

MID-CAREER TEACHERS' MOTIVATION TO TEACHING AND THEIR GROWTH IN  
THEIR PROFESSION

A Record of Study

by

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## ABSTRACT

Similar to most careers, a teacher follows a career cycle: struggling in the beginning, as an expert in mid-career, and finally reaching end career. The mid-career teacher can be a school and district's greatest asset; however, they can also fall into a mid-career slump with little room for professional growth and waning on intrinsic motivation. Through this mixed methods study, I will explore the mid-career teachers' motivation to teaching and their growth in the profession. I will employ three research instruments to collect data: a Teacher Motivation Assessment Scale (TMAS) designed and validated earlier; a semi-structured interview protocol designed by the researcher; and a checklist to document the participants' motivation and growth. Teacher instructional rounds designed to improve mid-career teachers' motivation and growth were offered on one campus over a semester. Mid-career teachers participating in the teacher instructional rounds were compared before and after the rounds. The surveys showed statistically significant differences overall, but did decrease in some categories. These categories aligned with data obtained through the interview and self-checklist in terms of commitment and interest. Teachers were interviewed throughout the semester and all expressed positive attitudes in observing other teachers. Mid-career teachers also filled out a self-checklist of evidence for growth and motivation. Participants on average had more items reported on the checklist, but were lacking in areas of learning from peers and setting goals. The data showed patterns and needs in the mid-career educators that can help the educator, administrators and in the planning of professional development.

## DEDICATION

The accumulation of years of work found on these pages is dedicated to my husband who pushed me to accomplish my goals and my parents who have gifted me with the value of education and the opportunities it brings.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

Experienced teachers are the most critical resources on a campus for quality education. In prior research literature, there has been significant research and media on retaining, growing, and mentoring new teachers, but little has been said about the motivation and growth of a school's greatest source of professional capital, mid-career teachers who have experience in classroom management and pedagogical strategies. These teachers can grow stale and can be hard to retain in the classroom because they are often overlooked for development. Their motivation to teach may decrease over time. They stop searching for opportunities to grow and improve their teaching skills. Without additional support from the administrators, these mid-career teachers may fall into a phase Doan and Peters (2009) referred to as the "seven-year itch." Doan and Peters (2009) continued to explain that "retaining mid-career teachers, however, has received little attention in comparison (to new teachers). Such teachers -- those with six or more years' experience -- can face frustrations, question their career choice, and look for growth opportunities outside of the profession" (p. 18). From my experience, this "itch" comes from a lack of motivation and professional growth as opposed to a desire to actually leave the classroom. Based on the Learning Policy Institute's review (Kini & Podolski, 2016) of thirty studies published within the last fifteen years which analyzed

the effect of teaching experience on student outcomes in the United States and met specific methodological criteria, the authors found that:

Teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher's career. Gains in teacher effectiveness associated with experience are most steep in teachers' initial years, but continue to be significant as teachers reach the second, and often third, decades of their careers (Kini & Podolski, 2016, p. 15).

In addition to academic effectiveness, student attendance rates and overall school climate improved. Mid-career teachers can be the heart of a school, yet fostering their growth and motivation is often overlooked.

### Situational Context

I teach in a large district that staffs over 4,448 people on 46 different campuses. My own campus, a traditional nine through twelve high school campus, is a suburban campus that enrolls just over 2000 students. The school staffs 119 teachers. My school has 25% minority staff and a 48% student minority population. Administrators and gatekeepers at my campus have encouraged me to use teachers seeking additional professional degrees as a measure for motivation and teacher leadership, in this case 74% of teachers currently have only a bachelor's degree while 28% already hold a master's degree. While I do not believe that this is a conclusive measure of motivation and growth, both of these percentages are above the district and state average according to the Texas Academic Performance Report. My school employs 3 first-year teachers,

40 teachers between one and five years of experience, 67 teachers who have between six and twenty years of experience and only 9 teachers with over twenty years of experience. This means that 56% of the teachers in our building fall within the midpoint range. The number of students in this range is greater than the state average and shows that our district is a choice district to work in and one that is known for hiring experienced teachers. For a campus and district who employs over half of their teachers in a single career stage and looks to hire teachers within this range, there is very little done to grow and motivate these teachers.

As a district, the programs that I have found to support, grow, and mentor teachers are developed only for new teachers, the district's Playing for KEEPS induction and mentoring program. The only role available for mid-career teachers is as a mentor. Mentoring others can help develop leadership skills, but there is no mentoring or leadership training for teachers who are not mentors. Many other districts participate in teacher leadership programs, some are even offered by our service center, but our school has never participated in these programs. The district does employ four instructional coaches for most of the core subject areas, but these coaches focus on the middle grades. District staff offers support, but their expertise rarely makes it into the high school classrooms for improvement and growth. Since the school has opened, there have been two mandatory, district-wide book studies, each met with resistance. In 2016, I led an optional teacher book study on motivation. All participants in the book study were in the mid-career range. The campus has provided small opportunities for growth and

motivation, but they are not being taken advantage of at a larger level. These could include instructional coaching, book studies, and instructional rounds.

Another place for growth and motivation for teachers in mid-career is the ability to present and attend conferences and trainings of their choice. These all take budget funding, and teachers are often denied leave and funding. I have been asked to spend my own money on travel, substitute teacher expenses, and registration fees. This lack of opportunity for teacher career growth creates a lack of motivation and a staleness in teachers, especially those in the mid-career phase. Over half of our staff is at the mid-career point, and many are experiencing lack of opportunities. I cannot impact the budget for professional development, but I hope that results from my study can shed light on the importance of mid-career growth that can be obtained through some other avenues that are already on campus.

#### Personal Context

About every five years in the classroom I start to get antsy, changing subjects and/or districts. Around year fourteen I started noticing many of the teachers around me moving into administrative, counseling positions or even industry. I enjoy instruction and by no means felt like I had mastered my craft, but I was discontent. There were new things to learn and try, but there was also too much on my plate and very little push or motivation to do the hard work of course adjustment or development. I sat down and tried to make a list of teachers that I could see myself as in ten years. I looked for mentors, but I found few. There are good educators at every school, but I quickly

realized how many at my stage in their career (and beyond) had become negative and combative. Many were resistant to new ideas (unless they thought of them), and they often did the same things year after year. Like most things in this world, the teaching career has a life-cycle; I just did not know what the next stage was. As an educator, I crave learning and growing, and I was mostly learning from younger newer teachers who were still full of fire and passion and possessed much better technological skills. My home office is piled with papers that need to be graded; my lessons plans are late to be turned in; and I try to balance all this with my family and college courses. These multiple responsibilities were things I did not have to think about at the beginning of my career. There are other teachers on my team who have been here as long as me. One of them shows movies, copies worksheet after worksheet, and drives out of the parking lot at 3:10 pm when the bell rings. I rarely forget why I do my job, but at the middle of my career I sometimes wonder why I work so hard at it.

Mid-career teachers find themselves in a hard stage. Being a mid-career educator is an easy place to flat-line and a hard place to find motivation. Mid-career educators come in all grades and content areas. Teachers between six to twenty years of experience tend to be referred to as mid-career educators and are experts in their field. They have years of training and experience, yet they are often ignored rather than continually grown. My own perspective is as a high school science teacher. My own desire to grow, maintain motivation, and develop leadership roles in my school that move beyond principals are the basis of this action research study.

## Statement of the Problem

A district whose majority of teachers fall in the midpoint career range should show concern for building capacity in their most abundant human capital. Home to a percentage of mid-career teachers that is well above state average, my district is a choice district in which teachers seek to work, and it is one known for hiring experienced teachers. The teacher turnover rate has decreased significantly over the last few years. Teachers who come to the campus often stay. A low percentage of turnover creates an atmosphere of stability and a campus climate that is hard to shift. Because there is high percentage of mid-career teachers, their influence carries the greatest critical mass on campus, this influence spreads to the entire campus culture (in terms of norms, participation, and practices) and attitudes. Intentional efforts to support teachers in this career phase could positively impact an entire campus.

Mid-career teachers have the advantage of time and experience in the classroom. However, time can bring significant changes in the education, technology, and student demographics. Teachers have tried-and-true lessons that have been taught year after year, despite new research and shifting methodologies in education. Repeating instructional practices over and over can actually lull a teacher into complacency. This complacency can be common in mid-career pedagogies. Classrooms look different than they did a decade ago, much less two decades; they have less paper and more technology. Students can google the answer to any worksheet put in front of them or share answers with their watches faster than a teacher can take attendance. The students themselves are also different. According to new data released by the National Center for



Education Statistics (NCES), the diversity of public schools in this nation will change drastically over the next decade or so, and appear much differently in 2022 than it does today (Chen, 2017). Just like new technology insists on learning new skills and new approaches, new student demographics do as well. A danger of the mid-career teacher is to continue to teach to the same kinds of students that sat in their desks when they began their career. Mid-career teachers must be willing to grow and learn almost as much as they did in their early years. This will require moving off of the plateau of complacency and the safety of last year's lesson plans. Mid-career teachers require awareness and motivation to grow with students.

Consider the following two scenarios below to help illustrate the problem:

Ms. Smith is in her eleventh year as a high school English teacher. Her test scores are some of the best in the building; she has an easy rapport with her students and develops many of the lessons for her team. This year she is working on improving feedback with her students and learning new ways to incorporate 21st century learning. She has no official title, but she receives a small stipend for helping to coach and mentor a new teacher. Administrators often ask for her input on changes, decisions, and the overall campus climate. She meets monthly with a cross curricular team in her district who have all been teaching for ten years on leadership and improvement. They often collaborate and encourage each other outside of these monthly meetings. She occasionally leads trainings on her campus as well as across the district, often for a paid stipend. Administrators work with her not only as a master teacher, but to also help improve the areas that she would like to grow. Instead of being sent to training sessions

for things she has already mastered, she spends a half day doing walk-throughs with an administrator, not as an intern or principal candidate, but to provide teacher input to the administration team as well as to sharpen her own skills. Her perspective and skills are constantly growing and constantly benefit not only her own craft, but the entire building.

Mr. Wilke is in his eleventh year as a high school chemistry teacher across town. He started his career excited and eager. Early on he struggled with classroom management and clarity of lessons. Those things came with time, and for the most part, his days go by easy enough. He has a binder of lessons that he pulls from each year. Occasionally, he makes tiny changes or finds a new activity but rarely changes what “works.” He still enjoys his content and the student interaction, but lately has struggled to be motivated to go to work every day. Administrators seem happy enough with him; his evaluations are always good, and they rarely come into his room. They see him as an experienced teacher that they do not have to worry about. In the boring professional development sessions that he has to attend, he grades papers or plans for the year ahead. He has either heard it before or knows that whatever new trend is being peddled will pass soon enough. He looks around the room and notices that most teachers are just as checked out as he is. It never occurs to him to lead sessions himself, much less pay attention. This year he is more restless than ever. He feels pressure to make a change and potentially more money with it. He toys with the idea of becoming a principal, not because he has ever wanted the job but mostly because he sees no other option. His brother is a realtor and lately has been pushing him to try that out. He is not sure, but he knows that he needs to make a change.

Unfortunately, with few pathways, options, or intentional programs to grow mid-career teachers, the second scenario is one that many teachers are likely to see more often than the first. Even the most motivated educators find seasons of frustration and complacency. The eagerness of new teachers wears off with experience and often so does motivation for mentorship and development. Mid-career teachers often have the most to offer a district: they are the experts; they are the ones who have made it past those first few years and are likely to stay; and they have the most direct impact with students. Sadly, many of them lay fallow instead of being continually developed.

According to Evans as reported by the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, (1989), “the teaching force is now composed of mainly people in middle to late career who have been teaching in their current school for most of their professional life” (p.10). Mid-career teachers have the most to offer but face different issues than new teachers. Mid-career teachers, ones have taught somewhere between 7 to 20 years, find the middle of their career draining, complex, and isolating. These teachers are overwhelmed and bored at the same time and rarely used to their full capacity.

Administrators at the campus and district level do not always see these teachers as the ones in which to invest. Schools, more often, are developing and trying to hold on to new teachers as well as handle new problems. Administrators and interns attend leadership trainings, but teachers are rarely in attendance. Department head meetings happen on a regular basis, and participants are encouraged to share information both ways. However, that still leaves many teachers on campus without a voice. Teachers in the middle are not sure how to develop their own careers when they see so few options.

Showing both administrators and mid-career teachers how to best use their voice, sharpen their skills, and improve their contributions on campus can improve some of the lulls that these teachers experience.

Without awareness and opportunity to see new ideas, the experiences of mid-career teachers will not change. Administrators will focus on different campus and district problems, trusting that these teachers will keep doing what they always do. Without encouragement and voice, these teachers do not always speak up and seek out these chances for themselves. They sit through the same professional developments year after year and make few changes, often growing more and more negative each year.

My own role as a mid-career educator, with seventeen years of experience, gives me personal insight into these needs. During my campus internship, I spent a significant amount of time observing teachers in their classrooms on my own campus and throughout the area with my mentor. After just a few observations, I felt cheated – why had I not been watching my peers for the last seventeen years? I watched the teacher across the hall teach the same lesson as me with a minor adaptation that I had never considered. I saw a history teacher with a classroom layout that motivated me to move around a few desks in my classroom to encourage more interaction among students. I observed a classroom where the teacher did not notice that she never gave students time to answer questions. I committed to a longer wait time in my own class. I saw a mathematics teacher using technology that I wanted to try. Just a few observations quickly sparked changes in my own practice.

## Research Questions

In this study, the main research question is:

What are the changes in mid-career teachers' motivation and growth because of their participation in the teacher instructional rounds?

To answer this question, I pose the following sub-research questions:

(1) What are mid-career teachers' motivation and growth before the teacher instructional rounds as captured by the Teacher Motivation Assessment Scale (TMAS) and individual, semi-structured interviews?

(2) What are mid-career teachers' motivation and growth after the teacher instructional rounds as captured by the Teacher Motivation Assessment Scale (TMAS) and individual, semi-structured interviews?

(3) What are indicators of the mid-career teachers' motivation and growth as captured by the checklist and reported by the participants?

## Important Terms

**Flat profession-** profession in which there is no opportunity to exercise greater responsibility and assume more significant challenges.

**Instructional rounds** - practices in which a small group of educators makes a series of visits to classrooms to observe specific kinds of behaviors then share the results of their

visits with the observed teachers. The aim of instructional rounds is to observe learning strategies and determine root causes for problems and positive outcomes.

**Intrinsic motivation** - performing an action or behavior because you enjoy the activity itself. Where acting on extrinsic motivation is done for the sake of some external outcome, the inspiration for acting on intrinsic motivation can be found in the action itself.

**Mid-career teacher** - teachers who have between seven to thirty years of classroom teaching experience.

**Teacher career life-cycle**- a developmental model that consists of progressive phases propelled by the mechanisms of reflection and renewal or impeded by withdrawal.

