District Administration		7	10
	Teachers more concerned about district administration than students	1	1
	If you have a corrupt leadership, it's gonna trickle down to the teachers.	1	1
	Change from the bottom up is difficult	1	1
	Administrative turnover impacts confidence	3	3
Administration / Campus Administration		12	43
	We have good leadership and discipline	1	1
	Unhappiness with the way the school's being run.	1	1
	Unethical behavior by principal lead to demotion	1	1
	Things are wishy washy because we haven't had a stable principal	1	1
	There is a gap between administration and teachers	1	1
	Teachers defy administration	1	1
	Teachers blatantly go against administration	1	1
	Teachers aren't heard by administration	2	5
	State mandated tests cause administrators to behave in pecular ways	1	1
	Some teachers go out of their way to piss administration off	1	1
	Principals are not consistent	0	0
	Principal liked me	1	1
	Principal did not know who teacher was	1	2
	Previous principal knew everyone	1	3
	Previous principal did too good of a job and was promoted	1	1
	Previous principal celebrated success	1	1
	Personal plan affects relationship with administration	1	1
	New principal is learning and improving	2	2
	I'm not blaming the administration. It's the environment that causes this.	1	1
	I think that there are too many people in leadership roles that really don't know that a quality education is.	1	1
	I followed previous principal	1	1
	I do not really want to start all over. I started being a whole lot nicer to the administration,	1	1
	Got off to rough start because pointed out pattern in class assignments	1	1
	Gap between teachers and administrators	1	1
	Administrators think are what we're isn't really important.	1	2
	Administrators rarely visit class	1	1
	Administrators must pick who to cut	1	1
	Administrators don't speak Spanish	1	1

	Administrators don't know who teachers are	1	1
	Administrators are very busy	1	2
	Administrators are under stress due to state test	2	3
	Administrators are unable to articulate something about the actual curriculum	1	1
	Administrators are looking for reasons to write teachers up	1	1
	Administrator pressure on teachers leads to good or quitting	1	1
	Administration thinks good thinking is chaos in class	1	3
	Administration select people to give them their opinion of people who fall in line with what their goals are (Nodes)	2	2
	Administration left	2	2
	Administration handles problems I bring them	1	1
	Administration does not listen to teachers	1	1
	Administration did not like being held accountable	1	1
Philosophical Belief on Education		7	24
	What we're doing isn't really important	1	1
	There are keys to successful teaching	1	1
	Teaching is my calling	1	1
	Teaching Impacts Lives	0	0
	Teacher wants feedback	1	1
	Teacher motivation from seeing student success	1	2
	Teacher is responsible for student success	1	1
	Self esteem is effected by student success	1	1
	Poor leadership makes me want to leave the school	1	1
	No factors make me want to leave	1	1
	My influence can impact others	2	7
	Lack of being heard leads to apathy	1	1
	Kids are my biggest motivation	1	1
	It is all about the kids	1	2
	I stayed because of a relationship with a student	1	1
	I have to feel like I am accomplishing something	1	1
	Good feeling when students recognize me as their teacher	1	1
	Education is full of opportunities	1	1
	Consider moving to make more of a difference	1	1
	All teachers need to be held accountable	1	1
Student Teacher Connection		7	23
	Wish getting to know kids was mandatory	1	1
	When students go to college it motivates me to continue	1	1
	Want to work here because of population	1	1
	Students stories break my heart	1	2
	Student trusted me with sensitive information	1	1
	Seeing students achieve is exciting	1	1
	Relate to students because of ethnicity and cultural background	3	3

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	Relate to students because of background	1	1
	Relate to students because I'm young	1	1
	My subject is about coming to terms with who you are as an individual	1	1
	Letting kids know you care is important	1	1
	It is good to see student eager to learn	1	1
	I value the students	1	2
	I stayed because of a relationship with a student	1	1
	I share my own story to motivate students	1	1
	I see alot of myself in my students	1	1
	Have to get to know the students	1	1
	Have to get to know some kids better	1	1
Planning and Assessment		N/A	N/A
Planning and Assessment / Teacher Team Planning		3	6
	We bounce ideas off each other	1	1
	Sometimes people want to do their own thing	1	1
	Sometimes people don't want to collaborate	1	1
	Our team works well together	1	1
	Me and one other teacher plan together and look at test	1	1
	I have 45 minutes every 2 days to collaborate	1	1
	Everyone has to do their part	1	1
Planning and Assessment / District Curriculum		7	13
	My subject helps all other areas	1	1
	Teacher is resource	1	1
	Push to create our own curriculum	1	1
	Need to give challenging curriculum	1	1
	It is important to connect curriculum to students	1	2
	I love the curriculum	1	1
	District curriculum is good not great, have to add your own flavor	1	1
	Curriculum is good basic guide	1	1
	All subject can adapt curriculum	1	1
	Add our own flair	1	1
Students		6	17
	We have to know our students	1	2
	We have higher needs students	1	1
	Teachers have to motivate students	1	3
	Teacher motivates students by challenging them	1	1
	Students need discipline	1	1

