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Running Head: VETERAN K-6 PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Veteran K-6 Public School Teachers:
Remaining Committed and Staying Engaged in Their Careers

by
Leslie Ann Young

Claremont Graduate University

2019

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VETERAN K-6 PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Leslie Ann Young as fulfilling the scope and quality requirement for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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VETERAN K-6 PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS

Abstract

Veteran K-6 Public School Teachers: Remaining Committed and

Staying Engaged in Their Careers

By

Leslie Ann Young

Claremont Graduate University: 2019

This phenomenological qualitative study involved 15 veteran K-6 public school teachers – each having taught a minimum of 24 years - from several districts in Southern California. It identified and examined what factors influenced the ongoing commitment and engagement of these teachers over the course of their careers. Factors mirrored the study's theoretical framework and included: 1) the teacher's challenges, 2) the teacher's personal characteristics or attributes, and 3) the teacher's professional life phases.

A majority of the teachers interviewed spoke to the escalation of the environmental challenges they confronted while on the job, such as, student behavior, administrative and parental support, educational reform, work load, and instructional time constraints as well as individual factors, such as, family issues and personality. In particular, the increased aggressive misbehavior of some students along with an all-too-common lack of support from both parents and administrators left these teachers feeling disrespected, isolated, and even burnt-out at times. However, the study's findings pointed to the affirmative power of the teachers' personal characteristics – specifically, their passion for teaching and their students along with the teachers' resilience – in helping them to combat the trying environmental and individual challenges they faced during the various professional life phases of their careers, and remain committed and engaged.

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Moreover, the study's findings suggest that veteran teachers could benefit from recognition, growth, variety and interaction with colleagues in order to have a meaningful longevity in their careers as well as more robust support from both site and district administrators. The findings also recommend that teacher educators introduce their pre-service and beginning teachers to what it takes emotionally to stay committed and engaged in the profession in meaningful ways, thereby, giving these new teachers a deeper foundation of what being an effective and fulfilled teacher really entails.

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My now-deceased parents, Eunice and George, who always believed in my dreams and would have been so happy to share in this chapter in my life

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and

My spouse and “fellow beam of light,” Julie, for almost three decades of love, support
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In 2001, when Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock claimed that the teacher is the principal factor that influences student achievement in the classroom, they were reasserting the significance of a teacher's influence on student learning. In fact, teachers are so important that, according to one estimate, a child in poverty who has had an effective teacher for five years in a row would have learning gains large enough, on average, to completely close the achievement gap with higher-income students (Loeb, Rouse, & Shorris, 2007). From this reasoning followed the argument that improving teacher effectiveness would make a bigger impact on student achievement than any other school-related factor (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling, therefore, would depend, in large measure, on ensuring that people would want to work as teachers, that their teaching is of high quality, and that all students would have access to high-quality teaching (OECD, 2005).

Despite the enormous amount of research, reform and policy efforts on these issues, widely-quoted statistics have revealed that approximately 50 percent of all teachers in public schools will leave the profession within the first five years of their careers (Ingersoll, 2003; Michie, 2011).¹ To combat this attrition from the teaching force, attention has been given to supporting beginning teachers during their first years in the profession (Edwards, 2003a). Yet, beginning teachers only made up 26 percent of the teaching force in 2011 (Feistritzer, 2011). In actuality, veteran teachers form the majority of teachers in the schools in many Western countries (Day, C. & Gu, 2010; Edwards, 2003a; OECD, 2005). In fact, Day and Gu (2010)

¹ However, a more recent finding has shown that 17 percent of all beginning teachers were no longer teaching five years after they began (Gray, Taie, & O'Rear, 2015).

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claim that teachers who survive the first four or five years in the classroom are very likely to remain in the job for another thirty. If that is true, then veteran teachers are the ones who by and large educate our nation's students. Therefore, these teachers find themselves in a powerful and unique position to offer valuable contributions to their students, staff, and communities.

However, although these teachers have survived to become veterans, we know relatively little about the conditions which have added to or reduced their sense of commitment and engagement, and the link of these to their perceived capacity to teach to the best of their ability.

For those who stay – in particular, teachers who climb the salary scale until retirement – the road is filled with highs and lows. Career cycle research shows that motivation declines for these teachers as they age (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Vonk & Schras, 1987). According to Edwards (2003b), experienced teachers stated that they were more stressed later in their careers than when they first started. Yet, there are accounts of experienced teachers who continue to thrive despite the challenges they face. Although studies have identified the causes of waning commitment in the wake of frustration, withdrawal and even burn-out, no research – to my knowledge – has pinpointed the factors that enable these teachers to remain committed and engaged.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to identify what factors influence the ongoing commitment and engagement of veteran K-6 public school teachers. The majority of studies show that it is teachers who most influence student achievement in the classroom (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Yet, despite the vast number of studies on teacher effectiveness, they do not reveal much regarding what it is about teachers' behaviors or abilities that make the difference in how their students perform (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Most training

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programs for pre-service teachers and professional development for in-service teachers in California, for example, focus on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession, which are comprised of subject matter, classroom environment, lesson planning, and assessment (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009). However, evidence suggests that teachers who are truly effective in the classroom rely on more than content and pedagogical knowledge. In fact, according to Day and Gu (2010), teachers seem to need more than that kind of knowledge over the span of their working lives if they are to remain committed to making a positive difference in the lives of their students. Such commitment entails an added personal dimension on the part of the teacher. “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p. 10). This study attempts to identify what factors, including the personal characteristics or attributes in the veteran teacher, contribute to his or her commitment and engagement in the profession.

Significance of the Study

The current attention given to social-emotional learning in the classroom has led to a renewed interest in the social-emotional tools required by teachers to not only survive, but thrive in their careers. A number of recent studies have shown that teachers who are chronically stressed are less effective in meeting the academic and social needs of their students (Sparks, 2017). Day and Gu (2010) found that veteran teachers, when interviewed, referred most often to their emotional state when describing what it meant to be a teacher and what kept them going in the changing policy, social, situational and personal realities of the profession. Goodson and Hargreaves (1996) and Hochschild (1983) have claimed that teaching involves daily, intensive and extensive use of both emotional labor and emotional work. Emotional labor is the use of one’s emotions to do the job well. For example, a teacher may model empathy towards a

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struggling student in order to encourage the student to be less critical and more empathetic towards him or herself. On the other hand, the school district's policy may require that this same teacher give the struggling student a failing grade in that content area based on a lack of mastery of the standards. The teacher, who had worked hard to engender empathy and foster self-love in this student, now has to carry out an action that contradicts his or her social-emotional objective. Such a contradiction most likely evokes a negative emotion on the part of the teacher, but the teacher will probably "grin and bear it." This is an example of emotional work or the management of one's own emotions to meet the expectations of the job. For Goodson, Hargreaves and Hochschild, a teacher's work satisfaction will depend on how well he or she can manage emotional labor and emotional work. In addition, Intrator and Kunzman (2006) believed when teachers had a greater awareness of how inner emotions and directives play out in professional practice, they could make more discerning judgments on what was worth fighting for, letting go, or attending to in their daily teaching practice as well as their long-term professional lives.

Despite the strong link between a teacher's social-emotional health and his or her effectiveness in the classroom, more work needs to be done in the way of practice, policy and research. A recent report looking at the landscape of teacher-preparation programs and social-emotional learning noted that very few programs overall teach teachers how to identify their feelings, strengths, and weaknesses, or how to control and express their feelings (Will, 2017). Furthermore, writings in educational theory are replete with pedagogical practices used in pre-service teacher preparation and in-service professional development. However, the assumption that to be prepared for the reality of the classroom, teachers must only be trained in subsistence strategies and techniques - such as, classroom management and guided reading models - can be

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misguided. Intrator and Kunzman (2006) believe that powerful teaching emanates first and foremost from the teacher, but current professional development does not reflect that. In other words, for these two researchers, we need to begin with the “soul” of the teacher: the passion and purpose that animate teachers’ ongoing commitment to students and learning (p. 39). Teachers yearn for professional development experiences that not only advance their skills and knowledge base, but also simultaneously probe their sense of purpose and invite deliberation about what matters most in good teaching. Universities, districts and schools need to better appreciate the role of professional development in sustaining teachers for the long term. This means seeking and disseminating information on what it takes – both intellectually and emotionally - for teachers to remain committed and stay engaged in the profession.

Whereas Intrator and Kunzman’s recommendations focused on professional development, my study will concentrate on the factors that have influenced the commitment and engagement of veteran K-6 public school teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework being utilized in this study is adapted from the results of Day and Gu’s mixed methods research on teachers’ lives, their work, its contexts and its effectiveness for students as demonstrated in the VITAE project (2010). The VITAE project was a four-year national mixed-methods study of 300 primary and secondary teachers in 100 schools in seven regions of England who were in different phases of their professional lives. The results of the study – published in their book *The New Lives of Teachers* – demonstrate that it is the relative success with which teachers manage various personal, work and external policy challenges that is a key factor in the satisfaction, commitment, well-being and effectiveness of teachers in different contexts and at different times in their work and lives.

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The figure below is this author's visual conception and modification of Day and Gu's findings which concluded that teachers' ongoing commitment to teach to the best of their ability for the benefit of their students in the face of challenging circumstances and changing contexts depends on three factors: 1) the teacher's challenges, 2) the teacher's personal characteristics, and 3) the teacher's professional life phase, (Day & Gu, 2010). The intensity with which the teacher experiences these factors is pivotal in understanding how and why a teacher continues to teach.

Figure 1 below represents a diagram of the theoretical framework to be used for this study.

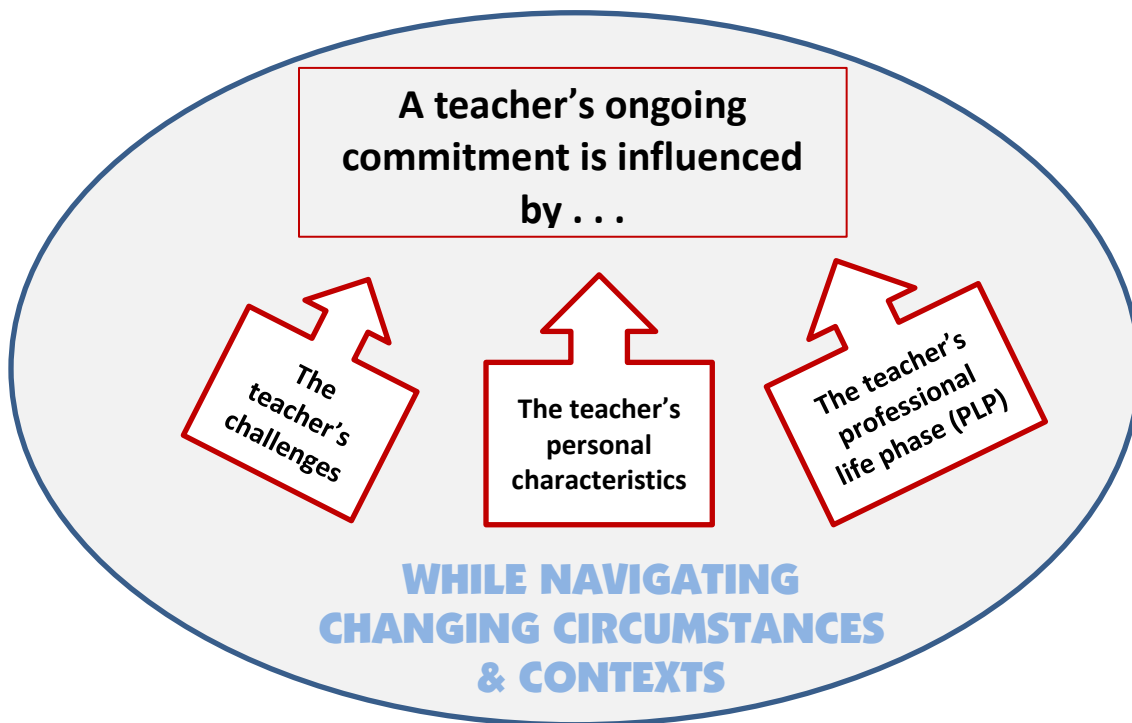


Figure 1. Influences on a teacher's commitment over time (adapted from Day & Gu, 2010).

A more in-depth description of each of the three influences is explained below.

The Teacher's Challenges

Day and Gu (2010) focused on the attrition and retention of teachers throughout their careers and examined the pertinent evidence regarding these teachers' needs and challenges.

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They found that teachers are confronted by professional, workplace, and personal pressures which are likely to challenge and erode their beliefs and practices. These pressures can be divided into environmental (or external) and individual (or internal) factors (McMahon, 2003). Environmental factors are those over which the teacher has little control (Crick, 1998). These include lack of time, overwhelming work load, grade level taught, student behavior, lack of administrative support, unsupportive parents, lack of collegial support, role conflict and ambiguity, educational reform, low salary, and economic and societal considerations. Individual factors are those that are specific to the teacher's personal life. These factors include personality, gender, life changes, and locus of control.

The Teacher's Personal Characteristics

The term "personal characteristics" is used in a number of studies on teachers and teacher effectiveness, but its meaning can vary from study to study. Příbylová (2014) in her study on the personal characteristics of primary school teachers in the Czech Republic and Timmerman (2009) in her research on the personal characteristics of sex education teachers in the Netherlands both defined this term as having to do with a teacher's personality or personality traits. Hartlep and McCubbins (2003) in their review of Haberman's STAR teacher traits as characterized in Haberman's screener - used by schools, districts and higher education institutions to predict the effectiveness and staying power of teachers serving diverse students in low-income urban schools - cited personal characteristics as "dispositions" rather than skills or pedagogy. For Day et.al. (2007) personal characteristics are called "personal influences" or "factors" that help shape a teacher's personal life. For Day and his colleagues, an understanding of the interplay between personal, professional and situated factors directly affect teachers' well-being, commitment and resilience (see Figure 2), all leading to varying degrees of teacher

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effectiveness. According to these researchers, only with this understanding and the provision of appropriate support and development strategies is successful school reform possible.