**Teacher efficacy** - teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning.

**Teacher growth** - a process that honors differences among teachers, encourages positive change, and provides concrete support for improving teaching and learning. Teachers and administrators collaborate to review performance on standards, discuss ways to improve teaching and learning, and identify professional growth goals.

**Teacher motivation** - what attracts individuals to teaching, how long they remain, and the extent to which they engage with their professional development and the teaching profession.

**Reflective thinking**- an active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge, or the grounds that support that knowledge, and the further conclusions to which that knowledge leads.

## Closing Thoughts

As a mid-career teacher, I have felt a loss in motivation and a struggle for growth. My solution was to create my own motivations, but sometimes that got lost in the daily demands and increasing workload. My school and district do not seem to be alone in their inability or disinterest in developing their mid-career educators. Not meeting the needs of a district's potential best and largest resource means that educators are not growing in ways that can contribute to both the leadership of a campus or the capacity for learning within the classroom. Teachers that are not heard or developed loose motivation and this can lead to complacency, resistance, and, in some cases causing them to leave the classroom entirely.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Like all living things, teachers follow a relatively predictable life cycle. However, outside of research, the life cycle of an educator is rarely taught, talked about, or used to develop support or education models. “As teachers progress throughout their careers, they must grow and transform to remain effective” (Steffy & Wolfe, 2001, p. 16). Stagnation in most cycles leads to regression as opposed to progression. Barnwell (2015) suggested that it takes many educators a decade or even longer to become truly effective in their craft. Despite previous ideas that teachers plateau after the first three years, the ability to efficiently deal with distractions and disruptions, create and implement engaging curriculum, and provide meaningful feedback to students only comes with time (para 5). In the present study, I examined mid-career teachers’ motivation toward teaching and their growth in the profession.

#### Teacher Career Cycle and Defining Mid-career

Available research defines the stages of a teaching career in various ways, but generally categorizes mid-career teachers with similar parameters. In 1989, Huberman theorized five stages of a career cycle that integrated variables of both a psychological and sociological nature through interactions of individuals and their work settings over time. In Huberman’s model (1989), years 7 to 33 represents the mid-career. These mid-career years showed a split that can occur; it can be a time of experimentation and/or



interrogations characterized by a negative attitude or view of professional development. According to Huberman (1989), this split was followed by years of serenity or conservatism characterized by stubbornness and rigidity. These stages were similarly mapped by research from Sammons et al. (2007), Henninger (2007), and Woods and Lynn (2014). These stages showed how teachers tended to hold individual attitudes, knowledge, skills, behaviors, and self-efficacy at various points during their careers. Additional experts on career teacher cycles, Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000), suggested similar results, and their model “consists of six progressive phases propelled by the mechanisms of reflection and renewal or impeded by withdrawal” (p. 16). Their career cycle model began with a novice phase where teachers begin student teaching or have their first teaching experience and move to a practicum stage as their first three to four years of teaching. The next stage teachers grew in confidence and experience for another three to five years. The third and fourth phases moved teachers into the mid-career range where they potentially hit the peak of their professional career as experts and influencers. This model differed from that of Sammons et al. (2007) model in that teachers do not automatically move along the cycle. The last and final teaching stage is reaching a state of emeritus or waiting for retirement (Farrell, 2014). Unlike previous linear model Sammons’ model showed that teachers could move from stage to stage chronologically but can also experience stages multiple times. Fessler’s and Christensen’s model (1992) took into account the effects of factors, both inside and outside of the school context, teachers’ motivations, commitment, and enthusiasm at different stages in their careers. Even though this model did not follow a linear path, the

model did show a potential for both growth and regression throughout a teacher's career. Sammons et al. (2007) acknowledged that their "analysis suggests not only that supportive school were of crucial importance to teachers' sense of effectiveness across all six PLPs (professional life phases) but that for teachers in the last phases, in-school support played a major part in teachers' continued engagement in the profession" (p. 683). Beyond just the first five years, sustaining growth and motivation become major factors after approximately year seven. This timeline is especially important because at year seven, most teachers have mastered many of the things that more inexperienced teachers struggle with and they are expert educators in which districts have invested and should want to develop further. Regardless of the number of stages, mid-career seems to fall somewhere between six to twenty-five years of experience. Steffy and Wolfe (2001), as summarized by Farrell (2014), describe the final stage where:

Teachers reach their highest professional standards and are recognized as experts. After this, teachers can enter the distinguished phase of their careers as they begin to influence education far beyond their classroom to city, state, and even national levels. This influence can be achieved through conducting workshops and/or writing position papers or serving as mentors or coaches to other teachers (p. 505).

However, this stage is often not reached without recognition of mid-career concerns, strengths, and mentorship.

## Importance of Focusing on the Mid-career

If mid-career teachers fall in their 6<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> year, that leaves many “expert” teachers with decades left in the classrooms with no mentorship or potential to advance professionally. The middle of an educator’s career can be a time of significant growth and impact or one of stagnation and frustration (Huberman, 1989). Understanding the developmental continuum that mid-career teachers fall on creates a lens that can be used to promote efficacy in teachers based on their experience (Compton, 2010). Steffy et al. (2000) explained that “the strength of this model is its focus on the process of how one continues to grow and become a more competent career teacher along the continuum” (p. 5). According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2013), there are three stages of teachers; teachers are in the beginning, middle, or end stages. Teachers that are in their first three years of teaching are still learning their craft. Teachers that have been teaching for more than twenty years are at the end of their careers. These end-career teachers are often labeled as resistors to change and new methods. The teachers primed to be developed are the teachers in the middle. Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) explained, “there are teachers in the mid-career range — with anywhere from four to 20 years’ experience. These are, on average, the most committed and capable” (p. 38). Malcom Gladwell’s *Outliers* (2011) explains the 10,000 hour rule. According to Gladwell, it takes over 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert in any field. A teacher in their mid-career has 10,000 hours of experience, enough to make them an expert. Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) go on to say, “we need to focus more on the teachers in the middle and to keep challenging and stretching them” (p. 38). Mid-career teachers are often overlooked, but

ignoring mid-career teachers can mistakenly let good teachers plateau instead of being developed into a great resource.

### Concerns for Mid-career Educators

Multiple stages of a teachers' career can be susceptible to negative feelings, doubt, frustration, and lack of professional satisfaction. Farrell (2014) expressed that "teachers in their mid-career years, regardless of the discipline they teach, seem to be most susceptible to these negative feelings and as a result can become concerned with growing stale in the profession" (p. 504). Fessler and Christensen (1992) described mid-career as a potential time of frustration and discouragement with teaching. At this point educators can question their career choice and start to lose effectiveness. In Texas, teaching is a profession with salaries awarded based on years of experience not performance, with few exceptions. Texas Education Agency Chapter 153 explains the regulations for salary schedules based on a number of creditable years of service; there are no state rules related to salary found based on performance (TEA). A survey on how teachers in each career stage choose to learn and grow showed a troubling lack of interest and motivation in professional and expert teaching stages (Compton, 2010). These results are unfortunate because not only do these teachers need to show growth themselves but "teachers in the expert phase could be a valuable resource to assist with apprentice teacher growth and represent a group rich with possible ideas and opportunities for administrators and staff developers" (Compton, 2010, p. 55). Compton (2010) expressed concern that this "persistent or deep withdrawal" in the professional

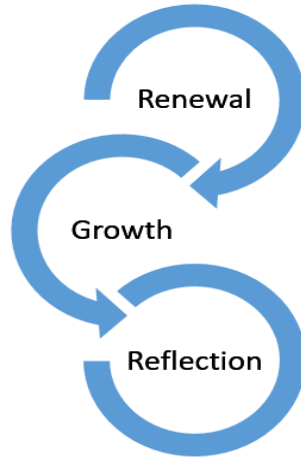
and expert phase of teachers that begins in mid-career is due to ignoring their professional growth needs and not providing career opportunities for their gifts and audiences for their voices of experience. This oversight is resulting in many missed opportunities for the profession. Mid-career teacher attrition and underutilization is not an issue germane only to Texas or even the United States. A study of Israeli teachers examining how schools empower teachers to hold leadership positions came to similar conclusions. “The professional progression of these teachers is manifested in their relatively low mobility – they hardly change positions. Their focus is on teaching, which they see as their key role” (Avidov-Ungar, Friedmana, & Olshtain, 2014, p. 709). One teacher participant reflected, “I do not have any success that is manifested in promotion – there is no promotion. I apparently am in the same place all the time” (Avidov-Ungar et al., 2014). It is difficult to take the next step when very few seem given. Danielson (2007) explained:

Teaching is a flat profession. In most professions, as the practitioner gains experience, he or she has the opportunity to exercise greater responsibility and assume more significant challenges. This is not true of teaching. The 20-year veteran's responsibilities are essentially the same as those of the newly licensed novice. In many settings, the only way for a teacher to extend his or her influence is to become an administrator. Many teachers recognize that this is not the right avenue for them. This desire for greater responsibility, if left unfulfilled, can lead to frustration and even cynicism (p.15).

A mid-career reflective study by Farrell (2014) suggested, “administrators also need to be able to find ways to cope with teacher plateauing, because if they can understand teacher career cycles and movement in and out of these cycles, they can help reduce career stagnation” (p. 516). Farrell (2014) further suggested that help can come from administrators who “find ways to support their teachers and boost morale by recognizing and affirming their important role within that institution” (p. 515). Mid-career educators represent an age group with families and growing financial responsibilities. The idea of little professional growth can cause many to question their place and stability in the profession.

#### Mid-career Collaboration

Through Steffy and Wolfe’s (2001) life cycle model, the phases that could potentially promote growth and motivation all are characterized with the need for reflection and renewal. These stages are most likely to be met when specific opportunities are provided for change and communication with others for reflection. Figure 1 shows the cycle, according to Steffy and Wolfe (2001), required for teacher growth in any phase.



*Figure 1.* Renewal – growth – reflection model. Adapted from “A life-cycle model for career teachers” by B. Steffy & M. Wolfe (2001).

Support networks are vital for continued growth. Teachers who are not reaching out or renewing themselves in professional ways will only continue to stagnate and withdraw. In a case study on teacher growth, it was found that some teachers sought their own support system and professional development of their interest yet others remained:

isolated, physically, emotionally. Alone within their classrooms, some teachers hesitate to network or seek sources for renewal or support. Instead, they concentrate on the negatives in their professional lives. The education community must find a way to help both types of teachers--those who seek growth and those who are stuck in a sea of frustration (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 66).

Professional learning communities have encouraged practice and are in many ways their own models of distributed leadership and support networks. Professional learning communities are a place where educators “work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 2). These groups tend to be collaborative teams for planning and analyzing data within a grade level or subject group. However, this same principle can be applied to the specific concerns and growth of mid-career teachers. Small group studies can be used to process similar educator experiences as well as learn new skillsets, such as leadership, together. Farrell’s (2014) reflective study on preventing professional plateauing among mid-career teachers suggested the construction of mid-career teacher groups as a solution. “Institutions could encourage the creation of teacher reflection groups,” a teacher participant explained that these discussions, “validated each others’ experiences, gave support, sympathy, encouragement, held up similar experiences for comparisons for different teaching styles” (Farrell, 2014, p. 515) Another participant shared a similar response, “The group provided time to share common experiences, ask for and offer insights and advice, ponder solutions. It was nice to be able to affirm and support each other as we expressed concerns or doubts, too” (Farrell, 2014, p. 515). These reflective informal groups are not limited to education, business and industry have practiced them with success as well. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) wrote about how these community groups



essentially saved the Chrysler Corporation. They go on to explain that many industries and companies are finding that “these communities find a legitimate place in the organization, they offer new possibilities—many yet undiscovered—for weaving the organization around knowledge, connecting people, solving problems” (p. 4). Mid-career teachers in a school or district do not usually get to spend time discussing, planning, or connecting unless they already meet regularly as a reflective group. Wenger et al. (2002) goes on to encourage the idea of connecting people in other ways:

These people don’t necessarily work together every day, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. As they spend time together, they typically share information, insight, and advice. They help each other solve problems. They discuss their situations, their aspirations, and their needs. They ponder common act as sounding boards. They may create tools, standards, generic designs, manuals, and other documents—or they may simply develop a tacit understanding that they share.

However, they accumulate knowledge, they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together. This value is not merely instrumental for their work. It also accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each other’s perspectives and of belonging to an interesting group of people. Over time, they develop a unique perspective on their topic as well as a body of common knowledge, practices, and approaches. They also develop personal

relationships and established ways of interacting. They may even develop a common sense of identity (p. 5).

These same kinds of conversations provide teachers “with opportunities to look back on and review events and practices. In this way, reflective conversations make an important contribution to building a shared repertoire of skills and techniques amongst teachers and educators in a school” (Ashraf & Rarieya, 2008, p. 270). The teacher career cycle shows that teachers start to question their role and motivation as early as year eight (Huberman, 1989). In many cases, the only people on campus that provide reflective feedback are administrators. Many mid-career teachers at this expert level have as much or more experience and education than some of the administrators (Hallinger, 2003). Being seen and treated as contributors to growth could potentially help relieve some of the mid-career frustration that so many teachers experience. The classroom is still a place that is often seen as having a closed door (Darling-Hammond, 2010). With new programs, new technology, and high stakes testing, it is understandable how even some experienced teachers can feel out of their comfort zones. With constant change, mid-career teachers often find themselves in the same boat as new teachers but are insecure about asking for help or suggestions. They may be fearful of being judged and may hesitate to be observed by their peers. This lack of openness harms everyone including teachers and their students.

According to Fisher and Frey (2014):

The practice of observing classrooms has traditionally been the purview of administrators, whether for evaluation purposes or to gauge progress across a

department or a school. But this decade has seen classroom visits turned on their head as teachers are invited to go where only administrators once walked. Learning walks have been transformative in the schools and districts we work with, especially in moving from professional development to professional practice. Adopting them as standard practice also marks a turning point in fostering teacher leadership. (p.59).

Like-minded teachers may find each other on their own. Unfortunately, many of these ad hoc teacher support groups are built upon negative experiences or classroom frustrations unless organized in a systematic and sustainable way. Finding a group of teachers to learn, grow, and reflect with is most often going to need some support and initial structure. An intervention strategy that helps to provide community, support, and reflection is teacher instructional rounds.

Instructional rounds can benefit educational professionals from first year teachers to superintendents; however, for the sake of my study, I am focusing on the experiences of mid-career teachers who have engaged in instructional rounds.