	Students must be motivated by curiosity	1	1
	Student deficits in learning	1	1
	Our expectations are too low	4	5
	Never give up on students	1	2
	Interest in what students have to say	1	1
	Have to understand student struggles	1	3
	Have to show students you care	1	1
	Half of student have low expectations	1	1
	Challenging student means less discipline issues	1	1
Parents		7	14
	Time is limiting factor in parent communication	1	1
	Principal gave points for attending report card pick up	1	1
	Parents supportive but not involved	1	1
	Parents don't know how to motivate their children	2	4
	Parents are absent	1	1
	Language is barrier	2	3
	It is difficult to get parents to come to school	1	1
	Have to explain how things work here in US	1	1
	Calling parents doesn't change much	1	1
	AP parents are supportive	1	1
Professional Challenge		9	12
	We are not heavy on continual improvement	1	1
	Teaching is a personal journey of growth	1	1
	Some teachers like to know curriculum in and out not me	1	1
	My subject is not important enough to focus on	1	1
	I've had alot of growing experiences	1	1
	I'm on continous journey	1	1
	I enjoy the challenge despite its frustration	1	1
	Have to keep it interesting	1	1
	Fellow teachers prefered not to be challenged	1	1
	Gained confidence as SIC team member	1	1
	From Dean, to AP's, to SIC	1	1
	Dog eat dog climate	1	2
	Committees make decisions and paln	1	1
	Committees help make decisions	2	2
	Change must be long term	1	1
Personal Experiences		4	15
	Similar background to students	1	1
	Love of history	1	1
	I struggled in school	1	1
	Experiences help guide philosophy of teaching	1	2

	Doing well in school was the norm for me	1	2
School Culture		9	11
	Teachers pay for and foster students	1	1
	Students have tough stories	1	1
	Some teachers don't like kids	1	1
	Some students work dangerous job	1	1
	Parents ask students to go to work, not to college	1	1
	More stable home life would help students	1	1
	Many teachers see HS as a family	1	1
First Years in Teaching		5	11
	Older teachers helped take care of me in early years	1	1
	Mentor teacher encouraged	1	1
	First years of teaching realized student deficiencies in writing	1	1
	First years as a teacher were challenging	1	4
	First years as a teacher must be in learning mode	2	2
	Finding a positive mentor is important	2	4
Unwritten Rules		4	6
	You have have to do extra work to fail students	1	1
	We have to pass kids to keep our job	1	1
	They watch you more if your students aren't doing well	1	1
	They want someone who doesn't make too many waves	1	1
	More work if you are not a good teacher	1	1
	Kids have to pass	1	1
	Don't fail the wrong student	1	1
District Lay-off and Firing Practices		4	5
	Teachers who bring revenue are given priority	1	1
	So there's a certain fear in possibly being forced to leave	1	1
	Firing young teachers based on when they were hired, not ability	1	1
	District does not fire bad teachers, they fire bad employees.	1	1
	Budget cut fires were not done fairly	1	1
State Testing		7	11
	Those who are part of TAKS test get listened to	1	1
	Test effect administrators in major way, but not necessarily teachers	1	1
	TAKS causes us to plan together.	1	1
	State tests effect administration so administration put pressure to pass on teachers	1	1

	STAAR test guided unit tests and teaching	1	1
	STAAR has driven 6 weeks district assessments	1	1
	Our school did well	1	1
	Non tested areas prefer not being held accountable	1	1
	Love the district curriculum as guide	1	1
	look at district data to try to make our tests more rigorous	1	1
	data goes through dean, to SIC, then to department chairs then to teachers	1	1
	Can't just pound knowledge in to their ears for the test	1	1
	Alternative to NCLB	1	1
Pay - Compensation		6	8
	Wanted to try company that made a profit	1	1
	Pay is not very important	1	1
	Pay is irrelevant	1	2
	No money in teaching	1	1
	Hard to find a good paying job	1	1
	Good pay with summers off	1	1
	Didn't even know how much I got paid	1	1
	All teachers get same pay	1	1
Student Behavior		4	7
	Student only cares during football season	1	1
	Profanity was bad at other school	1	1
	I continue to get better at classroom management	1	1
	Have to learn to work with them	1	1
	Gun as test to scare teacher	1	1
	Getting students to change is always difficult	1	1
	Gardener analogy	1	1
	Challenging student means less discipline issues	1	1
Ups and Downs in Teaching		4	6
	Wanted to quit at first	1	1
	Sometimes teaching is poppy sometimes metal	1	1
	Lose patience because of passion	1	1
	Like relationship sometimes hot and cold	1	1
Resources Technology		3	5
	There is inequity in resource allecation	1	1
	Students will take care of new resources	1	1
Gossip		3	4

	Teachers focus on rumors not on students	1	1
	Gossip is a problem	2	2
	Gossip can be immature	1	1
Resources Books		3	4
	Would like more access to performances and stage	1	1
	Not enough space in library	1	1
	Materials do not fit my needs	1	1
Teacher Preparation		2	4
	Intensive hands on preparation helped prepare me	1	1
	I had adequate preparation	1	1
	Big difference between Teach for America and District AC Program	1	1
Teacher Work Load		1	2
	More work for teachers that doesn't affect learning	1	1
	Failing too many students leads to more teacher work	1	1

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