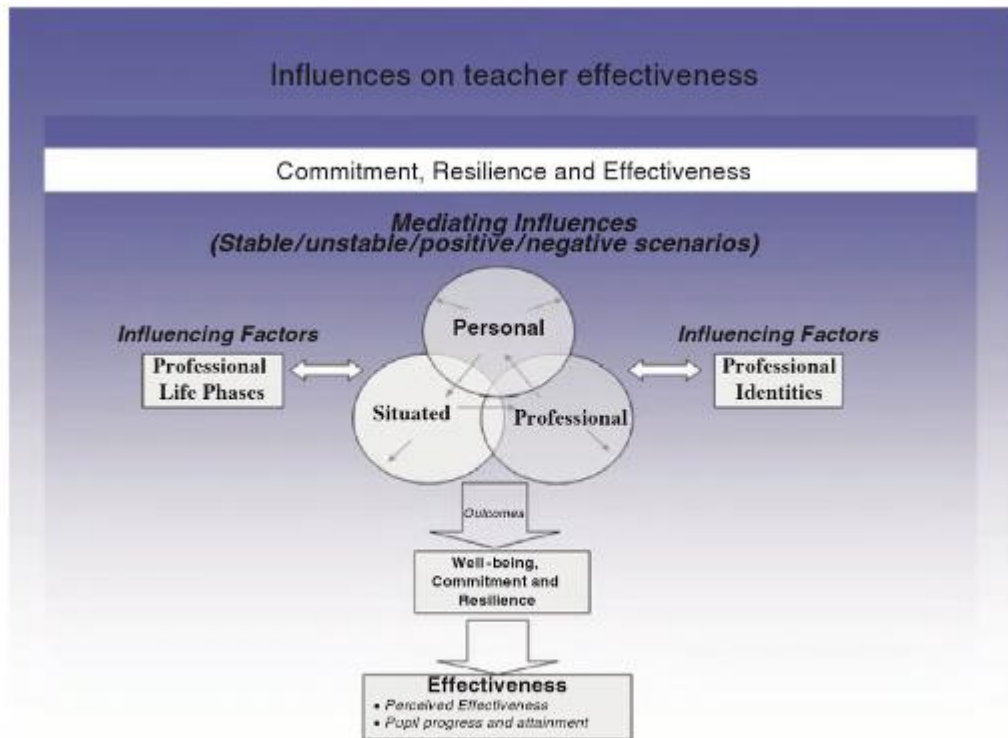


Figure 2. Teachers' commitment, resilience and effectiveness (Day & Gu,

This researcher chose to use the term “the teacher’s personal characteristics” to mean the teacher’s attributes, features or qualities. In reading the literature, five personal characteristics were most often described to directly influence a teacher’s commitment to his or her students and the decision to remain in the profession. These characteristics are: a passion for teaching, a passion for students, strong teacher identity and integrity, a firm belief in teacher efficacy, and resilience. Although other factors may influence a teacher’s decision to remain in the profession, such as, compensation based on educational level, certification, and experience, I chose to focus

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on these personal characteristics as evidence suggested that those teachers who remained committed to and stayed engaged in their work were able to overcome the more external challenges because they possessed some or all of these characteristics (Day & Gu, 2010).

The Teacher's Professional Life Phase (PLP)

A professional life phase (PLP) is a distinctive time period over the course of a teacher's professional career (Day & Gu, 2010). Each phase is characterized by groups of teachers who demonstrate similar professional features, needs, and concerns. A handful of researchers have created PLP frameworks and enumerated the salient characteristics these teachers share depending on the stage they find themselves in (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000; Vonk, 1989). This study is based on the six PLP's of Day and Gu (2010); in particular, the last two which are entitled 1) Professional Life Phase 5 - 24-30 Years in the Profession: Challenges to Sustaining Motivation, and 2) Professional Life Phase 6 – 31 Plus Years in the Profession: Sustaining/Declining Motivation with the Ability to Cope with Change and/or Looking to Retire.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study, therefore, is: "What factors influence the ongoing commitment and engagement of veteran K-6 public school teachers?"

Definition of Terms

Commitment: part of a teacher's affective or emotional reaction to his or her experiences in a school setting. It is also part of the process which determines the level of personal investment the teacher makes to a particular school or group of students (Ebmeier & Nicklaus, 1999).

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Engagement: a state in which one invests his or her personal self during work role performance, thereby bringing personal energy & experiencing an emotional connection to work (Christian, 2011).

Factor: an element – either positive or negative - contributing to a particular situation.

Personal characteristics: attributes or qualities that can directly influence a teacher's commitment to his or her students and the decision to remain in the profession. These characteristics are: a passion for teaching, a passion for students, strong teacher identity and integrity, a firm belief in teacher efficacy, and resilience.

Veteran K-6 public school teacher: any K-6 public school teacher who has taught 24 years or more. This definition comes directly from Day and Gu's research on veteran teachers and professional life phases (2010).

Organization of the Chapters

While chapter one provided an introduction to the study, chapter two lays the groundwork for the study through a review of the literature on veteran K-12 public school teachers and how the dedicated teachers among them remain committed and stay engaged in their chosen profession. Chapter three details the qualitative methodology used for the study, including the sampling method and analysis technique employed in order to interpret and report the data as accurately and objectively as possible. Chapter four offers a description and discussion of all results, organized by the factors detailed in the theoretical framework. Chapter five presents an analysis of the meaning of the results, with particular attention to the practice and policy-related implications of the data as well as their application to future research. Concluding remarks are also included within Chapter five in closing the study. References and appendices follow.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this review is to provide an overview of the literature on veteran K-12 public school teachers and how teachers among them remain committed and stay engaged in their chosen profession. The review begins by addressing the demographics of veteran K-12 public school teachers in the United States. The review continues by discussing the challenges veteran teachers face, and the characteristics of teacher plateauing, depletion, burnout and renewal. It is followed by an exploration of what role the personal characteristics of veteran teachers play in their continued commitment and engagement. A subsequent description on the various models of professional life phase or career cycle research ensues. Finally, the review addresses the consistencies, gaps and implications of the literature and the reasons these form the basis and rationale for my study.

The Demographics of Veteran Teachers

There were 3.2 million public school teachers educating the nation's 49.4 million children attending public PK-12 schools in 2011, according to the U.S. Department's National Center for Education Statistics, the latest printed statistics on teacher demographics (Feistritzer, 2011). Teaching is also still an overwhelmingly female occupation (with 84 percent of the teaching force) and strikingly White (also at 84 percent) with Hispanics being the fastest-growing non-White group entering the profession. About 31 percent of all teachers teach in cities, 26 percent in suburbs, 19 percent in towns and about 23 percent in rural areas. Approximately 48 percent of teachers teach in grades PK-4, 26 percent in grades 5-8, and 27 percent in grades 9-12.

However, finding the actual number of veteran teachers currently practicing in the U.S. is no small task. Much of the difficulty lies in the lack of a consensus in the literature that qualifies

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a teacher to be considered a “veteran.” According to the Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (1979), a veteran is “a person of long experience in some occupation or skill” (p.1298). Thus, based on this definition, a veteran teacher is one who has served in the teaching profession for a lengthy period of time. In some studies, teachers with only seven or eight years of experience are already considered “veterans” (Rich & Almozlino, 1999; Teitelbaum, 2008). In contrast, other studies define teachers with as many as 15 or even 35 years of experience as “veterans” (Brundage, 1996; Cohen, 1991). In addition, the interchangeable use of “experienced” and “veteran” in the literature (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kauffman, Moore Johnson, Kardos, Liu, & Peske, 2002) suggests the homogeneity of this category of teachers without differentiating between the different professional phases of their careers. A teacher with only seven or eight years of experience will most probably have distinctive professional identities and characteristics from a teacher who has served for over 30 years (Day & Gu, 2010). Lastly, a veteran teacher is not necessarily an expert teacher despite his or her years of experience (Margolis, 2008).

Day & Gu (2010) – from whom I have developed the theoretical framework for this study – consider a veteran teacher as a teacher who has served in the teaching profession for 24 years or more. Hence, I have chosen to use these researchers’ definition of a veteran teacher in this study. The most recent statistics on the number of veteran teachers comes from the National Center for Education Information (see Figure 3). Feistritzer (2011) pointed out in her report that the proportion of the teaching force that had 25 or more years of teaching experience had almost doubled from the first year the authors started surveying teachers in 1986: from 15 percent to 27 percent in 2005. However, from 2005 to 2011, that proportion of teachers with 25+ years of experience dropped to 17 percent, while the proportion of teachers with five or fewer years of experience rose from 18 percent in 2005 to 26 percent in 2011. For Feistritzer, the explanation

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was that older, more experienced teachers were leaving in greater numbers due to retirement, and younger, less experienced teachers were replacing them, with many of these new teachers entering the profession through routes different from the traditional college-based education programs their older counterparts took. This explanation coincides with Grissmer and Kirby's analysis of teacher attrition rates following a U-shaped curve, high for teachers early in their career and for retirement-eligible teachers, but very low during mid-career (1997). The current structure of teacher retirement systems provides strong incentives to continue working until eligible for retirement as well as providing the critical variable in determining the timing of the demand for new teachers.

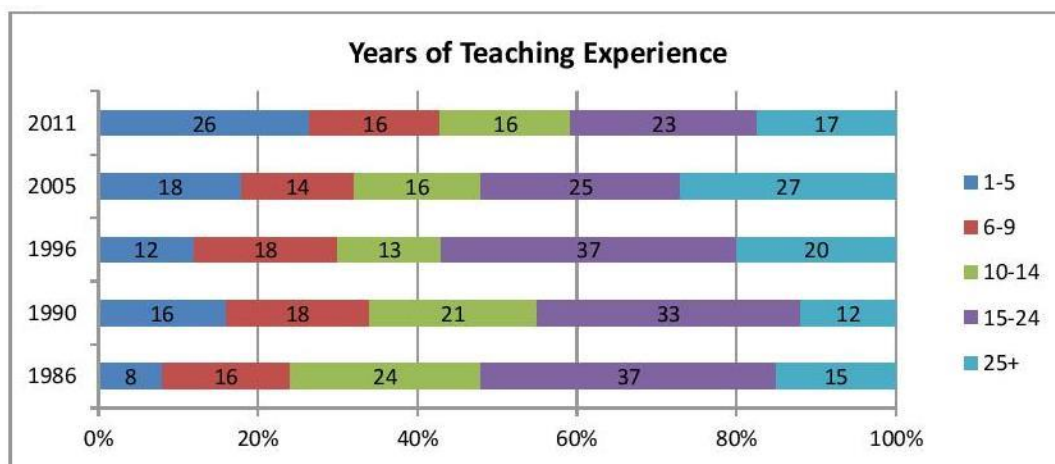


Figure 3. Years of Teaching Experience of K-12 U.S. Public School Teachers. Taken from the National Center for Education Information (Feistritzer, 2011).

Despite the decline in the number of teachers with 25+ years of experience, Feistritzer (2011) still shows in her chart on “Teacher Age, 1986-2011” that the percentage of teachers aged 50 years or more was greater than any other age group in 2011 at 31 percent (see Figure 4). This

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percentage has declined from 42 percent in 2005, but it still ranks as the second largest percentage of this age group from 1986 to 2011. It cannot be assumed that all teachers aged 50 years of more also have 25+ years of experience, but they most likely have close to that amount. Veteran teachers may be leaving the ranks, but they still make up a significant force in the ranks of all K-12 public school teachers.

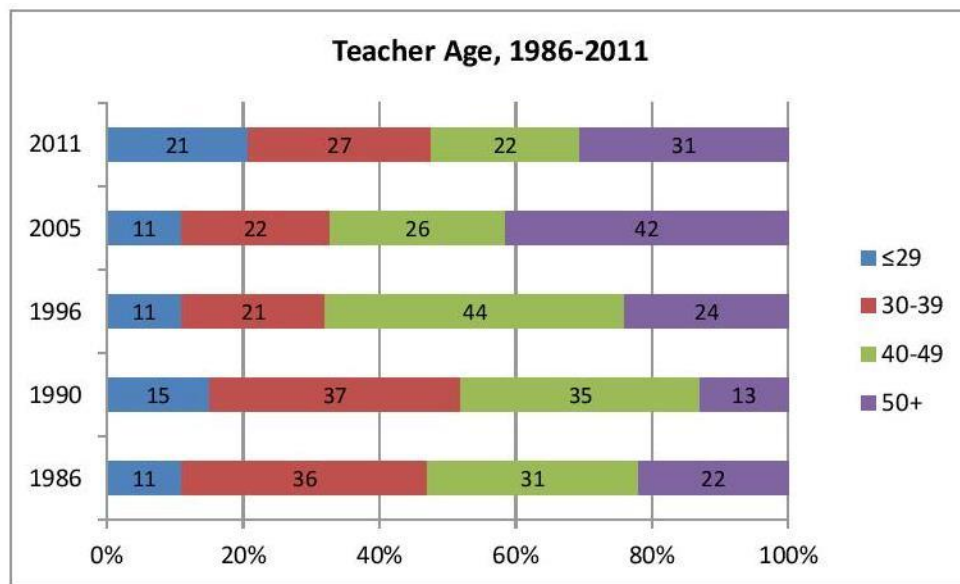


Figure 4. Teacher Age of K-12 U.S. Public School Teachers, 1986-2011. Taken from the National Center for Education Information (Feistritz, 2011).

The Challenges of Veteran Teachers

Although veteran teachers (with 25+ years of experience) made up 17 percent of the U.S. K-12 public school teaching force in 2011 and teachers over 50 years of age 31 percent (see section above entitled “The Demographics of Veteran Teachers”), research on the challenges facing them has often been overlooked in the literature as the focus has been on the attrition of beginning teachers (Edwards, 2003b; Megyeri, 1996). Hansen (1995) even claimed that little is

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known about how and why veteran teachers manage (or do not manage) to continue to fulfill their original calling.