### Teacher Growth

Not only is it a good idea for teachers to be removed from the isolation of their own rooms or content areas, but growth should be promoted at different career stages. Teacher growth can be tied directly to student growth; however, adult learners are grown and motivated in different ways than their students. Fullan (2008) stated that effective teachers must be treated as active learners. To learn and grow, teachers should be

empowered and taught to make decisions based upon relevant data. Teachers learn as active researchers, or scientists, trying to solve whatever problems might exist in their classroom or school. Scientists and teachers alike accomplish this through observation and reflection (Schmoker, 2004). According to Weimer (2010), teaching is a “rollercoaster of highs and lows, slow climbs, corners careened around on two wheels, and trips down at breakneck speeds” (p. xii). This rollercoaster includes a long mid-career stretch where so many grow tired, burned out, or require the advocacy of mentors and administrators (Weimer, 2010). Steffy (2000) stated, “In order to sustain teacher development, administrators must support the growth process by addressing unique needs of teachers operating at different phases” (p. 23). Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2004) referenced John Dewey’s work from this perspective: “He emphasized that teacher learning and growth do not magically and spontaneously unfold. Rather, teachers depend on appropriate interaction between themselves and the principal and between themselves and other professionals” (p. 132). Downey et al. (2004) provided a walk-through as a prime example of collaborative, reflective dialogue. Walk-throughs are centered on the teacher, not the principal or any other supervisor, and incorporate the ideas of differentiated supervision (p. 132). Mid-career teachers are constantly wrestling with change. Specifically addressing these needs of teachers in their specific career stage promotes teacher growth and development that may not have happened on its own and requires structures to be put in place by administrators, such as walk-throughs, to help foster that growth.

## Conceptual Framework

Through this proposed mixed methods study, I explored mid-career teachers' motivation for teaching and growth in their profession. This framework was developed from the review of literature on the life-cycle of a teacher and concerns at mid-career and a proposed intervention that will be further outlined in chapter three. Through the conceptual framework, I outlined the combinations of teacher perspectives with knowledge of the mid-career stage and current research models already in place in the district where the research was based, though not necessarily on the campus where the research is based. This design shows the combination of teacher input on their motivation to teaching, the teacher life cycle and the current models of professional learning communities combined to form a fuller perspective from which to motivate mid-career teachers and grow in their profession. In a planned effort to combine perspective and concerns specific to mid-career teachers along with evidence of growth, I sought to study how instructional rounds could impact teacher's motivation and growth.

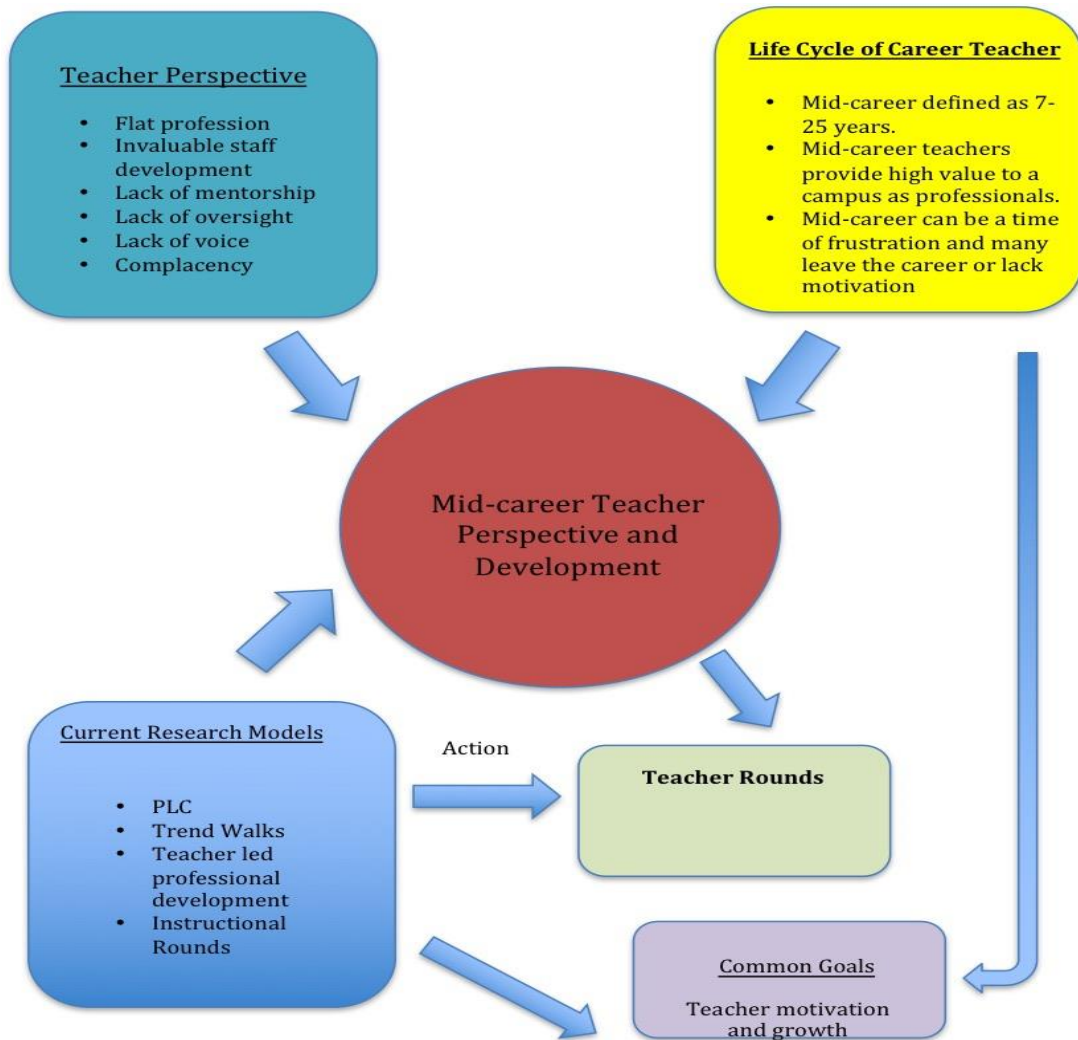


Figure 2. Conceptual design.

## CHAPTER III

### INTERVENTION AND METHODS

#### Proposed Solution and Instructional Rounds Defined

A potential solution to the mid-career stalemate is for teachers to participate in instructional teacher rounds. Instructional rounds borrow from the medical school model of using rounds to teach, train, and answer questions. For instructional rounds, a small group of educators (three to six) travel in small groups to observe in classrooms focusing on a specific problem or area of focus. Teachers take notes, record evidence, and return to discuss afterwards.

Imagine that the educators are medical students and instead of observing a class, they are in a hospital room with an experienced doctor visiting a patient. Later, huddled outside in the hallway, the group talks about what they saw. Their comments are factual and based on evidence: I noticed this; the patient did that. Questions get asked. Eventually, a diagnosis is offered, as well as potential treatments. Everyone is on the same page before they move on to the next patient. (Hough, 2009, para. 4).

Instructional rounds provide non-evaluative data for growth, analysis, and improvement in the context of a reflective learning community. They show areas for growth or provide models within a school or classroom. The members produce commitments from their observations or discussions to try in their own classroom or campus until the next session. These rounds provide ways to diagnose and improve

one's own practice. Hough (2009) suggested that the same medical training model, one that includes a shared language and a common sense of what is effective, could work for educators. The field of medicine has changed quickly with the advancement of technology and science. The same is true of education. Teachers are not taking out gallbladders, but they are training up and inspiring future doctors and productive citizens to be forever learners and collaborators. The best way for teachers to do this is to replicate what they already do in class: observe, model, and do. Instructional rounds are a disciplined way for educators to work together to improve instruction. City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) defined them as a process to help educators look closely at what is happening in classrooms in a systematic and focused way. Rounds are not evaluative or intended to provide individual teacher feedback; rather, the attention is centered around identifying patterns of best practices in action together and sharing out the effective strategies and approaches seen. Instructional rounds, initially focused on networks of superintendents and upper administrators working in cohorts to improve a school and/or district, has been found to be effective on campuses among teachers; these are often called teacher rounds or occasionally learning walks. Some texts have slight differences based on intent, format, or participants, but for the purpose of this study I used the terms instructional rounds and teacher rounds interchangeably. According to Stephens (2011), rounds and walks “are intended to enhance teachers’ capacity and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Coaching, instructional rounds, and learning walks appear to be driven by a strong focus on school improvement and school accountability” (Stephens, 2011, p.111).



City et al. (2009) suggested four key principles for identifying and improving the instruction that are summarized below:

- Content, teaching and learning should be seen as linked.
- Groups identify and focus clearly on a “problem of practice” relating it to the instructional core.
- Teachers should develop skills to examine instruction and its impact on the quality of student learning.
- Teachers and other key agents in the school need to build a shared vision of what improved teaching could look like.

Instructional rounds are not new to the education world or even the district of research; however, they are completely new to the campus of research. Mid-career teachers often get frustrated with professional development that does not reflect their needs. The goal of instructional rounds are, “to help schools and districts develop effective and powerful teaching and learning on a large scale, not just isolated pockets of good teaching in the midst of mediocrity” seems to fit in well with developing both excellent and experienced teachers on a campus (Teitel, 2009, p. 3). Experienced teachers sit through trainings for things they already know or things they feel no longer pertain to them. Lack of meaningful opportunities for growth can frustrate an already frustrated teacher. These rounds provide teachers, of any stage, the chance to see what other teachers in the building are doing. Experienced teachers who may otherwise stick to doing the same thing can have examples of new ideas, methods, and technology that is practiced just down the hallway. Not only can this provide a pedagogical push, but the process can also

reveal an expert who is close by. This study of rounds by Teitel (2009) had teachers participate in three instructional rounds over the course of a semester and open up their own classrooms to other teachers in the building to provide feedback. These opportunities for rounds provided teachers who may have been stuck or complacent a chance to meet with and collaborate with teachers with whom they may not usually learn from or share with. The selected school holds over 100 teachers, yet often teachers interact with the same few teachers. Most participating teachers fall into the mid-career range, but observations can be done across any content or teacher level. Through my internships, I found that my classroom perspective was a tiny one. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010), 49% percent of teachers entering public education leave after five years. Finding other teachers who want to continue to learn and try new things is an encouragement to teachers who are starting to feel stale and isolated. Opening the classroom doors to peers helped provide an added push for mid-career teachers, who are often already considered to be experts in their building, to work towards excellence as opposed to minimum effort. Peer expectation can often motivate as much or more than administrative evaluations. Even on a campus of over 2000, being an educator can seem an isolated profession. Professional learning communities provide collaboration for lesson planning, but teachers are rarely provided the opportunities to observe other teachers and actually witness these lessons or other strategies in practice. John Roberts, a participant of teacher instructional rounds at Middlesex Academy explained one important benefit for participating in instructional rounds, "You don't learn anything by being observed, only by observing"(City, 2011, p.

37). Doan and Peters (2009) offered practical suggestions for teachers in the crucial mid-career stage. They say that teachers often find that they are no longer challenged or stimulated by the daily routine of teaching (p. 18). Many of the practical suggestions offered by Doan and Peters (2009) to help motivate mid-career teachers include learning new skills, trying new things in the classroom, and sharing with peers. Another instructional rounds participant in a California network captured her learning experience in the following way: “We're finally having conversations about instructional practice. I've learned more about myself as a teacher and about quality instruction in one day of instructional rounds than in five years of professional development” (City, 2011, p. 40). Providing teachers with opportunities to visit one another's classrooms through the participation in instructional rounds helps create a structure that builds collaboration through professional dialogue. When done in a non-judgmental atmosphere and manner, teachers can benefit greatly from observing the classrooms of their peers (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Providing observation, learning and community opportunities for teachers through rounds, has the potential to not only improve campus instruction but to stave off some mid-career frustrations.

### Summary of Rounds Activities

The rounds on my campus reflect the practices outlined by City et al. (2009) and Troen and Boles (2014). Before the first set of rounds it was important to establish a network. In this case we worked from a group of seventeen voluntary mid-career

teachers on my campus. This constitutes fifteen percent of the total staff. It is also important to establish norms and train teachers on the process of instructional rounds. Teachers are used to programs and evaluative events so contrasting rounds to what they are used to, as shown in Table 1, is an important piece to educating teachers on the process.

Table 1

*Establishing the Practice of Rounds Adapted from City et.al (2009)*

Rounds are:	Rounds are not:
A practice designed to support improvement effort	A program or product to purchase
A practice that supports current improvement strategies	A new event
Focused on practice of people, to learn about effective teaching and learning	An evaluation tool or assessment of individuals or punitive
Focused on patterns of practice	Training for supervision
An inclusive practice	An implementation check or compliance with directives
A community of practice – learning from one another	Passive

The norms and shared expectations established for my rounds were combined from suggestions from Troen and Boles (2014) and meeting norms that were already in place on my campus. The general framework for a round was as follows:

**Part One: Meet together as group (10-15 min)**

Reminders of norms/expectation

Review the focus (“problem of practice”) and provide examples of potential evidence to look for

Assign observation groups and classrooms

**Part Two: Classroom Observations (25 minutes).**

Observe and record information in classrooms

**Part Three: Return and debrief (20-25 minutes)**

Chart shared observations to look for themes and/or patterns

Commit to a practice to try in own instruction

Brainstorm new problem of practice for next session

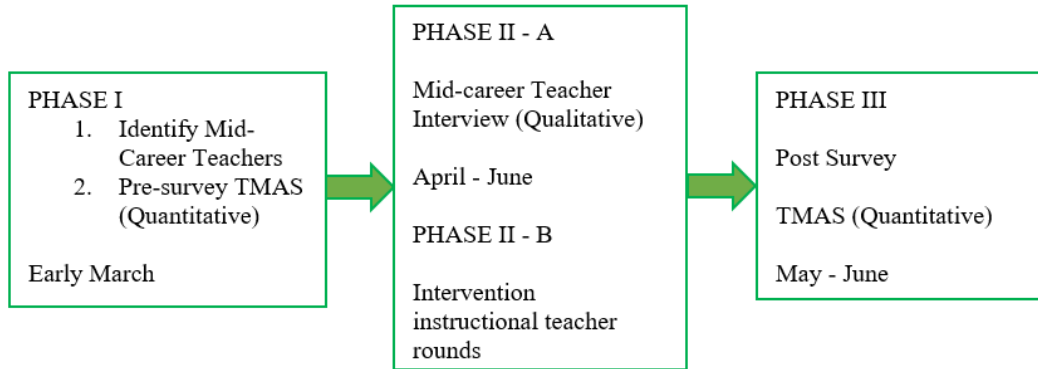


Figure 3. Research Plan Design.

### Data Collection Methods

Mixed methods research allows for a researcher to study both exploratory and confirmatory questions at the same time (Lund, 2012). A mixed methods research design allows for greater participant enrichment. Figure 3 shows both quantitative and qualitative pieces running concurrently making this proposed research one of convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the intent of convergent design is to “bring together differing strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses of quantitative methods with those of qualitative methods” (p.77).

I administered the electronic version of the Teacher Motivations Assessment Scale (TMAS), designed and validated by Obunadike (2013), to all mid-career

teachers on my campus. The survey was sent to all sixty-seven mid-career teachers on campus. The survey was slightly altered by three questions to more closely match teachers on my campus. These questions still align with the categories found in the validated survey. This tool, developed and previously tested with a high internal consistency score (Obunadike, 2013) is divided into categories for attitude, commitment, interest, and reward. The TMAS was validated across three universities in Nigeria. The Cronbach's alpha, a test of internal consistency, was used in the validity determination for the TMAS. "The summary of the test revealed alpha of .74. This indicates that the instrument has a high item consistency and therefore reliable" (Obunadike, 2013, p. 99). In this study on teacher growth and motivation, the TMAS was administered both before and after the intervention strategies. Through the qualitative portion of the study, I individually interviewed eight mid-career teachers throughout the spring and early summer (see Appendix A). The interviews were conducted with four teachers who voluntarily participated in the instructional rounds process, and four additional mid-career teachers who did not participate in the instructional rounds. Through conversations about my research, multiple teachers volunteered to be interviewed. These participants were purposefully selected based on their career range. Within this range, I sought a maximum variation of interviewees across both genders and multiple content areas. This intention was to gain a greater insight by providing data from multiple angles. I sought input on the final eight teachers from an administrator to help remove some bias in this selection. She chose the final eight from a list of twelve possible teachers. In addition to the TMAS survey given on my campus, all mid-career teachers

were administered a self-checklist created with a district administrator of potential areas where teachers could show growth and motivation in the last two years (See Appendix B).

### Participants

The TMAS was sent to all sixty-seven teachers on my campus who fell within the mid-career range. Forty-eight of these teachers returned both a pre and post survey as matched by their identifying numbers. Seventeen mid-career teachers participated in the intervention of instructional rounds. I refer to these seventeen as participants throughout my data. Thirty-one additional teachers returned both surveys and I refer to this group as the nonparticipants. I interviewed four teachers from each of the participant and non-participant groups.

### Data Evaluation

The survey was evaluated using standard statistical analysis and an independent *t*-test comparing participants versus nonparticipants. The total pre and post-survey scores were compared with a paired dependent *t*-test (Boone & Boone, 2012). I used an independent *t*-test to compare participants to the nonparticipants both before and then another independent *t*-test after the survey. I used dependent *t*-tests to compare each group (total, participants and nonparticipants) to their same corresponding group after the intervention. I also used a dependent *t*-test to compare the totals before and after the in each sub-dimension within the TMAS. Freebody (2003) stated that “since the teacher



is the researcher, it is a good idea to build in a comparison into data collection to help improve validity” (p. 269). The data from the pre-survey stand as a control for comparison to the surveys given after the intervention. I sought data to determine if views on motivation and growth would actually change after the intervention. If non-participants also changed their views, then those differences could be attributed to other factors. Interviews were analyzed for common and recurring themes. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), generating codes from qualitative data, for example, interviews, help to systematically organize and analyze information for a mixed methods study. The checklist of activities provided additional data to help triangulate the findings (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007) in this mixed methods study.

### Reliability and Validity Concerns

As a participant researcher (Anderson et al., 2007) in my own school, concerns about procedures and processes taken to ensure the validity of my research is important to the process and credibility of this research. First, there was concern for democratic validity (Anderson et al., 2007). As a mixed methods study, the research plan consisted of a survey to all teachers that fell into the mid-career range, which already increased the potential for various points of view. For the interview portion, a total of eight teachers were interviewed, four that participated in teacher rounds and four that did not. Both participants and non-participants were interviewed to determine the range of perspectives including and excluding the intervention. Many teachers volunteered to interview, but outside advice from an administrator was used to choose participants

rather than only choosing them by myself. This allowed a form of participation that was based on more than my own ease, opinion, or comfort level and, hopefully, provided a higher level of democratic validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In order to address the outcome validity (Anderson et al., 2007) of my research I started by seeking solid statistical relationships within the quantitative portion of the research plan. I made sure that there was a significance of .05 or higher in the survey analysis before stating that there was a relationship. I also sought to find overlaps in data through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of survey data, interviews, and a checklist of artifacts to show personal growth. The small sample size of my school and participant group of initially 15% is limiting. A greater sample could be done for further testing after this intervention or compared to another area school that has 100% participation.

Finally, catalytic validity (Anderson et al., 2007) is provided through the depth of my process. Using a mixed method design ensured a more in-depth process that allowed for a greater level of response and deeper understanding than the statistical piece alone. I used my interviews to show the complex nature of mid-career teachers' views on growth and motivation. I reflected on my own views before beginning and anticipated some change and shift in this throughout the research. I catalogued and reflected on my own thoughts here to show change, shift, and potential growth in this area throughout the research process. The changes were minor. I added two more interviews to gather additional data; initially, I proposed six. I think these additional interviews provided more data allowing me to find patterns in my categories.

Table 2

*Timeline for Research: A Mixed Methods Approach to Mid-career Teachers*

<b>Mo</b>	<b>Contact/Activity</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Analyze/Collect</b>	<b>Product</b>
Fall Internship and Jan/Feb	Identify Mid-career teachers on campus	Prep	Teacher years experience	Teacher email distribution list
	Create online TMAS survey link.	Preparation		Survey format
	Obtain participating teacher consent forms	Preparation	Participating teacher consent forms	
	Pre-survey TMAS link sent out to all mid-career teachers on campus	Phase I	Follow up survey two-three times to have as much data to pair as possible	Survey data
Oct-May	School Teacher Rounds intervention	Phase IIa		Four sets of instructional rounds organized with principal
April to July	Mid-career teacher interviews (Appendix A)	Phase IIb	Record teacher interviews	Record and use voice to text app.
late May	Post-survey	Phase III	Survey sent to all mid-career teachers.	Survey data
June	Pair pre- to post- data by person	Phase III	Follow up for any additional surveys	Paired survey data
Mid to late June	Transcribe any gaps from the voice to text interview	Data analysis	Transcribe interviews and code data	
Late June	Code interviews for common themes	Data Analysis	Code content	Identify interview themes
July	Run statistical analysis on survey (TMAS) data and prepare data charts	Data Analysis	Survey data	Standard analysis and t-test data and prepare data charts
August-Sept	Analyze phase I and III together for connected themes	Data analysis	Analyze and chart all theme data	Triangulate data

## Closing Thoughts

Instructional rounds seem like such a simple solution to a complex problem. However, a panacea for all mid-career issues is not the expectation. Teachers observing other classrooms will not solve all the frustrations of a mid-career educator. The hope, however, is that grouping teachers and providing them with new ideas in a real classroom setting would help to build cohesion and encourage growth. Instructional rounds were not created for mid-career teachers; they were initially for administrators to effect change and improvements on their campus. The benefits were so powerful in these communities that the rounds were adapted for teachers (Del Prete, 2013). The hope of teacher participation in instructional rounds was to motivate teachers who may find themselves in a professional lull to move towards a more positive direction through a process that is free, doable, and could impact a campus.

CHAPTER IV:  
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Key Findings

In this section I present the key findings of my data analyses. I used the following three research instruments to collect data in this study:

1. **A Teacher Motivation Assessment Scale**-- measuring teacher growth and motivation, referred to as the TMAS, sent to all mid-career teachers (N=67) in the school of study.
2. **A teacher interview protocol**—exploring eight teacher's views and opinions on their growth and motivation and experiences with career goals.
3. **A mid-career teacher growth and motivation self-checklist**--exploring evidence for motivation and growth.

I present the results of my analyses in the order of the research questions with a final section summarizing the findings.

**Teachers' Motivation and Growth Prior to the Treatment According to TMAS**

The mid-career teachers in my school completed the Teacher Motivation Assessment Scale (TMAS) before the instructional rounds intervention to determine their motivation and growth. The Likert-scale in TMAS was a five point scale, one representing a "strongly disagree" position and five representing a "strongly agree" position. In my analyses, I used the data from the mid-career teachers who completed both pre and post TMAS. The data from the mid-career teachers, who did not complete

the post TMAS, were excluded from the analyses. In Figure 4, the means of the instructional rounds participants' (N=17) and non-participants' (N=31) responses to the 22 Likert-scale questions in the pre-TMAS are shown (in addition to an identifying number and question on number of years teaching experience). The average number of years of experience for teachers (N=48) responding was 13.7 years. Seventeen teachers voluntarily participated in instructional rounds. All study participants (N= 48) completed both pre and post TMAS. Thirty-one additional teachers filled out both surveys, who did not participate in the rounds, at the same time the with the teachers, who voluntarily participated in the instructional rounds.

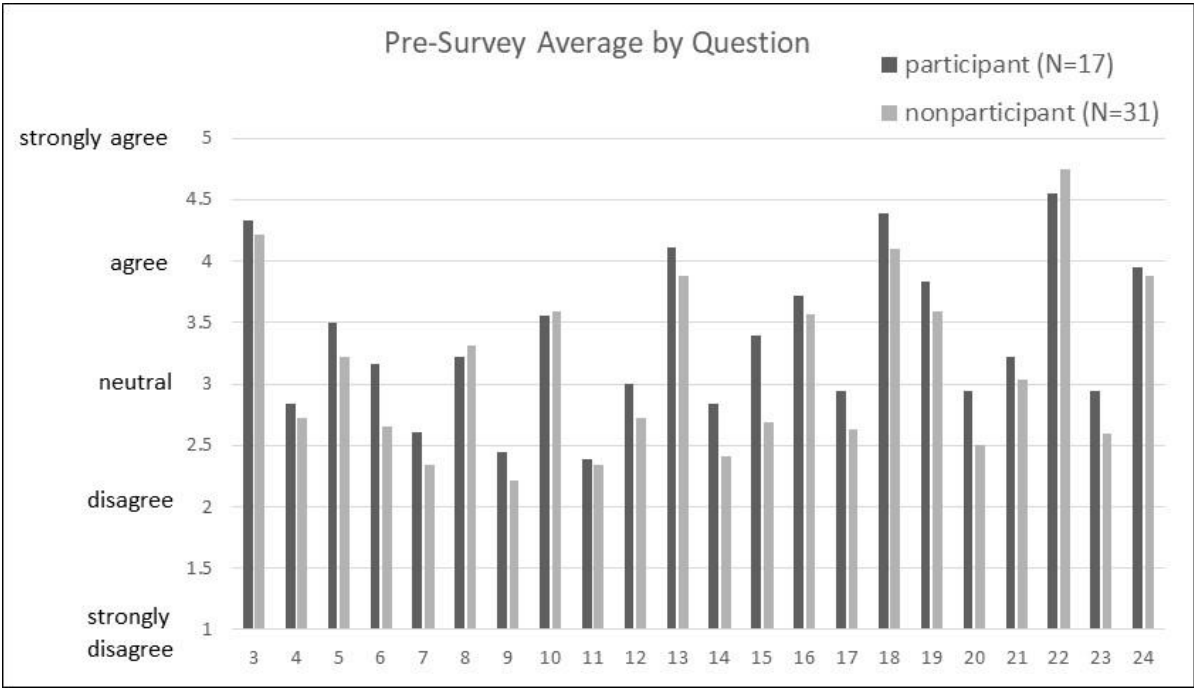


Figure 4. The mean scores of the instructional round participants' and nonparticipants' responses to the 5 point Likert-scale items in pre-TMAS.

The average score of all respondent's (N= 48) initial survey score was a 70.72 (64.29%) out of a potential 110 points (100%). Teachers who volunteered participating in the instructional rounds intervention (N=17) had a slightly higher initial survey score average of 67.17% and the teachers who chose not to participate in the instructional rounds had an average total score of 62.67%. The difference between the instructional round participants' TMAS scores (M=3.41, SD=.75.) and nonparticipants' TMAS scores (M= 3.21, SD= .82) was not statistically significantly different ( $t(21) = .82, p = .21, ES=.25$ )

The TMAS has the following sub-dimensions: attitude, commitment, reward, and interest. The highest mean score of the participants' responses to the TMAS items was in the attitude sub-dimension (6 items with a mean score of 3.63 out of 5), followed by the reward (5, items with a mean score of 3.54 out of 5). Teachers scored lower means for the commitment sub-dimension items (5 items with a mean score of 2.94) and the lowest mean score was for the interest sub-dimension items (6 items with a mean score of 2.76).

### **Teachers' Motivation and Growth After the Treatment According to TMAS**

The same Teacher Motivation Assessment Scale (TMAS) was given to all mid-career teachers after the instructional rounds. Paired data for the post instructional rounds of the TMAS had only a slight increase in total average, as shown in Table 3. The average for the post TMAS was a score of 66.67% (N=48), compared to the initial TMAS score of 64.29 % for all study participants (N=48). Participants in the instructional rounds had a score of 67.86% (N=17) and the nonparticipants had an

average percent of 65.84% (N=31). The instructional round participant group started out with a higher score and only increased the percent by .68, while the nonparticipants started out with a lower motivation rate and increased their total percent score by 2.38 points.

Table 3

*Pre, post, and gain TMAS scores and percentages*

Survey	Group	N	Percentage Score
Pre-Survey	Total	48	64.29
	Participant	17	67.16
	Nonparticipant	31	62.68
Post-survey	Total	48	66.67
	Participant	17	67.86
	Nonparticipant	31	65.84
Increase in percentage	Total		2.38
	Participant		.69
	Nonparticipant		3.16



In comparison to the initial-survey, the post TMAS results from Table 3 showed that the nonparticipants seemed to increase their percentage scores and even outscore participants on several questions. Figure 5 shows the participants and non-participants' post TMAS mean scores by question number. Question 18 showed a slight increase in scores for nonparticipants, but a decrease for instructional round participants. Question 18 asked if teachers should be compensated for workshops or professional development that they attend on their own time. Teachers who claimed to be participating in more professional development decreased their expectation for reward. Overall, these teachers showed a lower TMAS percentage score, but on this response (question 18) they seemed to be expecting less reward.

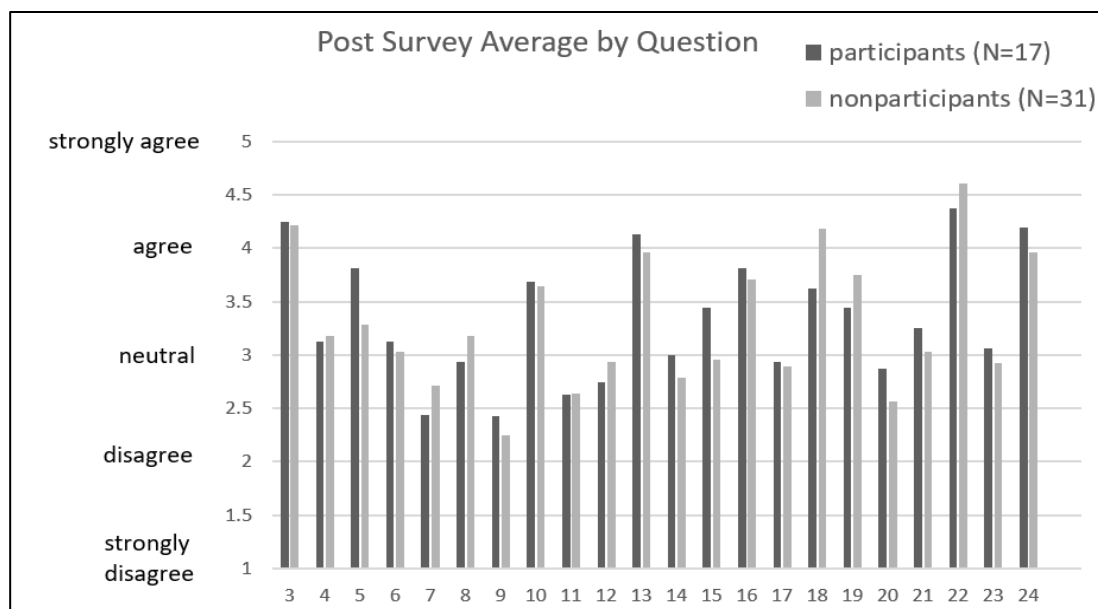


Figure 5. The mean scores of the instructional round participants' and nonparticipants' responses to the 5 point Likert-scale items in post-TMAS.