The New Lives of Teachers

Adding to the literature on veteran teachers, Day and Gu (2010) have recently contributed greatly in their research. Their book, *The New Lives of Teachers*, focuses on the attrition and retention of teachers in all phases of their careers, including veteran teachers, with the examination of pertinent evidence regarding their needs and the challenges they encounter. As part of the four-year VITAE research project, the researchers explored the work and lives of a purposive sample of 300 English and math teachers at different phases of their careers in 100 primary and secondary schools in different socioeconomic contexts, drawn from seven local authorities in England. The researchers found that veteran teachers are confronted by professional, workplace and personal pressures and tensions throughout their careers. These pressures and tensions are likely, at times, to challenge and perhaps, ultimately erode the values, beliefs and practices of these teachers. Day (2012) claimed in a later journal article that close to half of all veteran teachers reported that it had become a struggle to continue to give their best to the profession. At the same time, most of the teachers in Day and Gu's research did not feel that they would be able to change careers due to financial or domestic concerns. This finding provides even more reason to investigate whether and in what way the demands over time have dimmed these teachers' sense of commitment and engagement. Hargreaves (2011) corroborated this finding. He explained that an intense emphasis on caring for the young and vulnerable, combined with classroom conditions that restrict resources and create shortages of time, leave some of the most dedicated teachers feeling they were always falling short. This is in contrast to teachers in their early and mid-year career phases (zero to 23 years of experience), where a clear

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majority reported positive professional outlooks. Extending this argument, Edwards (2003b) emphasized that when family, health and financial issues are added to these concerns, the result can be “a tired professional who must face a classroom of noisy children every day without the energy of his or her younger colleagues” (p. 13). Furthermore, according to Day (2012), the teacher’s own professional agenda may have changed in response to various policy reforms, school leaders and cohorts of students, as well as the aging process and unanticipated personal circumstances. Veteran teachers find themselves needing to adjust their professional lives as colleagues come and go, the demands of students and the processes of working with them become more complex, and the conditions of service change (Day & Gu, 2010).

Environmental and Individual Factors

McMahon (2003) in her dissertation created a very useful way to understand the challenges facing teachers. She divided them into two main categories of factors: environmental and individual. Environmental factors are those over which the teacher has little control (Crick, 1998). These include lack of time for teachers, work load, grade level taught, student behavior, lack of administrative support, unsupportive parents, lack of collegial support, role conflict and ambiguity, educational reform, low salary, and economic and societal considerations. On the other hand, individual factors are those that are specific to the teacher’s personal life or attributes. These factors include personality, gender, life changes, and locus of control (McMahon, 2003).

Environmental factors. In examining environmental factors, McMahon (2003) cited Blase (1986) in describing specific stress categories related to time. First, teachers identified sources of stress directly interfering with instructional time, such as student behavior, large

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classes, athletic events, and interruptions. Second, teachers identified sources of stress that ultimately affect instructional time by requiring extra work on the part of the teacher, such as excessive paperwork, lack of materials, committee work, and other extra duties. Third, a variety of stressors were simply perceived as a waste of time and energy, such as meetings that were poorly planned and facilitated.

The second environmental factor - increased work load - also causes stress in teachers, mainly because it, too, interferes with time. Work overload includes such features as large classes, unwarranted paperwork, not enough preparation time, and increasing social work roles (Raquepaw & deHaas, 1984). The result is teachers who overextend their physical and emotional resources while attempting to cope with the increased workload. Ironically, work overload is also connected to school reform. Miller (1999) claimed that the demands of school reform as they apply to new forms of teaching, along with the expectations for added involvement in decision-making, augment stress for the very teachers the reforms are meant to help.

The third environmental factor - grade level taught – depends on the preparation and preferences of the teacher. Farber (1984) revealed data that suggested that working in junior high or middle schools is particularly stressful compared to working in elementary schools. Intermediate level as well as high school teachers tend to see their students in a more negative light than elementary teachers. Such a finding in the data indicates a higher incidence of depersonalization, a subcategory of burnout (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982).

The fourth environmental factor – managing disruptive or unmotivated students - is invariably one of the highest-ranked items in teacher stress surveys (Farber, 1991). In a review of eighteen empirical studies on teacher burnout, Leithwood, Menzies, Jantzi, & Leithwood (1999) discovered that student misbehavior was considered the highest contributor to burnout. Student

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misbehavior included discipline, absence, and apathy. DelRobbio (1995) found student discipline to be the largest sub-category of student-generated stressors in his study involving 378 secondary teachers from a mid-sized, urban school district. The respondents referred to such problems as "disrespect," "poor attendance," "continual outbursts of violence," and "fear of personal safety" (p. 95). In their study of 101 high school teachers, Raquepaw and deHaas (1984) also found student discipline to be among the top five stressors identified from the data collected. The researchers used a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory as well as a questionnaire regarding the teaching profession. Among the top five causes of burnout, teachers in the study ranked "Students not motivated to learn" or apathy as number four (p.15).

Yet, why would veteran teachers with so many years of experience still be challenged by student behavior? According to Day and Gu (2010), as teachers grow older, so do the challenges of maintaining energy in the persistently demanding work of teaching children and young people, whose attitudes, motivations and behaviors may differ widely from those with whom these teachers began their careers. In their study, Day and Gu found that teachers between 24 and 30 years of experience who were losing motivation in their work rated "pupil behavior" as the third highest negative influence after "work-life balance" and "policy." For teachers with 31 or more years of experience, "pupil behavior" moved to the second highest negative influence after "policy."

The fifth environmental factor - lack of administrative support - was ranked as the greatest obstacle to a teacher effectively carrying out his or her job (National Education Association, 1992). Administrators who are seen as incompetent and uncooperative can cause stress and deplete their teachers due to unclear expectations, lack of knowledge or expertise, lack of support, inconsistency, poor evaluation procedures, unreasonable job expectations, lack of

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opportunity for input, failure to provide resources, harassment, and favoritism (Dean, 1988). In their study of 447 special education teachers and 489 general education teachers, Billingsley and Cross (1992) found that teachers who experience higher levels of principal support are likely to be less stressed, more committed, and more satisfied in their work than teachers who perceive low levels of administrative support. The notion of administrative support included such things as feedback, encouragement, acknowledgment, clarification of staff roles, use of participative decision making, and collaborative problem solving. These factors coincide with Day and Gu's findings underlined in their study (2010) that school leaders must attend to the broader personal well-being of staff – through building trust via genuine regard and sustained interaction – alongside the raising of expectations and relentless pursuit of standards. The International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP) went even further in its recommendations by listing the combinations that successful school leaders in 64 studies in seven Western nations applied according to the leaders' own and schools' phase of development and the demands of the broader policy and demographic contexts. These combinations were: 1) sustaining passionate commitment and personal accountability, 2) managing tensions and dilemmas and maintaining moral purposes, 3) being other-centered and learning focused, 4) making emotional and rational investments, and 5) emphasizing the personal and the functional (Leithwood and Day, 2007).

The sixth environmental factor – parental support – poses a challenge to teachers because either these parents are not involved enough in their child's education or they are overly involved. Uninvolved parents may be unavailable (working at their jobs or being preoccupied with other family members), incapable (affected by drug or alcohol use or mental incapacities), uneducated (unable to help or supervise with homework or motivation), or have just given up on disciplining their child (Farber, 1991). On the other hand, Farber found that overly involved parents may

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argue that the teacher or the school is ineffective and press for vigilance and pressure in order to make sure their children are successful.

The seventh environmental factor – lack of collegial support – is problematic because teachers frequently claim that there is a lack of community and support even within their own ranks. Intrator (2002) wrote that even though teaching occurs in a public forum where the teacher is constantly surrounded by students and others, vast numbers of teachers describe feeling isolated or alone in their work. Teachers with more support from their colleagues show lower overall burnout levels (Greenglass, Fiksenbaum, & Burke, 1994). The research shows how important it is that a teacher feels as though he or she belongs to a group of peers who share the same values and interests, and above all, are colleagues whom he or she can trust (McMahon, 2003). Furthermore, a trusting relationship between teachers is of vital importance in building their sense of collective resilience. A lack of social support from colleagues could, on the other hand, lead to teachers' emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004 as cited by Day & Gu, 2010). Lortie (1975) called this the "individualism of teacher socialization" whereby due to the isolation of teachers in their classrooms with their students, they do not always perceive their burden as jointly shared by their colleagues (p. 81). For Lortie, this individualistic conception of practice exacerbates the burden of failure.

The eighth environmental factor – role conflict - can be defined as the experience of being torn between conflicting expectations. Cedoline (1982) describes the most common role conflicts as those between: 1) the individual's values and those of a superior or the organization, 2) the demands of the work place and the worker's personal life, and 3) worker abilities and the organizational expectations. For example, there may be an expectation to be an effective teacher, yet one may not have the adequate materials or support available (Blase, 1986). Miller (1999)

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even found that teachers wrestled with competing demands as they adjusted to school-wide reform efforts. Role conflict also contributes to the teacher's sense of efficacy in that the lack of a clear alignment between one's perceived and actual role affects that teacher's ability to teach effectively (see section on "Teacher Efficacy" under "The Teacher's Personal Characteristics"). Hargreaves (1994) suggested that the nature and demands of teaching have undergone acute changes over the years. While some may argue that the increasing demands put upon teachers have led to further opportunities for professionalism, Hargreaves claimed that a possible detrimental result of the effect of this buildup is due to "intensification." Intensification means a teacher's work is "becoming more routinized and deskilled; more like the work of manual workers and less like that of autonomous professionals" (p. 117). Such intensification can result in a widening gap between the teacher's vision of what teaching should be and the reality of what teaching is.

The ninth environmental factor – educational reform - has resulted in two highly stressful scenarios, according to the research. Teachers often feel left out of the decision-making process, but at the same time, pressured to achieve better educational results with a greater diversity of students and fewer resources (Farber, 2000). Lens and Jesus (1999) specified the problem with nationwide educational reforms: "First, they are too frequent; second, they are dictated or imposed on the schools and the teachers without much educational justification. The combination of both is, of course, the best way to demotivate people . . ." (p. 200). Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) wrote that educational reform depends in part on the teacher's sense of purpose. In other words, educators will be highly reluctant to change their practices, adopt new methods, or rethink their approach if they do not believe that the goals of reform demonstrate a strong correlation with the fundamental value and purpose of who they are as educators. Day and

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Gu (2010) further explained the impact of these reforms on veteran teachers. Veteran teachers, more than any others, may well regard reforms, however well-intentioned and valuable, as a challenge to the values, status, experience and expertise which they have nurtured and refined throughout their professional lives.

The tenth environmental factor – low salary - is often cited as a contributor to teacher dissatisfaction and frustration as well. Despite the fact that teachers' salaries in most countries have increased since the 1990s, the evidence is that average community incomes (as indicated by GDP per capita) have increased at a faster pace (OECD, 2005). Policies aimed at retaining effective teachers need both to recruit competent people into the profession, and provide support and incentives for professional development and ongoing performance at high levels. Despite the expectation and widely held belief that teachers find satisfaction through intrinsic rewards, salary is an important factor when considering one's career choice. However, given that veteran teachers often find themselves near or at the top of their pay scale, it is uncertain how much of a role low salary plays in their erosion of commitment, even though other occupations with similar training often reflect higher salaries. More likely, is the fact that a teacher's low salary, in relationship to other professions, reflects a lack of prestige on the part of society towards teachers. Teachers often feel their work is undervalued, thereby, contributing to a perception of low status and prestige (OECD, 2005). For veteran teachers, this underestimation of their worth to society is a sore point as many teachers choose and remain in teaching because they feel they are doing something that is worthwhile to society.

The last environmental factor – economic and societal considerations - also plays a part in teacher stress. Perhaps the most influential factors in recent times have been the large number of children in poverty and negative peer and family influences (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1997).

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Other factors include the shifting composition of the family, parental neglect, an unstable economy, job mobility, sexual abuse, growing criticism of public education, increased crime and violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and a declining respect for people and property (McGrath, 1995).

The myriad of environmental factors enumerated above can negatively affect the job performance of the teacher. From lack of time to lack of administrative support, teachers can feel caught in a web that they, unfortunately, did not create. Such a dilemma only adds to the stress they feel and ultimately, affects their emotional state and their effectiveness on the job (McMahon, 2003). For some teachers, the result is a waning enthusiasm and increasing need for self-preservation; for others, it is emotional exhaustion and even burnout. Both results highlight the fact that more attention needs to be given to supporting teachers so they can devote themselves to their students.

Individual factors. In addition to environmental factors, individual factors can also result in a decrease in teacher enthusiasm and commitment, which can lead to teacher plateauing, depletion and burnout. These factors include personality, gender, life changes and locus of control. (McMahon, 2003).

Certain personality characteristics can negatively impact teachers' well-being than others. Teachers who are idealistic and passionate about their jobs are at a greater risk for depletion and burnout (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980). Pines (1993) found that those who view work as a primary source of personal success and existential significance are also at a higher risk of burning out. According to Farber (1984), for these teachers who demonstrate a very deep commitment to their work, burnout is a "function of feeling 'inconsequential,' that no matter how hard one works, the payoffs in terms of accomplishment, recognition, or appreciation are

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not there” (p. 325). At the same time, teachers who report an acute deficiency of self-esteem and self-actualization experience higher levels of burnout (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1984). In other words, teachers who feel their needs are not met in teaching are more likely to face depletion. In addition, teachers who have a “Type A personality” are more susceptible to stress (Cherniss, 1980). These individuals tend to be more aggressive, competitive, intense and moody than their Type B counterparts who tolerate frustration better, thanks to their feelings of relaxation and calm. Maslach (1982) even suggested that a burnout-prone individual may be someone who lacks assertiveness. Such an individual may not have the ability to set limits at work, and instead, passively yields to the demands of a situation rather than actively reducing them.