The post TMAS showed similar results to the initial TMAS in Figure 4 in terms of overall percentages. Questions 18 and 19 had increased scores for nonparticipants over the instructional round participants. Question 19 asked if teachers knew where they could find experts in the building. The percentage scores for question 19 of the instructional round participants did not seem to change, but the nonparticipants' scores increased. This showed an unexpected impact of the instructional rounds on even the teachers who were not participating. These participating teachers had signs on their doors inviting others in and made observations throughout the building.

An initial and post instructional rounds survey was administered to determine the changes in teachers' views on their professional growth and motivation over the course of the semester. Table 4 shows the means, variances, and standard deviations of all study participants', instructional round participants' and nonparticipants' responses to the pre and post TMAS. The mean decreased slightly for the teachers who participated in the instructional rounds and increased for the teachers who did not participate in instructional rounds.

Table 4

The means, variances, and standard deviations of the responses to the pre and post TMAS

	Combined totals (N=47)		Participant totals (17)		Nonparticipant totals (31)	
	Pre TMAS	Post TMAS	Pre TMAS	Post TMAS	Pre TMAS	Post TMAS
Mean	71.673	71.488	73.750	72.813	69.556	70.704
Variance	140.420	86.303	187.133	144.296	109.949	54.447
Standard Deviation	11.850	9.290	13.680	12.012	10.486	7.739

The difference between all study participants' pre-TMAS responses (M=71.673) and all study participants' post-TMAS responses (M=71.488) was not statistically significant in  $p \leq .05$  value ( $t(93)=.0832, p=.467, ES= .017$ ). The  $p$  value of the difference between the instructional round participants' pre-TMAS scores and post-TMAS scores was computed .4109, that is not a statistically significant difference (Mpre=73.750, Mpost=72.813,  $t(30)=206, p=.41, ES =.07$ ) There was no statistically significant difference between the nonparticipants' pre-TMAS and post-TMAS score means (Mpre= 69.556, Mpost=70.704,  $t(52)=-.465, p =.32, EF=.05$ ). No statistically significant difference was found in the data for the groups before or after the treatment. The effect size values are also very low (<0.1) that show very little to no differences between the means. The pre-TMAS and post-TMAS totals by question were compared using an un-paired  $t$ -test. The results are shown in Table 5. The total means for group 1

(pre-TMAS given in early February, 2018) were analyzed as compared to group 2 (post-TMAS given in mid-May, 2018).

Table 5

*The t-test results for TMAS*

	Combined totals	Participants totals	Nonparticipants totals
T	.0832	.206	-.465
df	93	30	52
Critical value	1.987	2.042	2.009
p value	.467	.4109	.324
significance	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant

All comprehensive *t*-tests showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups, therefore, I examined the data based on the broader categories of each question. The TMAS survey has been validated to measure categories: attitude, commitment, reward, and interest (Obunadike, 2013). Figure 6 shows the TMAS totals for each category. Looking at data by category showed additional trends. Attitude sub-dimension items showed the highest value at all levels, followed by the commitment sub-dimension items and the reward sub-dimension items. The interest and commitment sub-dimension items were the lowest two categories depending on the group type and the administration time of TMAS.

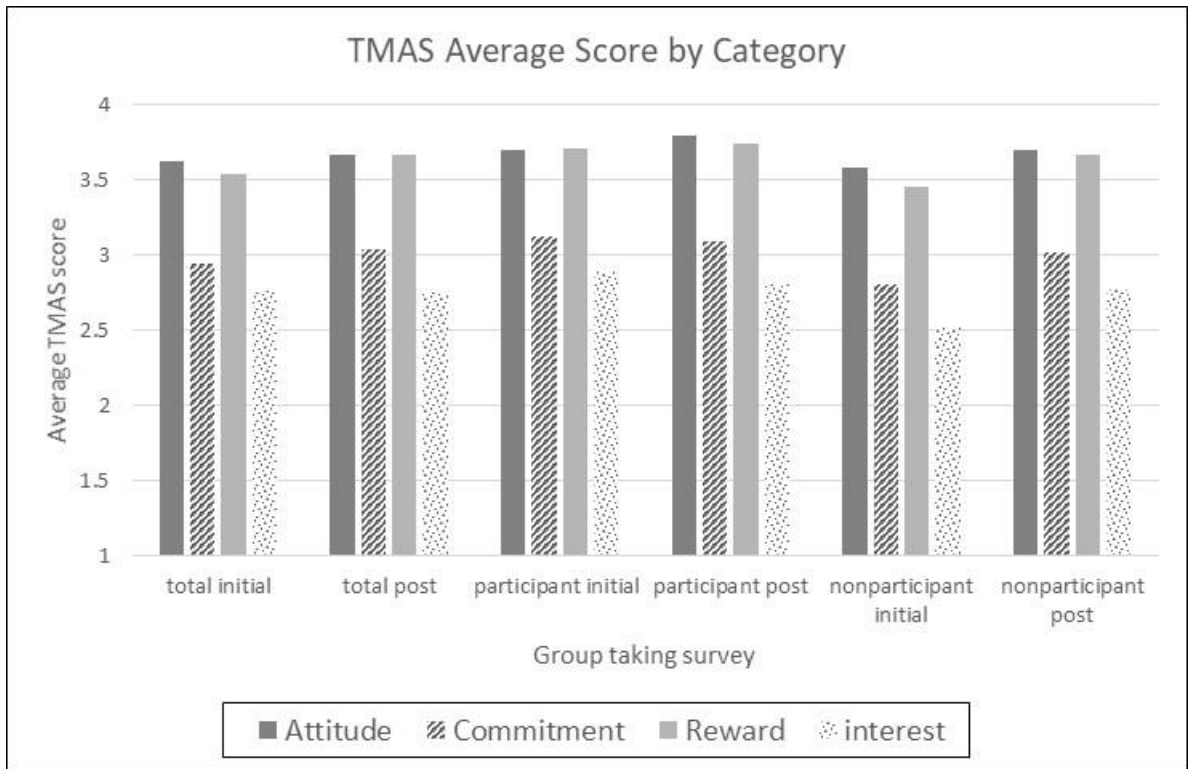


Figure 6. Total sums for each category in the TMAS survey for all groups.

The main things that stands out is the drop in commitment and interest sub-dimension items that only occurred in the instructional round participants. The reward sub-dimension items' mean score slightly decreased overall, but increased among the nonparticipants. The greatest change in scores for any group was in the interest sub-dimension item means. A potential explanation of this could be due to teachers not participating in the instructional rounds observing those who were. Interest can be peeked by observing others go through the process.

A two-tailed *t*-test analysis of the individual sub-dimensions, shown in Table 7, demonstrates that the difference in the attitude sub-dimension was not enough to be

statistically significantly different, however the differences in the reward, interest and commitment sub-dimension item means were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . Attitude had no statistically significant relationship ( $M_{pre} = 3.63$ ,  $M_{post} = 2.99$ ,  $N_{g1} = 6$ ,  $N_{g2} = 6$ ,  $t(6) = .436$ ,  $p = .44$ ,  $EF = .05$ ). Reward, Commitment and Interest showed to have small but still statistically significant impacts ( $M_{pre} = 3.66$ ,  $M_{post} = 3.71$ ,  $N_{g1} = 5$ ,  $N_{g2} = 5$ ,  $t(6) = -2.127$ ,  $p = .0075$ ,  $EF = .14$ ), ( $M_{pre} = 3.10$ ,  $M_{post} = 3.12$ ,  $N_{g1} = 5$ ,  $N_{g2} = 5$ ,  $t(5) = -3.915$ ,  $p = .0078$ ,  $EF = .22$ ) and ( $M_{pre} = 2.75$ ,  $M_{post} = 2.89$ ,  $N_{g1} = 6$ ,  $N_{g2} = 6$ ,  $t(10) = -2.93$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $EF = .27$ ) respectively.

Table 6

*t-test results by Category in the TMAS*

	Attitude	Commitment	Reward	Interest
t	-.8336	-3.915	-1.10	-2.934
df	6	5	6	5
Critical value	2.447	2.571	2.447	2.28
P value	.4364	.00785	.0075	.0149
Significance	Not significant	Significant	Significant	Significant

There were changes in the pre and post-TMAS mean scores in each sub-dimension, both overall and in the comparison groups. Despite my hypothesis, nonparticipants actually increased their commitment and reward more than the instructional round participants as they reported in the pre and post-TMAS. Both

commitment and the interest sub-dimension item means decreased for the instructional round participants.

### **Teacher Motivation and Growth According to Semi-structured Interviews**

Throughout the semester eight teachers were interviewed about their own views on the growth and motivation as a mid-career teacher (Appendix A). My analyses of the interview transcriptions generated four main categories: challenges, benefits, career goals, and motivation to grow. At first, some of the interviews started off negative with complaints, however, the frequency of benefits for mid-career teachers showed up more often than the struggles or frustrations in the same career stage with a ratio of 17:22.

Table 7 illustrates the number of times each code appeared in the data.

Table 7

*Codes and Categories from Teacher Interviews*

Categories	Codes	Frequency
<b>Challenges</b>	extra work/overwhelmed	6
	bored/repetitive	4
	stagnant pay	1
	staying current	1
	Frustrated	2
	Undervalued	3
<b>Benefits</b>	Confidence	7
	Less stress	2
	Experience/knowledge	8
	Easy	2

Table 7 (continued)

*Codes and Categories from Teacher Interviews*

Categories	Codes	Frequency
<b>Career goals</b>	Feel Valued	1
	Fast decisions	2
		<b>7</b>
	Career change	2
	New certification	2
	New subject	1
	Unsure	2
<b>Motivation to grow</b>		<b>32</b>
	Collaboration	5
	New ideas/fresh	6
	Change	2
	Subject matter/school	2
	Time off/break	2
	Professional development	5
	Learning	1
	Students	3
	Technology	6

Figure 7 shows the overall percentages of the categories coded. Motivation to grow was coded more times than any other category. Career goals had the least responses to code.



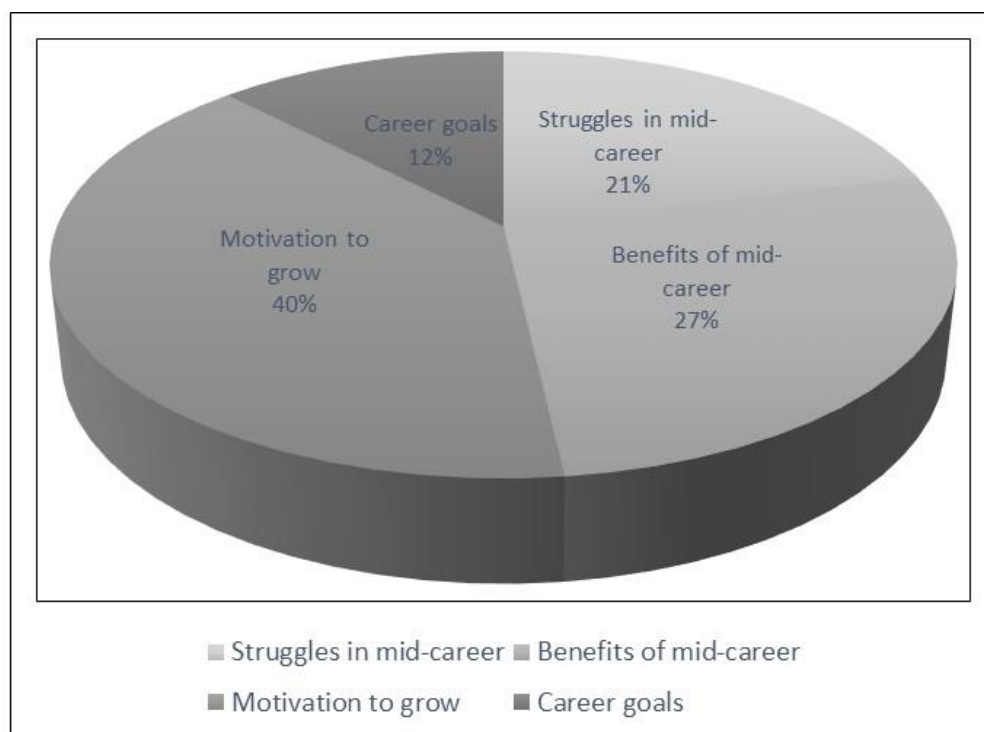


Figure 7. Percentages of each category coded from interviews.

The codes within the struggles in the mid-career category provided insight on teachers’ frustrations that were especially applicable to teachers found in this career stage. Figure 8 shows the percentages of codes in the category of struggle during mid-career. The most common complaint teachers had appeared as the extra work that this stage of a career can bring. At a time where the work is “easier” for an experienced teacher, teachers still reported more work added to their plates with little to none taken away.