Another factor that influences burnout is gender. Research results have been mixed regarding the variable of gender in connection with well-being. First of all, men and women score differently on subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (McMahon, 2003). Women tend to score higher in emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, while men score higher in depersonalization which manifests itself in more frequent and intensive negative feelings toward students (Maslach, 1982). According to Farber (1991), the reason for this may be that more men are employed in middle and high schools, a demographic factor connected to higher levels of stress and burnout. In addition, the traditional expectations inherent in the labor market consider men as the breadwinner in the family. Men who become teachers can experience a higher level of frustration, especially due to the fact that it is thought of as a more “female” profession, and hence, does not carry the same status (or salary) as other professions, such as, lawyers, doctors, or other high-prestige occupations. For women born after the feminist wave of the 1970s and 1980s, teaching is no longer one of the three jobs from which they will most likely choose (the others being nursing and psychology/social work). For these women, having another

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choice, should they question their commitment to teaching, can weigh heavily on their decision to stay in or leave the profession.

Both positive (e.g., marriage) and negative (e.g., death or divorce) life changes can make individuals more prone to burnout (Cedoline, 1982; Farber, 1991). Transitional periods can create stress that leaves an individual with less capacity to cope. Day and Gu (2010) found that in veteran teachers with 24 to 30 years of experience, “work-life balance” was the second highest negative critical influence after “policy.” However, according to McMahon (2003) the impact of these changes on a teacher’s vulnerability has not been established. In fact, at least one study has shown that significant life change events within a given year in teaching were unrelated to job burnout (Birmingham, 1984). Even for Day and Gu’s veteran teachers with 31 years or more of experience, “work-life-balance” dropped to the fourth highest negative critical influence, partly due to the fact that these teachers no longer had young children or aging parents to care for.

The position of the locus of control also correlates to burnout. Those individuals who exhibit an external locus of control or who feel that their destiny is determined by external forces, are at greater risk for burnout (Farber, 1991). Likewise, several studies cited by Cedoline (1982) show that individuals who have greater participation in decision making at their jobs experience more productivity, higher job satisfaction, and lower employee turnover (see section on “Depletion and Burnout” below).

Summary of the Challenges of Veteran Teachers

Veteran teachers are faced with professional and personal pressures throughout their careers. These tensions are likely, at times, to test and perhaps, ultimately wear away at their values, beliefs and practices (Day & Gu, 2010). McMahon (2003) demonstrated that these

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stresses consist of environmental and internal factors. In reading through the description of these factors, one may understand better why those who choose a career in education are susceptible to losing the interest, passion, and fulfillment that they possessed when they first entered the profession. It could be argued that these factors affect teachers in all stages of the professional life phases, but I would counter that the culmination of years of their effects takes a particular toll on veteran teachers. This toll can lead to a series of negative consequences on the emotional state of veteran teachers.

Career Plateauing, Depletion and Burnout, and Teacher Renewal

Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, and Enz (2000) explained how teachers can withdraw as disillusionment and overload from the challenges they face in their careers overwhelm them. Withdrawal represents the negative forces that cause educators to remove themselves from the reflection-renewal-growth process. This form of disengagement will also be described as taking place in certain stages of the Professional Life Phases or Career Cycles (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Vonk & Schras, 1987) (see section on “Professional Life Phases”). Discussed below are two forms of disengagement: 1) career plateauing and 2) depletion and burnout. A discussion on teacher renewal as one path to reverse the negative effects of these is also presented.

Career Plateauing

Milstein (1990) described plateauing as a particular form of disengagement amongst educators. Plateauers are those who have reached a long period of stability in their work. As long as this stability is comfortable, plateauers will probably feel that all is well. However, this stability can also begin to feel like sameness and stagnation, whether it's due to a sense of

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repetitiveness in a role or to a perceived lack of promotion opportunities. As this point, the plateauer may have a sense of intrinsic loss and feel that fulfillment is no longer possible. If forward movement does not occur, such a state can lead to the perception of being trapped. The flat hierarchical structure of educational institutions – with high subordinate to supervisor ratios and most teachers having to become administrators if they choose to leave the classroom but wish to remain in their educational organization – can easily lead to a sense of plateauing.

Milstein and Henry (2000) claimed that everyone experiences plateauing at some point in their careers. According to them, the individuals who remain in the same work role for more than three to five years were most likely to experience plateauing, with the average length of remaining in the same work role for teachers being close to fifteen years. Margolis (2008) found that new teachers are even plateauing earlier, some at four to six years, as they hunger for ways to remain fresh, be recognized for their work, and seek new opportunities. For Milstein and Henry (2000), plateauing becomes problematic when individuals feel they are stuck in a position and have few reasons to expect any change or improvement. It is at this point that they begin to feel dissatisfied and lose enthusiasm and energy, which can lead to a sense of hopelessness and a reduction in work performance. Even if these teachers may have mastered the content of their roles, if they do not have much enthusiasm for their jobs, it is doubtful that they will be able to imbue their students with enthusiasm for learning (Milstein, 1990).

Depletion and Burnout

As teachers' roles increase and societal critiques of the effectiveness of teachers continue to mount, common sense would question how any teacher with 10, 15, or 25 years of experience can sustain his or her vitality in the classroom. Increasing expectations without increases in time and resources create a drain for teachers (McMahon, 2003). The demands of teaching can

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challenge the reserves of even the most dedicated educator. When vitality wanes, teachers may manifest stress followed by depletion or burnout (Strayton, 2009).

Maslach (1982) outlined the three dimensions of burnout as exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness. Firstly, exhaustion encompasses the initial reaction to stress on the job. Rest and sleep do not help the burnt-out teacher who does not feel capable of facing people or responding to the demands of the job due to the feelings of emotional and physical exhaustion. Secondly, cynicism follows exhaustion as a protective mechanism. The teacher tries to minimize his or her involvement with the job by depersonalizing or “dehumanizing” the students and viewing them as somehow deserving of their problems. Thirdly, ineffectiveness ensues when the teacher sees him or herself negatively, which leads to losing confidence in the ability to perform adequately on the job. Along with these characteristics of burnout, the teacher goes through a period of psychological withdrawal from work. In the beginning, the teaching may seem acceptable, but the teacher tends to become quiet and isolated due to discouragement, disillusionment, and frustration. As the withdrawal deepens, negative emotions emerge and persist. Criticism and unresponsiveness are prevalent and some teachers at this stage will even sabotage any signs of school improvement. As a last resort, the teacher continues to become cynical and demanding and refuses to participate in all professional development activities (Steffy et al., 2000). As Cherniss (1980) stated, “Burnout is used to refer to the situation in which what was formerly a ‘calling’ becomes merely a job. One no longer lives to work, but works only to live” (p. 16).

Huberman and Vanderberghe (1999) pointed out the dangers of burnout when they wrote that it is a problem with serious consequences both for the teacher’s career and, more fundamentally, for the learning consequences of the students themselves. Burnout is also mentioned in the professional life phase research when teachers are faced with personal and

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workplace challenges (see section on “Professional Life Phases”). In understanding the underlying factors and the symptoms of burnout, educational leaders may begin to support teachers’ sense of motivation and fulfillment into and through the veteran years. In addition, teacher educators can inform pre-service and beginning teachers as to the pitfalls of the profession and how to deal with them, while teachers themselves can ask for assistance and the proper services in combating this phenomenon. The following section on teacher renewal offers a path towards such support.

Teacher Renewal

The research on teacher renewal is not as prevalent as the literature on teacher depletion and burnout (Strayton, 2009). In fact, studies on teacher renewal thus far tend to focus on a particular renewal program. Much of the literature is grounded on a perspective of teaching as a vocation and builds on the premise that teachers play an active role in their development and revitalization.

According to Strayton, the two most cited studies on teacher renewal are Bolin (1987) and Palmer (1998). Bolin (1987) defined teacher renewal as “to begin or do over again; make new; restore and reestablish; become new with growth” (pp. 13-14). Bolin presented the basic elements of renewal properties: imaginative reflection, affirmation, focus on objective reality, and taking action as the consequence of the renewal experience.

This process of stepping back, acknowledging, focusing, and being called to action undergirds many of the renewal processes researched during the past two decades. Palmer’s book, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (1998), was not a work specifically focused on teacher renewal, but it has resulted in an entire line of books, retreats, and studies based upon the principles of Palmer’s work. For Palmer, teacher formation

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is a professional development approach that invites educators to reclaim their identity and passion while creating a link between their renewal and the revitalization of education. Palmer underscored the importance of the personal meaning, choices, and experiences of the teacher, or what he called the inner landscape. Palmer is most concerned with the inner being of the teacher and recognizes that our best educative experiences for students come not simply out of structures set up from the outside, but from teachers who continue to explore, understand, and invest in the development of their inner landscapes.

Palmer's thesis contains significant implications for the prevention and treatment of teacher depletion and burnout. Although changes to the environmental factors would be ideal, Palmer voiced the findings of many researchers: that the individual must simultaneously learn how to deal with the problem (Cohen, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010; Intrator, 2002; Nias, 1999; Nieto, 2003). Others, such as Byrne (1991), argued that whether particular conditions lead to stress and burnout largely depend upon the manner in which they are experienced by the teacher. Douglas (1994) found in his mixed-methods study of secondary school teachers in eight districts in Connecticut that teacher burnout is considerably influenced by the psychological disposition of an individual and is aggravated by the institution and environment in which that individual works. When teachers only focus on blaming the institutions and environments in which they work as cause for the high stress they experience, they do not take action to protect themselves from the factors contributing to burnout. On the other hand, teachers who accept responsibility to respond to the high stress they experience in the work place and take positive steps to manage the conditions contributing to disillusionment, frustration, and stress are less likely to burn out. Moreover, teachers who take the responsibility for maintaining their mental and physical health exercise greater self-awareness, which in itself is a protective factor against burnout

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(Freudenberger & Richelson, 1980; Truch, 1980). Yet, it is the renewal and rejuvenation of teachers throughout their career, rather than only when burnout is evident, that can support them in sustaining their vision and passion for their vocation.

Intrator and Kunzman (2006) described a teacher formation program called the Courage to Teach based on Palmer's work. At Courage to Teach (now renamed the Center for Courage and Renewal) retreats, participants explore what is at the heart of teaching for each of them. By investigating personal and professional beliefs, participants can see the links between these beliefs and their teaching. This inner exploration sets the foundation for what these teachers need to engage within their jobs: pedagogy, content and policy. Poutiatine (2005) surveyed 41 and then 51 teachers from the Courage to Teach program for his empirical research study and concluded that participation in it had resulted in significant personal and professional growth. Participants are now able to articulate a rekindled sense of passion for their work, concentrate more on creating hospitable learning environments for students, dedicate more attention to framing good questions and listening to students, clarify and renew core beliefs, commit to taking on leadership roles, and strengthen their appreciation for collegial relationships. As Intrator and Kunzman argued, without setting the groundwork that creates purposeful, resilient teachers, any benefits of training focused on new procedures, techniques and strategies will ultimately disappear. Overloaded teachers who work in isolation will not retain what it takes to do their most inspired teaching. The way to truly increase teachers' capacities and skills is to "engage their souls" (p. 42).

Palmer's program to revitalize teachers through teacher formation has strong research to back it, but it is not widely known in K-12 public school districts, particularly in California. Gallagher (2013), an Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources of a school district in

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northern California, recommended strategies to address the social and emotional needs of teachers in order to improve teacher retention, teacher/student resilience and academic achievement. The research Gallagher presented shows clear connections between the role of resilience and teacher effectiveness and complements the current discussions on the significance of social-emotional learning for teachers and students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The active support of the teacher's social-emotional well-being builds the student's social-emotional well-being. The three main strategies used in this effort are educator support groups, meta-coaching and comprehensive resilience services. Educator support groups are led by mental health professionals for veteran teachers and focus on building resilience and knowledge around the issues of social emotional well-being in the classroom. Meta-coaching by mental health experts concentrates on mentoring both teachers and students as well as fostering resilience in the classroom. Comprehensive resilience services include professional development and training, social emotional learning curriculum, teacher support groups and the on-site services of a resilience coach. Gallagher (2013) argued that the outcomes from these strategies can motivate educators to create authentic, caring relationships with their students.

Summary on Career Plateauing, Depletion and Burnout, and Teacher Renewal

For Day and Gu (2010) when policy makers ignore the specific needs of veteran teachers faced with serious challenges, they fail to realize the long-term investment that they and their employers have made to teaching. In theory, this group of teachers should be at the peak of their expertise and teaching wisdom, as well as providing a model for their less experienced colleagues, rather than fighting off career plateauing, depletion, and burnout. Although in a "perfect world," school districts and sites would meet the needs of veteran teachers in supporting them through these challenges, this is not usually the case. Instead, researchers have advocated

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that teachers develop their own set of strategies to manage the stressors that the profession entails.

Teacher renewal – or the renewal of the “soul of the teacher” – has been shown to be a promising practice in aligning the teacher’s values with his or her experience as a teacher. It invites educators to reclaim their identity and passion while creating a connection between their renewal and the revitalization of education, thereby reigniting the passion and commitment so needed to survive and thrive in the profession. In other words, it places the locus of control – to reiterate one of the internal factors of depletion and burnout – squarely back with the teacher.

If teacher renewal is one way to heal the veteran teacher who has lost his or her commitment to the profession, then perhaps, inversely, veteran teachers who continue to stay engaged and find meaning are already drawing upon this resource of their “inner landscape” and thus, renewing themselves continuously. What does the “inner landscape” of a committed veteran teacher look like? And how do these teachers retain the strength and vitality of that landscape in order to teach to their best? The next part of this review will explore the terrain of this landscape – what I call “The Personal Characteristics of Teachers” - and what it entails.