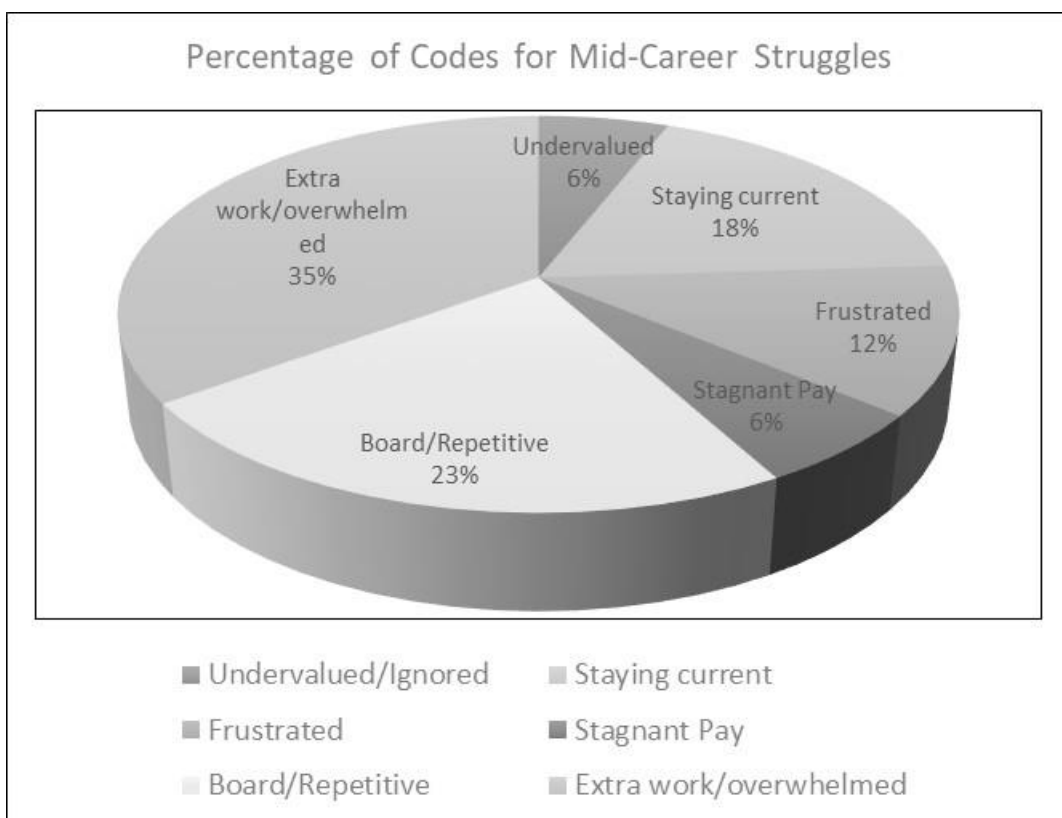


Figure 8. Percentage of each code within the category of struggles in mid-career.

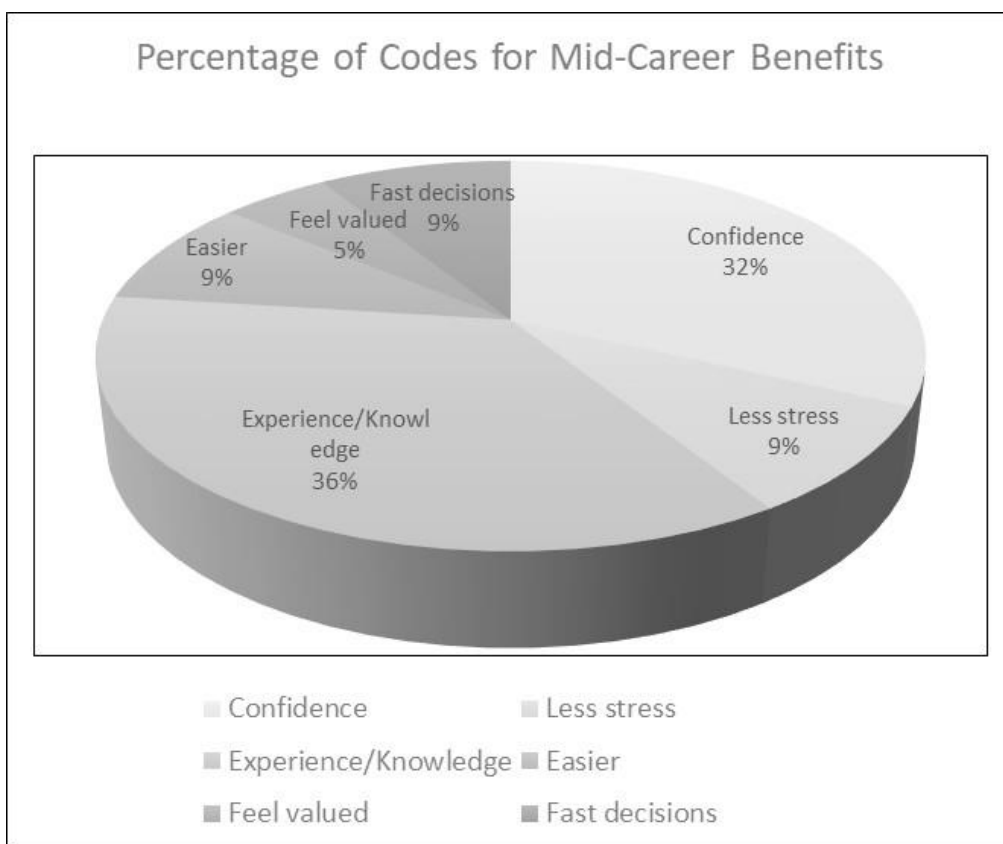
Figure 8 shows several drawbacks and struggles in the mid-career stage. Teachers express a feeling of being overworked, overwhelmed, and even feeling ignored. During interviews, one teacher responded when asked about the struggles in this career stage, *“I would say it is staying motivated and feeling like it matters. That the extra effort I put in matters.”* Teachers often complain that they want to be left alone to teach, but these data show that they do not want to be completely ignored. It is a balance that administrators often struggle finding. A principal on my campus provided me with her view explaining *“that she rarely worries what goes on in her experienced teacher*

classrooms, sometimes I even forget to check in every once in a while to encourage or support. There are just so many other needs that they sometimes they get forgotten”.

Teachers still want to feel valued and noticed for their work. Another teacher Melanie (all names have been changed) expressed similar sentiments:

*You are an expert at what you do, but your salary never goes up and so sometimes you don't feel like it matters. My expertise doesn't feel valued. You keep getting more work, but you don't get paid any differently.*

It does not all seem to be a struggle. Teachers were able to provide more examples of advantages they found at this stage than their reported struggles. Figure 9 reports the percentage of each code in the advantage category.



*Figure 9.* Percentage of each codes within mid-career benefits.

When I was a pre-service teacher I was warned to stay out of the teachers’ lounge. My professor shared that it can be a “black hole of negativity” and that we needed to be careful not to be sucked in. Despite the harsh warning, I ate most days in the lounge or escaped there for the occasional adult conversation or Diet Coke. The warnings were a little more dramatic than the reality, but my experience had been one where teacher complaints far outweighed the positive comments. At this point in the interview, however, every single teacher generally seemed pleased to talk about the advantages to this stage in their career. One career and technology teacher shared the

relief she finds in getting to this point, “You know who you are. You know what kind of teacher you want to be. You realize what you can and not control. What kind of things are actually worth stressing over.” This teacher also shared a quick story from her first year of teaching about how nervous she felt before Open House. Now she has a better grip on the things that she feels like matter as opposed to stressing over details. When I asked teachers to share some advantages to being in the mid-career stage, I could visually see some of them were relaxed and expressed more confidence. Some of their physical stances even changed. The teacher below gave this answer as she squared up her shoulders and sat up more straightly in her chair:

*You realize what is actually a big deal and more importantly what is not. You have more tools at your disposal and different ways that you have taught things. You can think on your feet if a lesson is not working.*

Another veteran English teacher, struggled to find her voice early in her career. She rarely questioned her principal, even to ask for clarification or for instructional resources. Now, in her nineteenth year she told a different story:

*I feel am not as sensitive and more at ease to question my principal. I have been at my school longer than my principals and that I have a better pulse on students and staff than most people in my building do. It me makes me feel bolder, before I was so afraid to speak up or ask for things I wanted.*

Some of the advantages and disadvantages for mid-career teachers seemed the same, for example some teachers reported that an advantage was how easy their job now

was, compared to others stating easy as a disadvantage. I separated them based on how the teacher answered. Teachers who said it was easy as a disadvantage stated it with the explanation of being bored, while the teachers saying it was an advantage meant that they had the basics of classroom management and their content down.

Most teachers answered with comments relating to experience. For example, a history teacher shared: “I know the curriculum backwards and forwards. I don’t have to study the book the night before anymore. That information just flows out of me – I know it. I can focus on all the other things.” This experience piece is what adds to the improved level of effectiveness of a teacher.

Teachers seemed to struggle answering the question, “Where do you see yourself professionally in the next five years?” Multiple times I was met with a long pause before teachers finally formulated an answer. An English teacher in her tenth year expressed:

*That is a really hard question because I know that I’m actually twice as far as a lot of people get in my career. You only hear statistics about people getting out within the first few years. I just reached the point where my son is about to start elementary school and I’m trying to decide if I want to be a full-time teacher or find something else.*

Two teachers were seeking additional certifications in administration and counseling. They were both a little unsure of this commitment because of the competition for jobs. For example, a business teachers shared, “I really hope I have a

counseling job by then, but those jobs are hard to come by.” Two other teachers hoped to be near retirement age, although they both suspected they would not actually be ready to retire that quickly. One teacher did not hesitate, like some of the other teachers, she immediately grinned and said she would be able to retire in five years. Then she had an uncomfortable pause, and despite the weariness of a long school day admitted that she would probably not retire any time soon.

Figure 10 shows an almost even distribution between teachers working on a career change, new certification, teaching in a new subject area (example moving from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to Advanced Placement Biology), retirement and either stuck or unsure.

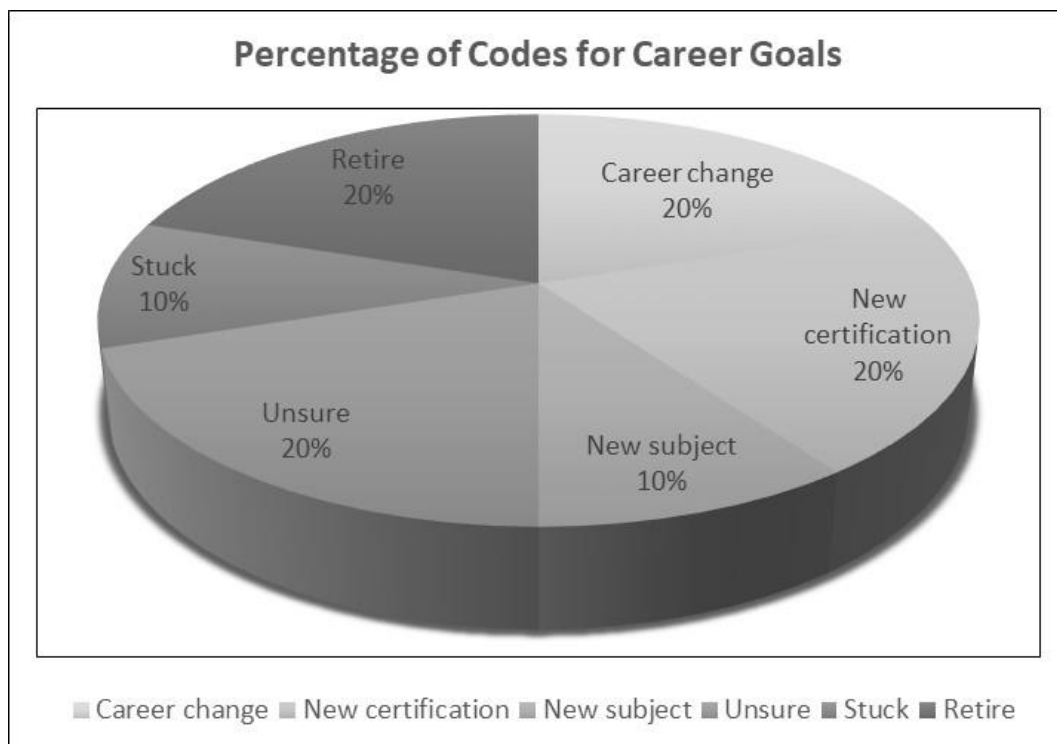


Figure 10: Percentage of each code within the category of career goals.

Every teacher I interviewed expressed a love for students and education, but some were not always certain how to set professional goals as a career educator. For example, these teachers responded:

*This is a hard question. I have had my Masters for twelve years, but I am not totally sure what to do with it. I can't imagine myself doing anything but teaching. I do not think I would make a good principal or counselor. I have thought about applying for one of those EdTech training positions, but it seems too out of touch with students.*

*Doing the same thing. I don't see any changes. I am pretty happy with what I am doing. For a while I thought about becoming a diagnostician, but I am not sure it would be worth the money it takes to go back to go back to school at this point. It is hard enough to grade papers at night, I can't imagine trying to write my own on top of that.*

One group of teachers that seemed to answer this question easily were two coaches. They both teach advanced classes, but also coach athletic teams. Their goals related answers focused on their coaching duties as opposed to goals they would create for instruction.

Several questions drew out responses on how teachers speak about motivation and growth. I asked what professional development created the most growth, what events have been the most rejuvenating, mentorship, how they benefit from their peers and what motivates them to try a new activity or technique in the classroom. Figure 11



shows the frequencies for codes in the category of motivation and growth. The answer with the highest frequency was motivation for the need for change. Teachers saw change, be it voluntary or forced, as an avenue for growth. Teachers found this change through moves in schools, subjects, grade levels and technology. Another code with a high frequency was teachers seeking new ideas and staying fresh. Despite their own role as educators, teachers mentioned simply learning to gain new knowledge the least amount of times, only 3%.

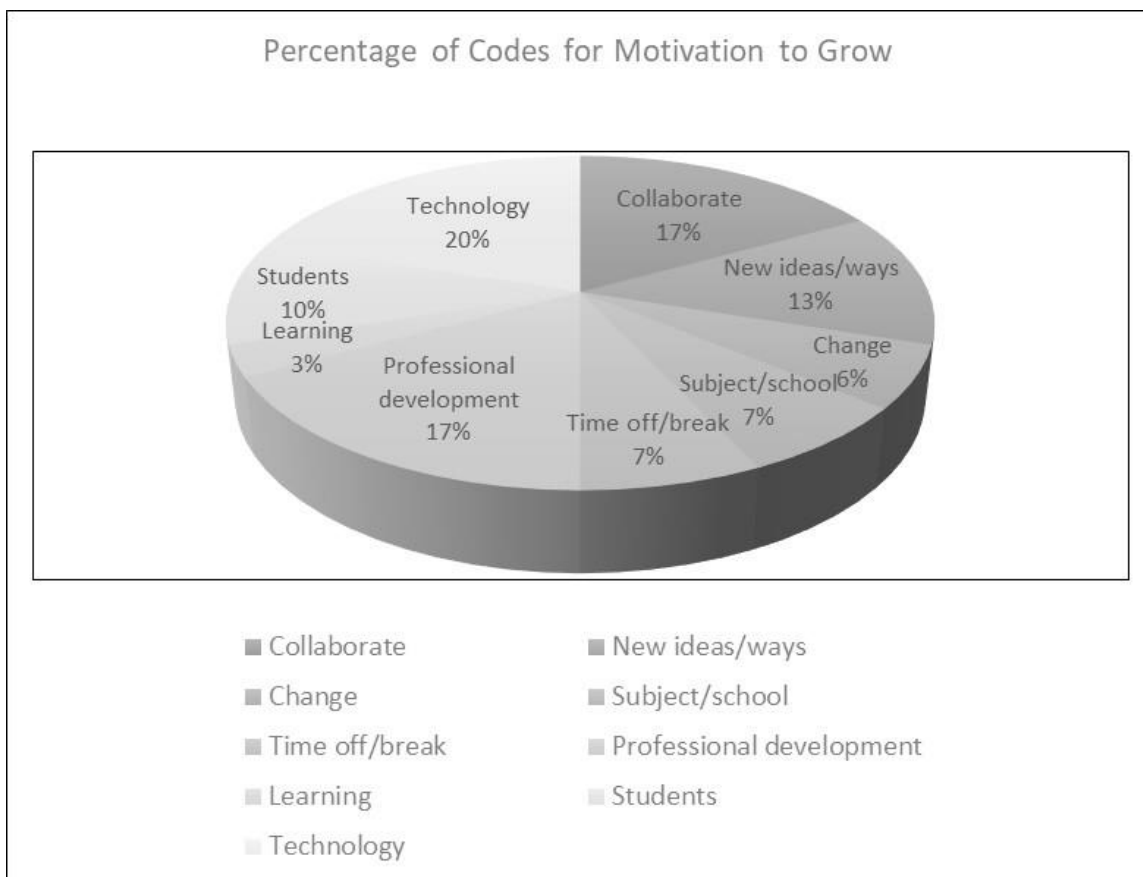


Figure 11: Percentage of each code within the category of motivation to grow.