The Personal Characteristics of Teachers

Day and Gu (2010) found that veteran teachers, when interviewed, referred most often to their intellectual and emotional selves while describing what it meant to be a teacher and what kept them going in the changing policy, social, situational and personal realities of the profession. According to these researchers, teacher effectiveness is “the product of the preparation and continuing support of both the head (cognition) and the heart (emotion)” (p. 17).

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For these reasons, it is in the exploration of the heart that common personal characteristics emerge in describing teachers who continue to thrive. The personal characteristics that will be explored in this literature review are: 1) a passion for teaching, 2) a passion for students, 3) teacher identity and integrity, 4) teacher efficacy, and 5) resilience (see Figure 5). According to the researchers that follow, these characteristics can directly influence teachers' commitment to and engagement with their students, and their decision to remain in the profession even when the passage of time can predict disengagement.

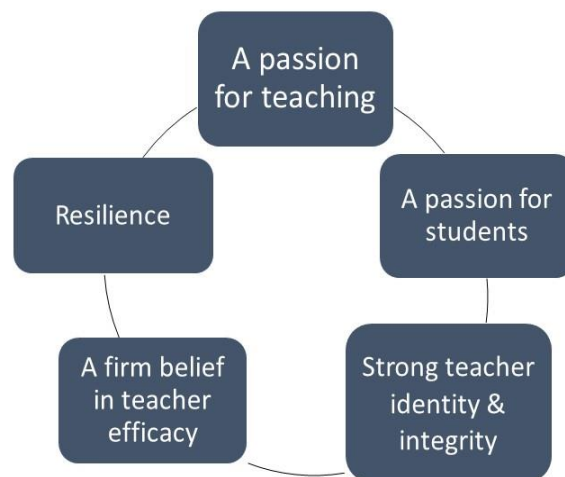


Figure 5. The personal characteristics of teachers.

A Passion for Teaching

The idea of teaching as a “calling” is not a novel one; rather, it has been defined and analyzed profusely in the literature. The word “vocation” comes from the Latin root, *vocare*, meaning “to call” (McMahon, 2003). It denotes a summons or a beckoning to a certain way of life. Teachers who are passionate about what they do often consider themselves public servants

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who are highly motivated by the personal meaning and fulfillment they receive from their work (Schwartz & Alberts, 1998). Gustafson (1982) even suggested that in order for an endeavor to be a calling, it must have both an inward and outward significance. Hence, teaching can be described as a vocation because it meets the criterion of providing meaning and value both to society and the individual (Hansen, 1995; Huebner, 1987). Greene (2005) recalled how she realized that she was a teacher. She referred to the challenging and exciting prospect of being able to move just one person to live “with more wonder and curiosity and imagination in pursuit of meaning” (p. 61). Nias (1999) went even further by seeing teaching as an arena in which educators can act upon their values, translating into action what they believe is important and worthwhile. In a similar vein, Palmer (1998) affirmed that teachers’ sense of vocation or calling provides a sense of purpose for their actions as well as facilitating the management of their experiences, commitment, and well-being. He proposed that a calling is not initiated from some external source, but resides within as part of the authentic self. He explained that he didn’t learn pedagogical methods to imitate from outstanding teachers, but rather, he learned a way of being himself in the world, of believing in who he was, because those teachers modeled that. They demonstrated that teaching is “a daily exercise in vulnerability” (1998, p. 17). For Huebner (1987) the fact that vulnerability can be challenging distinguishes teaching as a vocation in the first place. For him, taking on a calling cannot be done “without risk” (p. 25). This vocation can be threatened by “apathetic and mediocre environments, the challenges of society, and the complexity of the task” (Carotta, 1999, p. 136). However, if looked at in a positive light, the idea of vocation invites self-scrutiny and self-reflection which can enrich the teacher’s practice as well as fulfillment in the profession (Hansen, 1995).

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Regarding teaching as a calling can also be a beneficial factor to solving the obstacles inherent in the educational system. Hansen (1995) believed that regarding teaching as a vocation can shift the focus from one of frustrating barriers and insurmountable problems to one of hope and challenge. What were once considered roadblocks, become sources of interest, new opportunities and possibilities. Huebner (1987) even went as far to embrace the idea of teaching as a vocation as an important aspect of school reform. If teachers were allowed time for reflection, conversation, and connection as evolving individuals, schools would benefit and educational communities would be restructured.

What about the way teachers who consider teaching a calling actually teach? Do these teachers display a certain *teaching style*? The literature clearly agrees that what some would call teaching style is really an outgrowth of personality and preference. Teaching style remains independent of policy and prescription (Cohen, 1991). In fact, teachers who are passionate about teaching are less concerned with external expectations, which suggests strongly constructed personal, foundational, and contextual knowledge (Friedman & Reynolds, 2011). However, Day (2012) reminded the reader that without organizational support, bringing a passionate self to teaching effectively every day of every week can be stressful, not only to the body, but also to the heart and soul. Passion can diminish with the passage of time as a result of changing external and internal working conditions and contexts, and unanticipated personal events. Brookfield (1995) even cautioned teachers that they must keep in check their tendency to translate a sense of vocation into self-destructive workaholism. This tendency is witnessed most in descriptions of teacher depletion and burnout (see section entitled “Depletion and Burnout” above). Despite the possibility of this, however, the literature along with the popular public conception of educators,

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views teachers with a passion for teaching as those who most likely love what they do and consider teaching as their life's work.

A Passion for Students

Students universally identify outstanding teachers as those who care (Day & Gu, 2010). Noddings (1992) claimed that caring is a fundamental human need, whether for the caretaker or the cared for. Caring teachers share a deep empathy with their learners, can identify with them and be their advocate. As an example, Freire (1985) remembered how the teachers, in whose classes he excelled, were the ones who treated and nurtured him as a special person as well as pushed and challenged him to study and perform to his full potential. Outstanding teachers ask, "Who is this person before me?", rather than use a limiting label to categorize the student which only offers a single lens concentrated on a specific deficit rather than seeing a student's ever-changing strengths (Ayers, 2001). These teachers also realize that if they don't know about their students, they will not be able to influence them. Nieto (2003) in her case study exploring why seven outstanding Boston public high school teachers have stayed in teaching claimed that the one factor that might prevent students from dropping out of school is having an adult who knows them well and cares for them. For Nieto, high expectations need to be based on an unshakeable belief that, with hard work and support, all students are possible of reaching impressive heights. Furthermore, Noddings (1992) advised teachers to listen to their students and to try to connect what the teacher thinks the student should learn with what the student wants to learn. By connecting these two points, teachers will have a wonderful partnership with kids or students of any age.

Simultaneously, caring for students can be beneficial to the teacher. Ayers (2001) wrote that there is a particularly powerful satisfaction in caring in a time of carelessness. Caring is

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directly tied in with the rewards of teaching, which above all else, is knowing that your life makes a difference. In fact, caring can be considered an antidote to the pervasive feeling of powerlessness teachers sometimes experience in schools. Strayton (2009) referred to Nias's study (1981) in which 100 interviewed graduates trained to teach in the primary schools found that fulfillment in teaching mostly came from teachers giving of themselves. Michie (2011) wrote how the “saving grace” was always the kids themselves and how it was the personal relationships that made everything else worthwhile (p. 64). McMahon (2003), in her qualitative study of teacher renewal, analyzed the interviews of 11 teachers and found that the characteristic most commonly revealed when considering the rewards of teaching was overwhelmingly a love of kids. In fact, her participants described how when things got too stressful, they just closed the door to be reenergized by their students. This ability to focus on the students no matter what has been found to be a key strategy for successful veteran teachers. Cohen (2009) reached the same conclusion in her ethnographic study of two veteran, urban high school teachers while exploring what character traits support both longevity and ongoing engagement among veterans. One of the teachers said, “I think one key to my longevity is to always assume the best about every kid . . . You *have* to assume the best” (p. 481).

It can further be argued that it is the caring human being that helps to define the caring teacher. Nieto (2003) emphasized this point that it is the teacher as human being that students notice when she quoted a veteran social studies teacher as saying: “Our students may not be able to read a textbook, but they can sure read you” (p. 110). One trait that all good teachers share is the capacity for connectedness; they all connect their selfhood with their students and their subject (Palmer, 2005). Likewise, the ways in which teachers form their professional identities are influenced by both how they feel about themselves and how they feel about their students

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(James-Wilson, 2001). In fact, good teachers think of their destinies and those of their students as entwined (Nieto, 2003).

According to the literature cited above, caring is not just a show of benevolence or a gift to those in need. Rather, it is a solid faith in the capability of students to learn, sometimes in spite of evidence to the contrary. Nieto (2003) reminded the reader that caring through building relationships is crucial not only for student achievement, but also for teacher retention. It is the teacher's role to find ways to sustain the qualities of caring as active and healthy in environments that aim to diminish students and in situations bent on destruction (Ayers, 2001).

Teacher Identity and Integrity

If the teacher is an influential part of the teaching-learning experience, then studying the teacher – who he or she is or thinks he or she is – becomes essential. Researchers have called this “teacher identity” (McMahon, 2003). According to Jersild (1955), the self (on which teacher identity is built) is the composite of a person's awareness of his or her existence. In other words, it is the conception of who he or she is and “the citadel of one's own being and worth and the stronghold from which one moves out to others” (pp. 134-135).

For Palmer (1998), the key to a teacher's fulfillment is whereby one's *identity* as a teacher coincides with one's *integrity* as a teacher. Palmer defined integrity as what the self determines is integral to his or her selfhood, what fits and what does not. In other words, it means “becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am” (p. 13). In a similar vein, Rogers (1971) maintained that true identity lies beneath the defensive masks that humans create in order to protect themselves or to project a certain image. Likewise, Jersild (1952) described integrity as a process by which the individual develops the potential resources of his or her “real

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self” and uses them in a way that is in accord with a total way of life. The essential question then becomes “How can I become my real self?” In contrast, according to Jersild, a person who lacks integrity is alienated from him or herself as there are inclinations within him or her that are incompatible and therefore, in conflict. As a result, this person must then pretend to be what he or she is not, play a role, or put on an act.

The alienation that Jersild described above is part of the cynicism that Maslach (1982) depicted in his writings on the three stages of burnout (see section on “Depletion and Burnout” above). Teachers can become divided from their authentic selves because according to Palmer (1998), the enterprise of teaching is one of vulnerability. In order to reduce their sense of vulnerability, teachers who lack integrity disconnect from their students, subjects, and even from themselves. They build a wall between inner truth and outer performance. One veteran teacher (Tompkins, 1996) even wrote about her experiences of vulnerability before her students and her subsequent journey of self-exploration and discovery. As she began to recapture her sense of self, she also began to change the way she taught, as she focused more on the students and their identities than on her own fears of lacking expertise and performance skill as a teacher.

Yet, why would teacher identity and integrity be so important to the study of veteran teachers? A number of researchers have found that the connection between integral teacher identity and teaching effectiveness is a strong one, particularly in how the teacher relates to his or her students (Fuller, 1971; Hamacheck, 1999; Jersild, 1955; Luiz, N. & Hereford, H.C., 1971; Palmer, 1998). Hamacheck (1999) stated that while most people would agree that the more teachers know about their subject, the better they teach, it is also said that the more teachers know about themselves, the better their decisions about how to prepare the path for better teaching and learning. He wrote, “We remember our teachers, not so much for what they taught,

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but for who they were and are . . . Students may be attracted to a teacher's mind, but it is the essence of a teacher's self-hood that is remembered" (p. 208). For Hamacheck, the teaching self contributes to the positive or negative tone of a classroom and to the students' receptivity to learning. Luiz and Hereford (1971) even went as far to contend that the way the message is conveyed is more important than the message itself, and this way depends on the teacher's relationship to his or her identity. They wrote that the teacher's "characteristic way of interacting, of communicating the subject-area information, and of implementing teaching techniques sometimes is the most important thing a student can learn" (p. ix). Fuller (1971) broadened this argument by claiming that "what teachers *are* speaks so loudly that students cannot hear what they say" (p. 3). By extension, Jersild (1955) argued that a teacher's understanding and acceptance of him or herself is the most significant factor in any effort made to help one's students to know and accept themselves. Pedagogy in the traditional sense is not advocated exclusively in these cases; rather, it is the teacher's "undivided self" that will lead to caring relationships with students, and therefore, good teaching practice (Palmer, 1998, p. 15).

The integrated teacher who has totally embraced his or her teaching self is also seen as one who will be faced with important, even moral, choices as opposed to the teacher who merely sees teaching as a role or a job. Britzman (1994) addressed this difference when she spoke of the moment when the beginning teacher discovers that a role can be assigned, but forming an identity is a continuous exercise in negotiation. An identity requires the commitment of the self (what one believes and thinks) to teaching, even a state of being, while acting out a role (what one is supposed to do) does not (Danielewicz, 2001). However, such a dichotomy between identity and role is precisely what causes many teachers to question their professional choice.

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Danielewicz saw the battle as being one of loyalties: “A teacher must rise to the occasion time after time; the self goes on the line every day” (p. 10).

Teacher Efficacy

Veteran teachers often equate their commitment to teaching with how much of an impact they feel they are making on their students’ learning (Day & Gu, 2010). Teacher efficacy has been defined as a teacher’s belief or conviction that he or she can shape how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Teachers with a high level of efficacy believe that they can control, or at least strongly influence, student achievement and motivation. Individuals who believe they make a difference through their work are better able to tolerate the frustrations they encounter, approaching their challenges with enthusiasm (Day & Gu, 2010; Meister & Ahrens, 2011). Such resiliency, in turn, tends to foster innovative teaching and student learning (Goddard, Hoy, & Wollfolk Hoy, 2004). Coladarci (1992) found in his quantitative study of 170 teachers in Maine that self-efficacy (along with collective efficacy) emerged as the two strongest predictors of teaching commitment.