When asked about what motivates these teachers to learn more or try new things these teachers, math teacher Sarah responded:

*First, it is the kids. You have to try new things and be excited or they (students) won't be excited. I can get bored doing the same thing over and over so sometimes I have to try something new just for my own excitement level. I don't want to bore students and I don't want to be bored myself.*

Multiple teachers referenced technology as a motivator to learn new things or change. Our campus distributes iPads to each student and the staff is asked to teach using tools, platforms and technologies different than any mid-career educator learned on. In many ways technology is an equalizer for mid-career teachers. Teachers who are not willing to adapt, ask questions, or attend trainings are marked down in evaluations and run the risk of not preparing students for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. One teacher expressed this below: An example of this shared by a fourteen-year science teacher, *“The constant change in technology kind of forces me to do that. I have to learn with my students. It can be a struggle but I think it keeps me learning.”* Both teachers participating and not participating in the rounds showed relatively positive responses to the ideas of growth and learning from their peers. The last interview question asked teachers what they learned, or could learn, from observing their peers teach. All nonparticipants and participants in the instructional rounds process answered with similar responses on the benefits:

*I think I could learn how they switch up their lesson plans, how they handle certain situations, because my personality is different than many of my peers. It is also different from someone who has just been teaching for 2-3 years because maybe they have a fresh perspective. I am very open to trying new things and figuring out what is best.*

Every teacher mentioned a benefit to learning new things or new ideas, but one even pointed out the benefit of having others potentially learn from them.

*It (observing others) has made me want to do a better job. I am kind of competitive and to see great teaching just down the wall makes me want to be better myself. No more phoning it in. Teachers have come in my room to observe me too. This makes me nervous, but it also makes me better.*

As a researcher encouraging teachers to participate in this practice, I could relate to the comment above. During this practice, I found myself more concerned with how a peer might view my lesson than even administrators. That small amount of pressure made me want to be on my “A game.” It was more work, but I certainly felt pride in creating and executing better lessons. These interviews showed a hopeful and positive side of educators who were still willing to learn, some of them even with twenty of experience. They were honest about their struggles but still showed a genuine heart for their students and seeking opportunities to reach them.

## Teacher Motivation and Growth According to a Self-Checklist of Evidence

Teachers were asked to complete a checklist (Appendix B) of indicators for mid-career teacher motivation and growth. Table 8 shows the percentage of teachers (N=48) who recorded each piece of evidence.

Table 8

### *Self-Checklist of Indicators for Motivation and Growth*

Indicator	Percentage of teachers participating in the last two years
Attended a professional development in addition to the required SDCE hours	93
Tried new technology or teaching methods	82
Asked a colleague for feedback or help in a new area	80
Attended an educational conference	64
Are a member of an educator organization for current content area	57
Read a professional journal	55
Sponsor a school club or activity	54
Members of a Facebook group for current subject area	53
Follow and read educational online sources such as Edutopia	50
Shared an educational article or link with a peer	48
Invited an administrator or colleague to watch a lesson	48
Read a book related to teaching or education	47

Table 8 (continued)

*Self-Checklist of Indicators for Motivation and Growth*

Indicator	Percentage of teachers participating in the last two years
Give students end of the year or semester surveys to reflect for the next teaching year	46
Spent time watching a peer teach a lesson	42
Are department head or subject area lead teacher	39
Set aside additional time to reflect and write goals for the school year in addition to the TTESS process	39
Hold or are pursuing an additional degree related to education	36
Volunteered for a committee related to the school or education	35
Taught a workshop or professional development session related to your job	33
Other	6
Wrote or contributed to an online article on education	1

In terms of the number of total responses (N=48), teachers participating in rounds (N=17) had an average of 12.647 responses to the checklist, while nonparticipants (N=31) had an average of only 10.37 as shown in the responses in Table 7. It is not surprising that teachers who voluntarily participated in instructional rounds had more participation. The three highest items on the list were the exact same in both groups: attending additional professional development, seeking feedback from a colleague and trying something new in the classroom. Besides instructional rounds, only 42% of

teachers surveyed had observed peers teach and even less teachers were teaching peers through professional development or workshops. Besides asking for feedback, it seems that mid-career teachers are doing very little to directly learn from or share information with their peers.

### Impact of the Research on the Context

The initial meeting on instructional rounds created an excitement and openness among teachers in other departments that had not originally been present. Teachers led the conversation on creating door signs as shown in Figure 12 with the “#observeme” so that other teachers, not just participants felt welcome. Three teachers created quick response (QR) codes that could be scanned with a phone or iPad linked to a feedback form specific to a goal that the teachers were working on. These door signs and QR codes were completely teacher initiated. The excitement did seem to falter as the semester ended, and the responsibilities that went with it continued, but teacher-led academic conversations were happening across content areas and doors were opening.



*Figure 12.* A sample door sign participant teachers placed on their classroom doors.

The findings were shared with the stakeholders both on the campus and several district leaders. The mixed results were puzzling in terms of the participants showing a decrease in both interest and commitment. It did create an awareness and conversation around the over-commitment of teachers, even of their own doing. I was afraid that teachers would feel burdened by my research. I was asking busy professionals to squeeze one more thing (or multiple things) into their day with no direct reward. This was not the case. I was surprised to observe a high number of survey returns with little reminding from me. A mid-career math teacher that I had limited previous interactions with sent me the following email after she responded to my initial TMAS survey, “I have completed your survey. It was not what I was expecting. I have been waiting years for someone to ask me those questions. Please let me know if you need anything else.”

The overall positive nature of the interview responses was encouraging to the administrators implementing these strategies. Late into the process, the administrator most involved in instructional rounds on our campus took a new position, but has taken the concept of instructional rounds with her to her new campus. I have also left the campus to serve in a central administration role. Despite the decrease in scores on the TMAS, I heard enough positive comments from teachers on the role of collaboration and positives from watching others teach to want to find a way to use instructional rounds or learning walks in my new position. My campus still has a plan to implement department learning walks with potential leaders for the next year. The self-checklist was revealing in that it showed administrators our areas of strength: technology and professional development. The checklist also shows teachers and administrators areas to develop and encourage: reflection and goal setting. The low percentages of teachers that reported creating space to reflect and create goals is data I have shared with stakeholders and hope to continue to encourage teachers through my new role.

### Impact of Context on the Research

The present research was conducted in the Spring semester of 2018, in the midst of testing and a long year of teachers extending themselves. Post instructional rounds surveys were administered in May - a time of the year where teachers, students, and even administrators were counting down until summer. All but three instructional rounds participants taught either a State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) or an Advanced Placement (AP) tested subject. Some of the teachers under



the greatest testing pressure often find themselves the most empty at the end of the school year. Three out of the four instructional rounds were carried out during teachers' planning periods in an attempt to prevent teachers from having to stay after school. Some planning periods had several teachers off together, while one only had two. These groups varied even more across A and B days due to block scheduling. Inconsistency in groups might have impacted the level of trust built across instructional rounds groups. The head principal also chose to do team walks with department heads and a few other chosen teachers throughout a singular department. Some of these were occurring during the same timeframe (although not the same day). These results were unexpected and created a conflict for a few teachers. The academic administrator who was most involved with me during the instructional rounds process left before the last instructional round was completed. We completed the process but the enthusiasm and attendance waned without an administrator presence or input.

#### Closing Thoughts on Chapter 4

The initial survey and interview data showed teachers had strong positive attitudes which increased slightly, according to TMAS, over the course of the study. The TMAS scores dropped in other areas showing the lowest mean responses in the categories of interest and commitment. The lack of commitment would not surprise me if we were talking about all teachers, but these data were collected only from the teachers who already had committed six or more years in the classroom. These data are startling, even for your experienced teachers who seem to have an established career as a classroom

teacher, their interest and commitment was waning. These teachers still felt good about what they were doing and rewarded on many levels. The teacher responses from the interviews also demonstrated this positive attitude and love for students, but mid-career educators still felt overwhelmed and some even reported being bored. These teachers created lengthy lists of products in order to grow and even eighty percent voluntarily attended professional development beyond the minimum required. They are seeking out growth and motivational opportunities but it makes me wonder if they are the most using the effective tools. On my campus, a majority of teachers are learning from presenters, asking questions in their professional learning communities and trying new technology. As much as I would have wanted my data to show that instructional rounds directly improved motivation, the results from the survey data illustrated the opposite. At the end of a school year, the addition of instructional rounds to their already daunting schedules did not improve their motivational scores according to the TMAS, and in most cases their scores actually decreased. Asking teachers to do one more thing on their own does not seem to be the answer. However, all teachers seemed to lack mentors but learn best from each other, are searching for “new fresh ideas.” Teachers were eager to answer the survey and discuss their own motivation or lack of it. Many teachers were stumped when asked about their career goals. I can only imagine the lack of a long-term goal and how this could stunt interest, commitment, and overall motivation for mid-career career teachers.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary of the Findings

Three main data sets were mined for this study:

- A Likert-type motivational assessment survey (TMAS) was statistically analyzed.
- Teacher interviews were coded for categories.
- Teachers completed a self-checklist of evidence for teacher growth.

The data gathered between the teacher interviews and the survey yielded divergent results. Interviews included language that reflected positive attitudes and identified the benefits of observing peers teach. The teachers participating in instructional rounds, however, actually showed a decrease in their scores on the overall TMAS. The self-checklist showed high levels of evidence of growth, but low percentages in areas of reflection, goal setting and observing other teachers.

Research question one focused on obtaining teacher views on motivation and growth according to the TMAS. Teachers willing to participate in instructional rounds scored slightly higher on this scale, but overall, teachers scored high on the attitude component and lowest in the area of commitment and interest.

Research question two followed up with a post-TMAS to assess views after the instructional rounds. Teacher interviews were given throughout the course of the study. Scores did change over the semester, but the overall change was not found to be

statistically significant. When focusing on categories within the survey, there was a small decrease in scores among the areas of commitment and interest from the participants that was statistically significant. Reward increased overall, but decreased in participants at a statistically significant level. These data showed a decrease in areas that were already low with teachers who participated in the intervention. These results were counterintuitive to the intention of the rounds. In contrast, the interviews coded teacher collaboration and exposure to new ideas as some of the most frequent comments related to personal teacher motivation and growth.

Research question three was answered by examining the responses on the self-checklist of evidence. Despite the fact that two sources of data did not converge, there were still themes that connected all three groups. Figure 13 shows an overlap in the area of commitment and goals. Interviews of participants focused on positives gained from learning from other teachers and increasing their motivation when engaged with new ideas. The checklists provided several examples of evidence related to growth. However, this evidence did not seem to focus in areas where teachers were already struggling or lacking, potentially adding to their already overwhelming responsibilities and sources of frustrations.

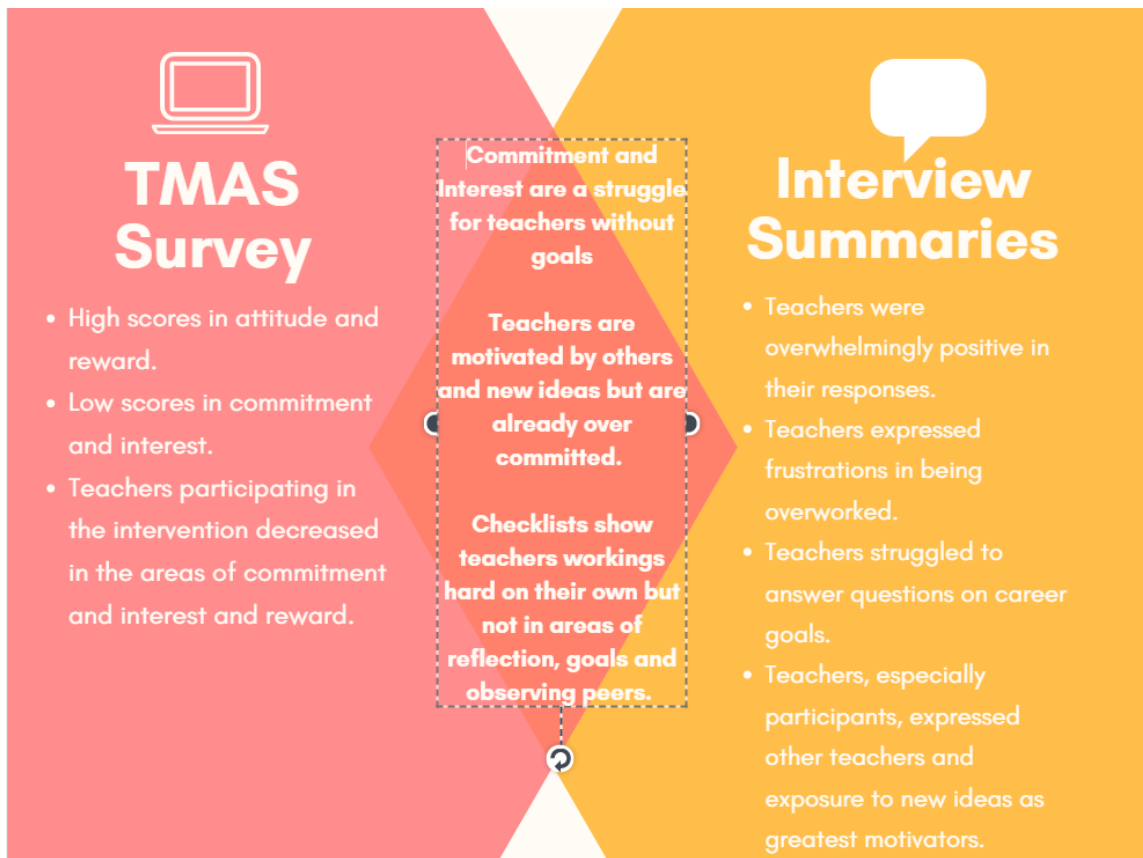


Figure 13. Connections in interviews and TMAS.