One of the features that makes teacher efficacy so powerful in terms of its results is the cyclical nature of the process (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). According to Bandura (1997), people have constructed beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of attainment. These beliefs, in turn, influence how much effort people put forth, how long they will persist in the face of obstacles, how resilient they are in dealing with failures, and how much stress or depression they have experienced in coping with demanding situations. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) in their article proposing a model for teacher efficacy found that the proficiency of a task creates a new mastery experience, which provides new information that will be processed to shape future efficacy beliefs. Greater efficacy leads to greater effort and

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persistence, which leads to better performance. However, the reverse is also true. Lower efficacy leads to less effort and giving up easily, which in turn leads to poor teaching outcomes. Hence, the cycle becomes the past and a source of future efficacy beliefs.

However, teacher efficacy does not materialize on its own; it must be supported. Several studies (Cohen, 1988; Kremer, L. & Hofman, 1981) have shown that employees' levels of enthusiasm for their work increases when they are given ample freedom and independence along with support to achieve the tasks. Moreover, school context affects teacher efficacy through factors, such as, the subject matter, the particular group of students taught, the sense of community in the school, school climate, leadership's ability to buffer teachers from disruptive factors, and teacher participation in school decisions. Moreover, the recent research conducted into "collective efficacy" or a collective sense of efficacy is likely to promote good teaching and successful learning even more (Day & Gu, 2010). Goddard, et. al. (2004) in their analysis on existing research on self and organizational efficacy found that organizations with strong beliefs in group capability can tolerate pressure and crisis and continue to function without drastic consequences. In fact, these organizations learn to rise to the challenge when confronted with disruptive forces. However, while it is possible for individual self-efficacy to survive in organizational contexts in which others do not have the same efficacy beliefs, the reverse is not the case. Hence, for schools to build perceived collective efficacy beliefs among staff, they must first attend to those of the individuals who work within them (Day & Gu, 2010).

If one of the reasons teachers go into teaching is to make a positive difference in students' lives, then a teacher's self-efficacy is logically one of the measures by which that teacher will view his or her success on the job. Whether or not a veteran teacher succumbs to

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resistance, depletion or withdrawal during his or her career will very well depend on how much he or she feels that his or her labor is bearing fruit.

Resilience

According to Day and Gu (2010), teaching is unique in that teachers must cope with adverse circumstances in the “minefields” of every school day (p. 175). Although at its best, teaching is immensely rewarding, it is also emotionally draining and physically exhausting. It is those who are able to manage the connections between their educational values, beliefs and deepest callings with those of their colleagues and organizations through the ability to adapt who are most likely to overcome possible setbacks. This is what researchers call “resilience.”

Masten (1989) defined resilience as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation, despite challenging or threatening circumstances. Great teaching demands an openness to something new, unique or dynamic (Ayers, 2001). To survive in the profession, teachers need to be flexible enough to jump into the water and swim. Cohen (1991) found that the daily stage fright that some outstanding teachers claim to experience is what motivates them to prepare meticulously for each class, even after years of teaching. There is no resting on past laurels, no complacency, no jadedness. These teachers still feel that they must prove themselves each day. If they view teaching as a vocation, rather than as just a job, they will usually consider the challenges and complexities of their work as sources of interest, not as barriers or frustrating obstacles to be overcome (Hansen, 1995). Teachers’ experiences and educational values will also serve as important sources of wisdom and strength, which will then enable them to bounce back from adverse circumstances and continue to fulfill their original calling to teach (Day & Gu, 2010).

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Based on their interviews with primary and secondary teachers throughout the United Kingdom, Day and Gu (2010) described resilience in three interrelated settings: individual, relational and organizational. According to the researchers, these settings influence their teachers' sense of professional self, wellbeing and capacity to teach to their best. In exploring individual resilience, Day and Gu quoted Bandura (1997) as arguing that "those who have a strong belief in their capabilities redouble their effort to master the challenges" (p. 120), with the belief being defined as personal efficacy. Day and Gu (2010) refer to one of their veteran teachers in the study, concluding that because he still experiences joy and considers teaching as a vocation, he is resilient in the final phase of his professional life. Palmer (1998) as cited by Day and Gu considered a teacher's sense of vocation as providing a sense of purpose for his or her actions and hence, a source of strength in the management of one's commitment. However, it is the teacher's commitment to being a lifelong learner that contributes to this resilience. Margolis (2008) concluded that opportunities which promote teachers' learning and enable them to share their gifts with others are what keep good teachers teaching. This conclusion aligns with the study of four veteran secondary school teachers and their ability to resist plateauing by Meister and Ahrens (2011). According to the researchers, plateauing can occur when one's situation is considered to be stagnant and lacking challenges. When work is perceived as repetitive and the possibility of promotion is remote, teachers are likely to experience a sense of loss, which can lead to skepticism about ever finding career fulfillment. Such feelings, in turn, cause these teachers to lose enthusiasm and energy, which can lead to a sense of hopelessness and a reduction in performance. Finally, Cohen (2009) found another behavior that contributes to a teacher's individual resilience: what she calls "useful amnesia" (p. 481). In her qualitative study on two inner-city veteran teachers, she claimed they both had an uncommon ability to forget bad

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experiences – to put aside unpleasant or depressing events in a school day, and move forward. This behavior also allowed these teachers to see each day as a “fresh start” with their students (p. 481).

Relational resilience – the second of the three terms previously described - depends on supportive and collaborative relationships within the workplace (Day & Gu, 2010). Neuroscientists have found that the social brain reveals that “we are wired to connect,” so that “resonant relationships are like emotional vitamins, sustaining us through tough times and nourishing us daily” (Goleman, 2007, p. 4, 312). To illustrate this point, Fessler & Christensen (1992) claimed that if teachers are to improve what they do and gain more satisfaction from their work, building resilience from the critical and long-standing relationships with their colleagues is essential. In particular, teachers working in schools under challenging socio-economic circumstances quickly learn the importance of mutual trust and support in order to sustain their morale, sense of efficacy, well-being, and effectiveness (Day & Gu, 2010). Such trusting relationships between teachers is of vital importance in building a sense of collective resilience. “By making connections with one another . . . people are able to work together to achieve things they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty” (Field, 2008). This is especially significant for veteran teachers as isolation is one of the main characteristics in the latter stages of the professional life phases (see section entitled “Professional Life Phases” below). Nieto (2003) stressed that schools need to become places where teachers find community and engage in intellectual work because a learning community is a key incentive in keeping teachers going.

In contrast to the nature of individual and relational resilience, organizational resilience - the third interrelated term - emphasizes the effectiveness of the organizational context, structure

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and system and on how the system functions as a whole to create supportive environments for individuals' professional learning and development (Day & Gu, 2010). As the current landscape of teaching is bursting with successive and persisting government and private policy reforms that have augmented teachers' external accountabilities, work complexity and emotional workload, schools that function as learning communities can promote and nurture organizational resilience. Horne and Orr (1998) as cited in Day and Gu (2010) proposed seven "C's" to describe essential features of resilient organizations: community, competence, connections, commitment, communication, coordination and consideration. Yet, most studies concluded that the key to organizational resilience is the presence of good leadership (Fullan, 2008; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Ross, Gray, & Sibbald, 2008). Committed and trustworthy leaders are vital to resilient schools (Day & Gu, 2010). "[Leaders] inspire or demoralize others, first by how effectively they manage their own energy and next by how well they manage, focus, invest and renew the collective energy of those they lead" (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, p. 5).

Resilience is a multi-faceted and fluid construct with its nature and longevity determined by various factors. However, if teachers can manage the interactions between their internal values, sense of professional competence and the external environments in which they work and live, they will be capable of exercising their resilient qualities, rebounding from disappointments and adversity, and sustaining their commitment to the profession, thereby increasing their effectiveness as educators. In an era when organizational and professional change is inevitable in order to meet new local, national and global social and economic challenges, it is those who are supported in managing these connections through the exercise of individual, relational and organizational resilience who are most likely to overcome any setbacks (Day & Gu, 2010).

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Summary of the Personal Characteristics of Teachers

Research on the affective dimensions of teachers – or what I call their personal characteristics – is crucial because these features reinforce the association between cognition and emotion, a vital link in teaching to one’s best (Day & Gu, 2010). The five characteristics discussed in the previous sections are considered to have a direct effect on a teacher’s sense of commitment to the profession. A passion for teaching is demonstrated by teachers who are highly motivated by the personal meaning and fulfillment of their work. A passion for students illustrates that caring is beneficial for both student learning and teacher longevity. The alignment of a teacher’s sense of identity and integrity is critical in how an educator connects to his or her students and stays true to his or herself in the process. A teacher who believes he or she is making a difference in the classroom – also known as self-efficacy - can weather the challenges that come with the terrain. Finally, all of these characteristics contribute to a teacher’s sense of resilience - whether it be individual, relational or organizational – and remind us that such a quality is a requirement to persevering and growing in the profession.

The topic of personal teacher characteristics is rarely considered by policy makers, teacher educators and school administrators when looking at how to nurture, develop and sustain teachers over time. The number of teachers who experience depletion at some point in their careers attests to this omission. If we are to discuss teacher quality, then we need to look at the *whole* teacher, not just his or her qualifications. Future research focusing on the role these personal characteristics play in the careers of veteran teachers would further illuminate the impact of the emotional and intellectual selves on teacher satisfaction, well-being and commitment.

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Professional Life Phases

Most research literature tends to conceptualize a teacher's life in terms of a career (Day & Gu, 2010). A handful of researchers have created a framework for looking at the whole of a teacher's career trajectory and thus, have enumerated the salient characteristics these teachers share depending on the stage they find themselves in (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000; Vonk, 1989). Like the career development process described in other professions, the teacher career cycle is usually divided into distinct phases, but characterized in this case by groups of teachers who demonstrate similar professional features and needs. Although teacher career cycles fall under various titles, I prefer to use the term coined by Day and Gu (2010) "professional life phases" (PLPs) to describe this process. According to Day and Gu, a professional life phase is a unique time period over the course of a teacher's professional career; however, it distinguishes itself from simply a "career phase" as it provides a more nuanced and holistic account of the complexities and variations in the trajectories of teachers over time (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, Gu, & Smees, 2006). Additionally, it helps capture not only the impact of psychological and sociological factors on teachers' work and lives, but also that of personal, emotional and organizational factors (Day & Gu, 2010). Moreover, the study of PLPs provides deeper insights into the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the influences on teachers' learning, change and development and thus, their capacity to teach to the best of their ability.

Table 1 below indicates the principal features of each of the PLPs discussed in this section.

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Table 1

Professional Life Phases (PLPs)

	<i>Professional Life Cycle of Teachers</i>	<i>Teachers' Professional Development Phases</i>	<i>Career Cycle Model</i>	<i>Professional Life Phases</i>	<i>Life Cycle of the Career Teacher</i>
Author (year published)	Huberman (1989)	Vonk (1987)	Fessler & Christensen (1992)	Day & Gu (2010)	Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz (2000)
Rationale	To see what determines more & less "successful" teachers	To do a longitudinal study on beginning teachers' professional development	To analyze the influence of personal & organizational environments on a teacher's career stage	To correlate a teacher's commitment, well-being, identity & effectiveness to the number of years of teaching	To advocate a model whereby teachers develop through progressive phases to sustain career-long excellence
Data based on	30 and then 160 secondary school teachers in Geneva & Vaud, Switzerland	Case studies of teachers and a review of the literature	Teacher observations, case studies & interviews, and a review of the literature on adult development & life stages	A mixed-methods study on 300 English & math teachers in the United Kingdom in different phases of their careers	No data used
Phases linked to years of teaching experience?	Yes	No		Yes	No
Phases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Survival & discovery (yrs. 1-3) · Stabilization (yrs. 4-6) · Experimentation/ diversification <u>or</u> stocktaking/ interrogation (yrs. 7-18)* · Serenity <u>or</u> <u>conservatism</u> (yrs. 19-31)* · Disengagement (yrs. 31+) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Preprofessional · Threshold · Growing into the profession · First professional phase · Reorientation* · Second professional phase* · Running down* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Preservice · Induction · Competency building · Enthusiastic & growing · Career frustration* · Career stability* · Career wind-down* · Career exit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Commitment (yrs. 0-3) · Identity & efficacy in classroom (yrs. 4-7) · Managing changes in role & identity (yrs. 8-15)* · Work-life tensions (yrs. 16-23)* · Challenges to sustaining motivation (yrs. 24-30)* · Sustaining/ declining motivation, ability to cope with change, looking to retire (yrs. 31+)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Novice · Apprentice · Professional · Expert · Distinguished · Emeritus

Notes: *=phases that are applicable to veteran teachers

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The study of the career development process for teachers began with Huberman who created a preliminary model with 30 teachers (1978-79), followed by an extended study (1982-85) with 160 secondary teachers in Geneva and Vaud, Switzerland (see Figure 6). Later considered a benchmark for PLPs worldwide (Day & Gu, 2010), Huberman's Professional Life Cycle of Teachers was based on the core assumption that

... there will be commonalities among teachers in the sequencing of their professional lives ... [and that we] can begin to identify modal profiles of the teaching career and, from these, see what determines more and less "successful" or "satisfactory" careers (Huberman, 1995, p. 94).