### Results in Terms of the Research

The findings of this study were aligned with the findings reported in the related literature. Participant interviews showed that the greatest struggle in the mid-career stage is one of exhaustion and being overwhelmed. A twenty-year veteran shared, “It is just overwhelming and easy to burn out. You master certain things, and policies change or more gets added to your plate. No matter how long I do this job, it still feels overwhelming—every single day.” Teachers in the middle of their career can experience burnout. Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996) defined burnout as a

“psychological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with other people in some capacity” (p. 192). Mashlach et al. (1996) developed and validated a Burnout Inventory (MBI) used in careers in social services and education. Findings from this inventory showed that, “burnout can lead to a deterioration of job quality in terms of care or service provided by staff. It appears to be a factor in job turnover, absenteeism and low morale” (Mashlach et al., 1996, p. 193). In addition, the MBI showed a high correlation to burnout and self-reported unhealthy behaviors and dysfunction. The MBI has been used to collect data on burnout since 1976. This survey has three components: exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996). This idea of reduced personal accomplishment closely lines up to a “stall-out” for mid-career teachers. In addition to pedagogical responsibilities which place teachers in a high stress environment that involves intense time spent with students, classroom teachers rarely have a clear career trajectory to follow. The personal accomplishment category for educators is a topic reflecting even more struggle and ambiguity. Teacher growth and motivation rarely comes from an outside force and is even harder to fight with the very real threat of burnout.

In the present study, the research on instructional rounds and teacher motivation was performed at the end of the school year, with the post survey administered in May. A study on the factors impacting the validity of the MBI found that end of the year range were the lowest and seemed to impact reliability (Kokkinos, 2006). Obunadike’s (2013) study for the validation of the TMAS administered to participants in this current ROS

did not include a factor for time of year, but I do question the impact time of year plays in this study's results. According to the results of the checklist, teachers who were willing to participate in instructional rounds were already showing more evidence of growth and motivation. These already busy and overworked teachers were involved in more areas of growth, preparing for testing students at a higher rate and potentially running on empty by May, compared to teachers with less involvement and accountability.

### **Role of Administrators and Commitment**

Commitment was found to be the lowest ranking factor for teachers on the mid-career scale. The validation of the TMAS showed that experienced teachers demonstrated a lower mean in the factor of commitment (1.74) compared to less experienced teachers (2.2). The means for this factor for both participants and non-participants were higher than the 1.74, but still both were low compared to the other three factors. Obunadike (2013) does not provide breakdowns for how many years of experience differentiates an experienced from an unexperienced teachers, but does summarize that the experienced teachers tended to have slightly higher scores overall than the less experienced colleagues. According to Richards (2007), "principals can benefit from knowing which of their behaviors or attitudes are most valued. [Richards adds] that they can benefit from knowing which behaviors and attitudes are needed, even if they are not obvious on the surface" (p 49). Experienced career teachers who show evidence of growth and volunteer for additional activities, for example instructional rounds, may not appear to be lacking in commitment or interest, but the survey data

showed that they were. If leaders and administrators are not aware and nurturing these factors in their expert teachers, the teachers can continue to struggle in these areas.

“The level of administrative support in a school is a major factor in whether teachers decide to persevere in their profession. In studying the many factors connected with administrative support, I became particularly interested in the power principals have to make a difference in teacher morale. Teachers have told me that when they feel respected, valued, and empowered, there is a higher level of commitment, less turnover, and greater school stability (Richards, 2007, p 49).

Leadership has a strong role in the commitment, motivation, and growth of mid-career teachers. This fact is not surprising; however, these administrators may not realize how important their role is in developing mid-career educators. According to a study comparing the concerns of new teachers to experienced teachers (Melnick & Meister, 2008), experienced teachers felt comfortable with communication and classroom management but still showed concern for their abilities in the area of time management. According to data from the 2008 study, experienced teachers handle discipline and parents with more ease and less intervention than new teachers. Parent communication and discipline are both areas that require significant support from principals. Experienced teachers require less day-to-day support from administrators, but over half of the experienced teachers in the same study felt overwhelmed by the amount of organization, documentation and paperwork required to do their jobs effectively. Mid-career teachers require less attention and immediate help, but are still overwhelmed and



feel ineffective. Leaders that recognize that even experienced teachers need support, encouragement and places to grow are likely to build stronger experienced teachers. The Melnick and Meister (2008) study classified “experienced” teachers as any with over three years of experience, but I predict that the same is true for teachers who fit in more inclusive definitions of mid-career range.

### **Long Range Goals**

It may seem contradictory for the primary struggle for mid-career teachers to be too much work (35%) and the next most frequent category to be boredom (23%), but teachers are not bored from lack of work. They are often bored of teaching the same content year to year, sometimes six times a day. Teachers who are not changing, growing, improving and learning with their students can find themselves on repeat—literally every hour, year after year.

The struggle that teachers showed when answering the interview question, “Where do you see yourself professionally in the next five years?” shows that many teachers do not have professional goals. The teacher self-checklist shows that less than only 39% of mid-career teachers on the research campus take time to reflect or set additional goals on their own. Hoerr (2016), a veteran principal, shares that while the job of engaging students belongs to teachers, the burden of engaging teachers falls on the principal. Engaged teachers should ultimately lead to more engaged learners. Hoerr (2016) suggested that helping teachers understand the importance of their own learning and setting their own learning goals can improve teacher engagement and interest.

Too often principals focus only on student learning—and that is an oversight. Of course, the purpose of school is for students to learn, but students' learning will be constrained unless their teachers are also learning. And, like students, teachers learn best when they are engaged (Hoerr, 2016, p. 87).

New teachers are constantly learning, but teachers in their mid-career have confidence in their craft and can need encouragement or a push to learn new things. Administrators who recognize the needs of mid-career teachers and how their important roles can add to improving commitment, interest and in helping these teachers set goals. These improvements can help grow already experienced teachers into even more effective and engaging educators.

#### Discussion of Personal Lessons Learned

At the beginning of the study, I fit into the context of a mid-career teacher who felt flat and frustrated in my own career. My results provided me some language and validation for the frustrations I had been feeling as an educator. I bounced between setting long lists of things to improve and books to read with feeling exhausted. The study expressed the juxtaposition of feeling somehow overwhelmed and bored at the same time. How could my job be too hard to feel good about doing it effectively and at the same time too easy and repetitive to always maintain interest and commitment? The data showed those patterns that I had not understood and helped me put my feelings into words. I then realized these feelings were not mine alone. Throughout the interviews I heard many of the same sentiments repeated and felt hopeful that if teachers were just

talking about this to each other they would find encouragement in the fact that they were not alone. Teachers repeated how they learned from each other and were motivated by fresh ideas, but they did not seem to be in an environment that was shared openly with each other outside of their own departments. Understanding where the potential potholes are provided me with a road map for how to navigate around them.

### Implications for Practice

The context of a campus that is over 55% mid-career teachers can receive huge gains from understanding the needs and struggles of teachers in this stage of their career. Data did not support the idea of instructional rounds as improving end of year motivation in mid-career teachers. However, used as a more targeted tool, paired with administrator support, these activities could still show potential. There are plans to continue teacher learning walks by department, but not a semester-long study. The formal instructional rounds protocol is not necessary for teachers to observe others and learn new and fresh ideas from other experts in the building, but shared observational opportunities and open classrooms are definitely still useful. The environment of open door classrooms should be encouraged and can improve overall collaboration and communication throughout the staff.

Overall, the data collected in this study were useful to mid-career teachers. Recognizing career stages and the differences that can be brought into each level of teaching can help a teacher build and grow specific to the needs for their stage. Novice teachers do not need to put much work into learning and growing or avoiding stagnation,

their lack of experience demands it. However, mid-career teachers who know that low motivation can be a potential pitfall, can accept those feelings as normal and use targeted professional development, share experiences and work with peers or administrators to set longer-range goals.

Specific to the campus of study, I recommend continuing instructional rounds, but over the course of the entire year as opposed to just one semester during a heavy testing calendar. I recommend the same format but with greater principal support so administrators can also learn and hear important perspectives from the mid-career teachers in their buildings. I would also encourage conversations with mid-career teachers and administrators to create a more focused approach regarding professional development and growth tools during T-TESS conferences.

### Recommendations for Further Study

The divergent results from this study juxtaposed interviews with a positive personal response to instructional rounds compared to the overall results of the TMAS that showed no statistical significance in improvement. In two categories (i.e, interest and commitment), the survey scores statistically significantly decreased. The results suggest the need for a study with a much greater sample size. This study was focused on mid-career teacher motivation and growth was targeted on a single campus with a single teaching group: high school teachers. I would recommend widening the scope of the study to include elementary in addition to secondary educators. Secondary teachers report higher levels of burnout, and I stop to wonder if they experience the greater

struggles in their mid-career and in a deeper way require more intervention and intentionality.

I would also recommend a study comparing TMAS results from my campus compared to other area schools. How many of the factors are driven by school climate and culture? Another area campus requires all teachers to participate in five instructional rounds during the school year. This has been in place for three years. I think it would be interesting to compare motivational and growth attitudes to a campus that has been using this intervention on a campus level for several years.

I would additionally recommend a study using the TMAS from different perspectives, specifically athletics and administrative ones. Administrators have a significant amount to gain from learning and understanding mid-career perspectives on their campus. Many administrators have followed a unique path and do not always understand the potential for the same drop in commitment a career teacher may experience. Two of the teachers I interviewed were also head coaches. Some of their answers about mentors and goals were tied to athletics. Coaching has structures for promotion, advancement and clear win/loss margins. Those teachers seemed more focused and had clearer goals. I am curious to determine if this commitment transfers to their attitudes in the classroom.

The TMAS measures different constructs than a burnout inventory, but there is significant overlap in the main themes of motivation. Teacher burnout has an impact on motivation and growth. I would recommend a study in mid-career teacher burnout using the MBI.

## Closing Thoughts and Conclusions

It is often said that teachers learn as much from their students as they teach them. I have always found that to be true. My students have taught me lessons in perseverance, kindness and bravery that were never in the lesson plan. They have also taught me how to download apps on my phone, new musical artists and that some of my clothing choices have become outdated. My students have changed significantly over the last twenty years. They have grown up completely in the digital age, speak more languages than ever before and are expected to take more standardized exams. Despite a decade or more of experience, it is easy for a mid-career educator to feel behind in their workload or lost in a changing educational world. Today teachers are expected to be role models, parents, technology experts, assessment gurus and data specialists (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The complexity of the educator role is increasing and can be exhausting, even for the most experienced teachers. Teachers need to continue to learn from and adjust to changing students and a changing world. Educators who are not learning and growing are no longer effective. Thankfully, most teachers are presented with a variety of opportunities for growth: websites, trainings, books and articles. Teachers need encouragement to choose development opportunities wisely so that their activities support goals and growth in this specific stage of their career. This study suggests a new lens and vocabulary for the needs and attitudes of mid-career teachers. I was first puzzled and frustrated that the intervention of instructional rounds did not seem to produce positive results for this teacher group. However, interviewed teachers found value in learning from their peers, in addition to learning from their students, they were

hungry for new and fresh perspectives. The checklist of evidence shed much light on the areas that seemed lowest on the TMAS for mid-career teachers. Many participants struggled to provide goals and next steps which contributed to a lack of commitment and even a loss of interest.

Knowledge of educator career cycles and attitudes toward motivation and growth have numerous implications for policy, professional development and growth (Eros, 2011). Most stakeholders focus on maintaining teachers for the first five years, but Huberman (1989) dubbed mid-career as the “danger zone,” where teachers who become frustrated by their attempts to experiment and grow are likely to leave. Yet, these experts tend to produce the best results with students and should be highly valued. In conclusion, I have found that I learned as much from my fellow teachers as I did from my students. Together they have taught me how to set up a digital platform, create an organized system for absent students, how to handle cell phones, and even to win over some of the toughest students. This research has taught me that many peers are working just as hard and are just as exhausted. Interviewing teachers and analyzing their survey results have taught me that growth and motivation do not come from doing more, but from understanding the needs and key strategies to help teachers in their current stage.

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## APPENDIX A

### THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this semi-structured interview protocol is to individually explore the participants' motivation and growth. The following questions will guide the conversations. Not all questions will be posed because questions that are already answered will not be asked. As needed, the researcher will ask emerging questions (questions that are not listed below).

1. What is the greatest struggle for this stage in your career?
2. What advantages are there to being a mid-career teacher?
3. What motivates you to learn more as a teacher and try new things in your classroom?
4. What is the most renewing or rejuvenating thing that you have done for your career?
5. Have you had any professional mentors that currently help to motivate you as an educator?
6. What type of leadership roles (official or unofficial) do you participate in on your campus or for the district?
7. What are your next steps or career goals for the next five years?
8. What professional activity or development opportunity have you taken part in that has created the most growth and/or change in your career?
9. How does this point of your career feel most different than a teacher with 2-4 years experience?

10. Have you ever had seasons (at least a semester) where you felt unmotivated, frustrated or consistently negative with your job? What, if anything, helped change that?

## APPENDIX B

### TEACHER GROWTH AND MOTIVATION CHECKLIST

This checklist is created to collect evidence for teachers' actual growth and motivation.

Please check all that apply.

In the last two years I attended a professional development above and beyond required hours

- In the last two years I read a professional journal
- I follow and read links on professional sites such as Edtopia
- I am a part of a Facebook group for teachers in your content area
- I have attended an educational conference in the last two years.
- I wrote or contributed to a journal, magazine or online article on teaching.
- I have asked a colleague for feedback or help in a new area in the last school year.
- I have give students an end of the semester or year survey for feedback and/or reflection tried new technology or methods in your teaching this year.
- I consistently share content with teachers beyond my PLC.
- I have read a book related to teaching or education in the last two years.
- I set aside time to set goals or reflect outside of TTESS during the school year.
- I have invited an administrator or peer into your classroom to observe and provide feedback during the last two years.
- I have spent time watching a peer teach in the last two years.



- I have taught a workshop or professional development session in the last two years.
- I have volunteered for a committee related to education in the last two years.
- I am department head or team leader.
- I have taken classes or have taken additional college courses related to education.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### SAMPLE TEACHER ROUNDS OBSERVATION SHEET

**Focus Questions:**

- *What opportunities do students have beyond listening?*
- *What tasks promote student participation / engagement / interaction with the content or skills?*
- *What teacher actions promote student participation / engagement / re-engagement during the lesson?*

**Class 1**

What is the task?

What is the teacher saying / doing?

What are the students saying / doing?

**Focus Questions:**

- *What opportunities do students have beyond listening?*
- *What tasks promote student participation / engagement / interaction with the content or skills?*
- *What teacher actions promote student participation / engagement / re-engagement during the lesson?*

**Class 2**

What is the task?

What is the teacher saying / doing?

What are the students saying / doing?