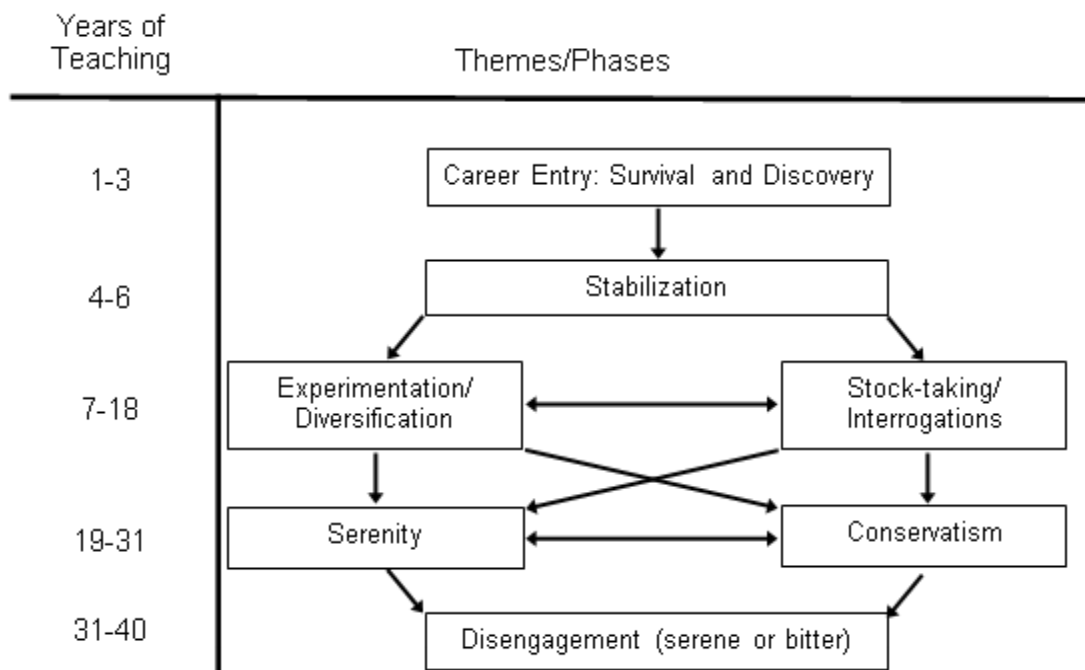


Figure 6. Huberman's Professional Life Cycle of Teachers (Joerger, 2010).

Huberman's identification of characteristics of teachers' career phases focused on central tendencies of change in these educators' "state of mind" which could be unpredictable and discontinuous (Day & Gu, 2010).

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Unlike Huberman's model, Vonk (1989) developed his Teachers' Professional Development Phases on a review of the literature and case studies of teachers (see Figure 7). The framework was used for a longitudinal study on beginning teachers' professional development. Vonk claimed that his model includes three views of professional development: 1) the acquisition of knowledge, attitude and skills; 2) the teacher's individual growth; and 3) the particularities of the school environment.

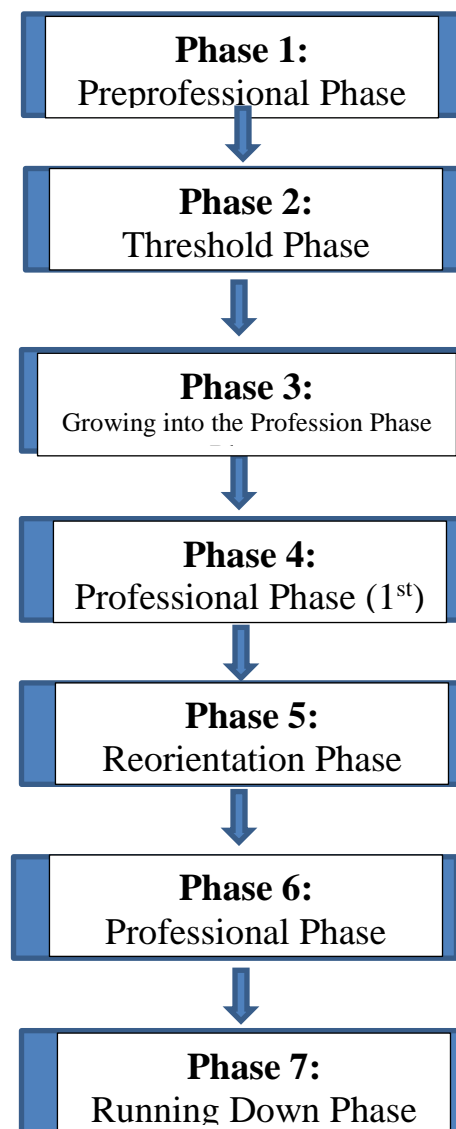


Figure 7. Vonk's Teachers' Professional Development Phases (Fessler & Christensen, 1992).

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Fessler and Christensen's Career Cycle Model (1992) differs from both Huberman's and Vonk's models because it offers a view of the career progression process comprised of influences from both personal and organizational environmental factors (see Figure 6). Rather than experiencing a linear progression from one step to the next, teachers experience the stages in this model in a dynamic manner reflecting responses to their environmental factors, thus creating a dynamic ebb and flow with teachers responding by moving up, down, and through various stages. This model was developed by observing common practice, interviewing teachers, conducting case studies, and reviewing the literature of adult development and life stages. For Fessler and Christensen, the model could be used to develop an appropriate responsive program of support to assist teachers to adjust to their new circumstances, whether they had 10 or 20 years of experience.

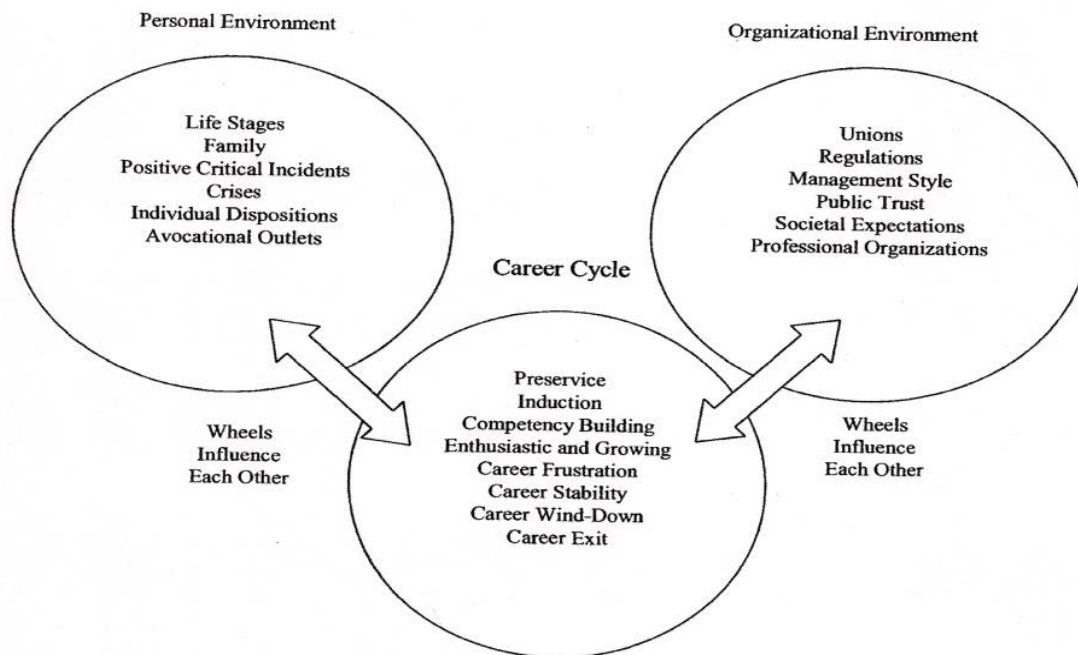


Figure 9. Fessler & Christensen's Career Cycle Model (1992).

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Day and Gu (2010) expanded the models conceived up to that point by creating a framework that encompasses teachers' cognitive, emotional, personal and moral engagement in the profession (see Figure 9). For these researchers, it is the impact of teachers' professional learning and development trajectories along with the identification of the nature of their professional lives over time on teachers' commitment and wellbeing in the social, political and personal environments in which they live and work that is significant. Like their predecessors, Day and Gu based their model on a study of actual teachers at different phases of their careers.

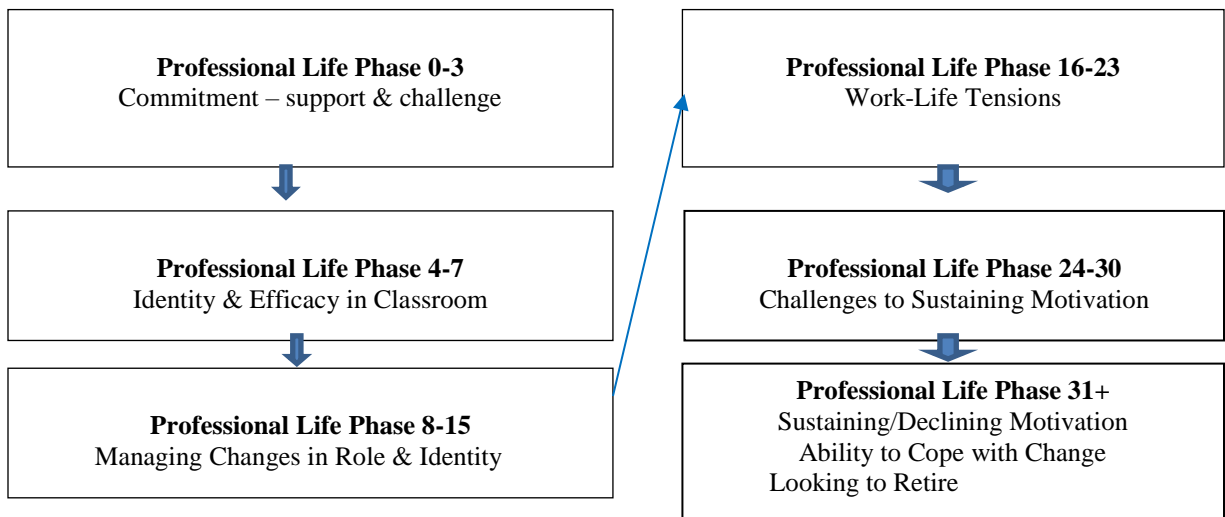


Figure 10. Day & Gu's Professional Life Phases (2010).

Unlike any of the models discussed so far, the Life Cycle of the Career Teacher by Steffy, et. al. (2000) is a model where teachers must develop through progressive phases to sustain a career-long standard of excellence (see Figure 10). It offers a prescription for enhancing the teaching profession in addition to describing teacher development. Steffy, et. al's model constitutes a vision of teaching that can bridge preservice and in-service teacher education, create a viable platform to provide professional-growth opportunities for teachers throughout their

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lifetime, and enable all teachers to attain the status of competent, caring, and qualified professionals.

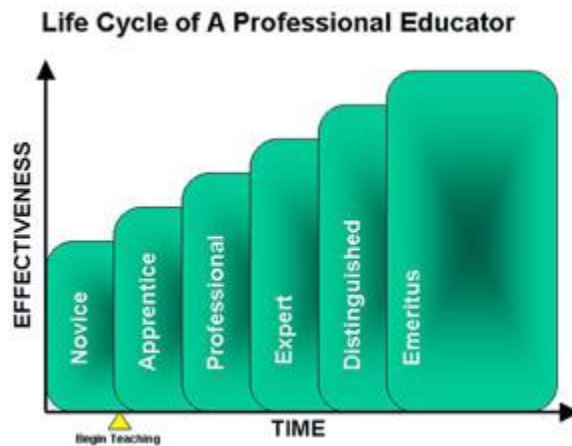


Figure 11. Life Cycle of the Career Teacher (Steffy, et al., 2000).

All of the PLPs cited in this review contain phases that help to define the characteristics and needs of veteran teachers. These phases generally take place in the middle or towards the end of a teacher's career (although they can appear earlier), and all of them, except for Vonk's (1987) and Steffy, et al.'s model (2000), involve some type of roadblock that the teachers will be forced to negotiate after having grown in competency and comfort in their earlier years of teaching. For Huberman (1989), the roadblock can appear somewhere between the 7th and 18th year of teaching, whereby teachers may follow the path of experimentation or diversification in which they might try various teaching strategies, assessments, and/or instructional content, or seek leadership roles. Other teachers during this same time period might take the path of stocktaking or interrogation in which they reflect upon their accomplishments and consider the time still remaining in the profession. These teachers may even consider other options to teaching during that phase. These latter teachers also tend to exhibit a more reticent attitude

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towards professional development and change. Like Huberman's model, Fessler and Christensen's career stages model (1992) also contains a phase (but which is not linked to the number of years of teaching experience) that follows a period in which the teacher has reached a high level of competence in the job. This phase is characterized by a disillusionment with teaching, career frustration, and sometimes job burnout. Day and Gu (2010) included three phases tied to the number of years of experience that can sow questioning and self-doubt: 1) professional life phase (years 8-15) whereby teachers are confronted with managing changes in their role and identity against a backdrop of growing tensions and transitions, 2) professional life phase (years 16-23) in which challenges to teachers' motivation and commitment result from work-life tensions, and 3) professional life phase (years 24-30) in which teachers experience challenges to sustaining motivation. For Day and Gu, teachers can maintain enthusiasm, commitment and effectiveness through these three phases if they are able to manage the challenges that confront them.

Vonk (1987) and Steffy, et. al. (2000) contrast greatly with Huberman (1989), Fessler and Christensen (1992), and Day and Gu (2010) in that the former researchers do not consider the roadblock phase as certain for all veteran teachers. Vonk's roadblock – the phase of reorientation to oneself and the profession - appears after the first professional phase of teaching whereby teachers demonstrate their accomplishments, skills and mastery. However, Vonk clearly admits that some teachers are able to maintain a high level of enthusiasm even after the first professional phase, as they move into career maturity as veteran teachers, thereby bypassing the career frustration and stagnation that others will experience. If teachers do enter the phase of reorientation to oneself and the profession (which Vonk did not link to years of experience), they will find themselves questioning and/or doubting their commitment to teaching. Job satisfaction

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could sink to a career low and some teachers may even experience job burnout, whereby the actual act of teaching becomes more difficult because of reduced energy and motivation.

Likewise, Steffy, et al.'s model (2000) does not include a formal period of questioning and possible self-doubt as it follows a trajectory of upward teaching development towards excellence and expertise based on a mechanism of reflection and renewal. Rather, teachers might break the mechanism by entering a phase of withdrawal that can happen at any time during the teacher's life. For Steffy, et. al., this phase is seen as a lack of engagement in the reflection-renewal cycle, rather than a response to some roadblock in the teacher's personal or professional life.

The teacher's response to the stages of self-questioning mentioned above will determine his or her continued engagement in or slow withdrawal from the profession. For Huberman (1989), following the phases of experimentation/diversification or stocktaking/interrogation, teachers can choose one of two phases. One phase – that of serenity (years 19 to 31) – is where teachers learn to accept their real selves in their professional roles, even if it means recognizing the difference between their initial and current levels of enthusiasm and energy. The other phase – that of conservatism (also years 19 to 31) – is where teachers may exhibit rigidity, reluctance to accept innovation, and discontent with the profession. For Strayton (2009), who wrote about Huberman for her dissertation, teachers who resolve the self-doubt that they might have exhibited in the stocktaking/interrogation phase as well as those who continue to engage in tinkering during the experimentation/differentiation phase tend to find themselves entering into the stage of serenity. Otherwise, teachers who are unable to resolve their self-doubt, but choose to remain in the profession, tend towards conservatism. Although most veteran teachers will find themselves in the phase of serenity or conservatism, some may experience the phase of experimentation/diversification or stocktaking/interrogation again as they find themselves in

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situations where they become reinvigorated or renewed in their profession, either due to professional or personal factors.

Both Vonk (1987) and Fessler and Christensen (1992) echo Huberman in that their phases of reorientation for the former and career frustration for the latter is a turning point in a teacher's career. In Vonk's model, teachers who find themselves entering the next phase – the second professional phase - can either continue to feel bitter, cynical, and pessimistic or try to develop a new professional perspective that allows them to rekindle their enthusiasm and develop new strategies to remain committed. In Fessler and Christensen's model, teachers who resolve their dilemma in the next phase – the career stability phase – may find it to be a time of consolidation and renewal, a time of stagnation, or a time of bitter resignation. For Day and Gu (2010), teachers in professional life phases 8-15, 16-23, and/or 24-30 will either find themselves holding onto a strong sense of motivation and commitment, thanks to further career advancement and/or positive pupil results, or remaining in the profession, but losing motivation.

In Steffy, et. al.'s model (2000), no phase exists uniquely for self-questioning or resolution. Instead, teachers move along the continuum of the PLP at different rates while being active participants in their own development either through the mechanisms of reflection and renewal or negatively by withdrawal or disengagement. Withdrawal can happen at any time during the teacher's life and break the reflection-renewal-growth cycle. Withdrawal also consists of three different stages: initial, persistent, and deep. Without help, an educator who begins the downward slide into initial withdrawal can become a detriment to students, schools, and the profession.

Finally, at the end of their careers, teachers in all the PLPs (except for Steffy, et al.) enter a final phase before retirement. For Huberman (1989), it is the phase of disengagement (years 31

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to 40) whereby teachers begin to withdraw from professional commitments and use the time for other meaningful activities. This last phase can be serene or bitter. For Vonk (1987), it is the running down phase which can be a pleasant, reflective experience or a bitter and resentful one. For Fessler & Christensen (1992), it is the career wind-down phase which echoes that of Vonk in its positive or negative outlook. Lastly, for Day and Gu (2010), it is the professional life phase sustaining/declining motivation, ability to cope with change and/or looking to retire (years 31+) whereby teachers find they can cope with change and remain committed, or feel tired and trapped as they look forward to retirement.

Summary of Professional Life Phases

All of the PLPs discussed were created in order to make sense of the intricate variations in the trajectories of teachers over time. Whether it be to determine if a teacher's career had been "successful" or "satisfactory" (Huberman, 1995, p. 193) or to lay down a road map towards teaching excellence (Steffy, et al., 2000), the models discussed reveal a professional trajectory that is subject to both personal and work factors. How teachers remain committed and stay engaged in their profession – whether it be their first or final year in their careers – is influenced by the internal and external contexts in which they practice, and these PLPs with their distinctive characteristics firmly make known the needs of the teachers they describe.

However detailed these PLPs may be in their descriptions of teachers' lives at various points of their trajectory, they do not address all the factors that would influence educators to stay in or leave the profession. For example, none of the PLPs enumerated above directly consider the effect gender has on a teacher's decision to continue with teaching (e.g., is teaching the primary income in the family? Are there childcare considerations that affect the choice of teaching as a profession?) As for socioeconomic considerations, none of the PLPs address the

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possibility of other career options as part of the choices teachers make while moving through the various phases. Although logically, teachers who encounter any phase involving career frustration will have most likely considered other options to their current profession, such a path is not directly addressed in the PLPs. Only the final phase, that of disengagement (Huberman, 1989), running down (Vonk, 1987), career exit (Fessler & Christensen, 1992), sustaining/declining motivation (Day & Gu, 2010), and emeritus (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000) offer the possibility of retirement as an alternative to staying in the teaching profession.

And for veteran teachers? What do the PLP models do to help us understand the needs of this group of teachers? Every model discussed above has a similar trajectory whereby the beginning teacher, after having grown in competency and comfort, will either be able to sustain his or her motivation and commitment throughout his or her career or be forced to negotiate a roadblock, a period where he or she will wonder if the right career path was chosen. Most likely, a teacher's enthusiasm will eventually rise and fall, like the stages in a marriage, whether due to the factors in the personal or organizational environment of Fessler and Christensen's Career Cycle Model (1992) or the questions and doubts that rise during the phase of reorientation in Vonk's Teachers' Professional Development Phases (1992). Whether or not this teacher will stay in the profession and retain his or her enthusiasm, even if selectively, or stagnate and do only the minimum, will depend on the ability with which he or she can negotiate the pitfalls of the profession and the different life and work scenarios that challenge his or her sense of identity, well-being and effectiveness. Knowledge of the impact of such interaction is key to achieving an understanding of what causes variations in teachers' professional lives and the quality of their teaching (Day & Gu, 2010).

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Consistencies and Gaps in the Literature

As this review has illustrated, veteran teachers are confronted with multiple challenges throughout their teaching careers. The literature on veteran teachers indicates that their needs require attention by school leaders and policymakers, but given the current state of educational policy in the United States, support is minimal and inadequate. Exploring how veteran teachers who remain committed and stay engaged in their work continue to do so provides a possible avenue on how to address these needs.

Although much of the research base is founded on qualitative studies, the findings have been remarkably consistent. Teachers who use their personal characteristics as “reserves in times of challenge” are able to fuel and promote their own sense of resilience and commitment for remaining enthusiastic in the profession (Frederickson, 2004). Although personal characteristics are difficult to rely upon solely without in-school support, the findings give pause to the role of individual factors in managing various challenges over a career in education.

The problem – and the gap – is that little research has been done on current veteran teachers in the field. Without an understanding of whether and how these teachers manage to navigate the personal, situated and policy-related circumstances over time and still enjoy what they do for a living, solutions for depleted and burnt-out teachers will be incomplete. Teachers need examples of other teachers who have survived and continue to thrive.

Implications

This literature review only scratches the surface of the needs of veteran teachers, the possibility of renewal after depletion and burnout, the role of personal characteristics in their commitment to teaching, and professional life cycles. Despite the sociopolitical context in which veteran teachers work, these educators can and do exert a great deal of power and influence in

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the lives of their students (Nieto, 2003). Good teaching and successful learning require the intellectual and emotional commitment of outstanding teachers (Day & Gu, 2010). The provision of appropriate and responsive support in these teachers' work contexts is key to ensuring and promoting the quality and well-being of their professional lives in teaching. "If our children need empathetic, caring, 'wide-awake' adults who can support students' academic, social and personal development," wrote Intrator (2002), "then we better attend to how our institutions support and sustain these people" (p. 154). Such support serves an important purpose in sustaining teachers' motivation and commitment as well as enabling them to teach at their best. Without support or recognition of worth, veteran teachers are at risk for undergoing diminished commitment, decreased job fulfillment, and a sense of detachment. Experiences such as these will only distance the teaching professional with years of expertise from his or her colleagues, students and families.

According to this review, today's teachers are faced with increasing challenges – from student achievement and behavior to their own possible burnout and attrition. To ignore the specific commitment and resilience needs of this large group of veteran teachers is to fail to realize the long-term investment that they and their employers have made to teaching (Day and Gu, 2010).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This phenomenological study utilizes a qualitative design through in-depth semi-structured interviews to identify what factors veteran K-6 public school teachers attribute to their ongoing commitment and engagement. The use of qualitative methods is appropriate due to three important aspects of the study. Firstly, Krathwohl (2009) indicated that qualitative methods are fitting in research when detailed, in-depth information is sought. Secondly, Creswell (2014) claimed that a qualitative approach is suitable when the research examines the complexity of participants' experiences. In this study, veteran K-6 public school teachers described in detail and in their own words the many varying personal and professional experiences that made up their education careers. Thirdly, a qualitative approach is called for when the focus in the study is on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the issue (Creswell, 2014). The interview structure in this study was such that the teachers had an opportunity to reflect on what in their experiences have propelled them to stay engaged in their work and continue to believe and demonstrate that they can and do make a difference in the lives of those they are teaching (Day & Gu, 2010). Since it is within the narrative of the interview data that the internal factors of these teachers emerged, qualitative research was the logical choice of methodology.

Sample

Fifteen veteran K-6 public school teachers from several districts in Southern California were purposively selected by the researcher via either handpicked or snowball sampling. As a qualitative study, the sample size was chosen not for broad generalizability, which is a focus of quantitative work, but for adequate breadth and depth in describing the essence of the veteran

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teacher experience (Creswell, 2014). Several Southern California school districts were targeted to allow for a wider range of experiences as well as possible patterns across and within the districts. Requirements for participation included having taught at least 24 years in the public schools in line with Day and Gu's definition of veteran teachers in their research on Professional Life Phases (2010) (See Table 1 in Chapter 2). Currently teaching in the classroom at the time of data collection was not a requirement.

The purposive sampling used in this study included criterion-based and snowball selection. Creswell (2014) asserted that the participants in a phenomenological study using purposive sampling need to be carefully chosen to have all experienced the phenomenon in question, so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding. In addition, Patton (2002) defined criterion sampling as cases reviewed to meet some predetermined criterion of importance, in this case having taught a minimum of 24 years. The Human Resources Department in one of the districts published a seniority list of teachers eligible for the district's retirement incentive with their date of hire. By consulting this list, the researcher was able to determine the number of years these teachers had taught in that district. Creswell (2014) defined snowball sampling as the identification of cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich. In this study, six of the 15 participants were identified via snowball sampling from other teachers, participant and non-participant.

Description of the Participants

Demographic Characteristics. A total of 15 subjects participated in this study (see Table 2). One identified as male and 14 identified as female. Finding male participants in the elementary sector who had been in the classroom for a minimum of 24 years was difficult as there were not many to choose from and those who did qualify declined to participate. The

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participants' ages ranged from 48 to 76 years, with an average age of 62.1 years. Twelve participants identified as White, two as Hispanic and one as Asian. Although the researcher consulted all possible sources, eligible African-American participants who met the criteria of 24 years of teaching was very difficult to find given the low percentage of African-Americans teachers in the districts used.

Teaching characteristics. All of the participants had taught or were still teaching. I chose K-6 teachers because I have a deep interest in elementary school teachers. Although one could argue that including secondary teachers would broaden the study, Colaizzi (1978) states that "experience with the investigated topic and articulateness suffice as criteria for selecting subjects" (p. 58). Hence, I chose to stay loyal to my passion for K-6 teachers. One participant in the study was currently a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA), one was a GATE teacher, one was a Special Day Class teacher and one taught in the Dual Language Immersion program. Six participants had taught full-time in pull-out Intervention programs to students below grade level. Five of the teachers were retired. Nine of the participants had taught in both primary (K-3) and upper (4-6) grade classrooms. All of the participants had Masters' degrees with five having obtained specialist certificates (reading, response to intervention or RTI, bilingual or special education). The participants' years of teaching experience ranged from 27 to 40 years, with an average of 31.8 years.

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Table 2

Participant Demographics

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Yrs. As Teacher</i>	<i>Types of Classrooms</i>	<i>Education Level</i>	<i>Certifications</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Mary Dobson	48	F	27	Reg ed Intervention	Masters	Reading Spec	White
Arlene Paulson	55	F	28	Reg ed Intervention	Masters	Reading/ELA RTI	White
Dorothy Jacobsen	51	F	28	Reg ed GATE Intervention	Masters	N/A	White
Grace Boughman	59	F	32	Reg ed	Masters	RTI	White
Gretchen Johnson	59	F	30	Reg ed	Masters	N/A	White
Anita Garcia	64	F	33	Reg ed GATE Intervention	Masters	BCLAD	Hispanic
Zonia Leond	58	F	34	Reg Ed Sp Ed Intervention	Masters	Reading Spec Sp Ed	White
Dina Sawyer	58	F	28	Reg Ed Bilingual (Spanish)	Masters	N/A	Hispanic
Sunshine Baker	69	F	39	Reg Ed	Masters	N/A	White
Irene Jean	76	F	29	Reg Ed Program Facilitator	Masters	N/A	White
Gigi Kay	71	F	33	Reg Ed Intervention	Masters	N/A	White
Kaenine Handler	73	M	37	Reg Ed	Masters	N/A	White
Renee Boyer	73	F	40	Reg Ed GATE	Masters	N/A	White
Emily Costa	57	F	29	Reg Ed	Masters	N/A	Asian
Tina Fontane	60	F	30	Reg Ed	Masters	N/A	White

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Protection of Human Subjects

In order to protect the human rights of the participants, an application for research project review was submitted to Claremont Graduate University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Each participant was asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B), which was in accordance with the standards set by the IRB. The consent form specifically stated that the participant did not have to answer every question and could leave the research project at any time. To protect all subjects, participants were assured confidentiality in that their information, survey results and interview responses would not be made available or identifiable to anyone other than the researcher. All of the participants were given pseudonyms. Original recordings of the interviews were erased after transcribing, coding and summarizing to protect participants' privacy. Any emails originating from the participants or those who recommended the participants in the recruitment phase were also deleted permanently from online email services, eliminating the possibility of the subjects' connection to the study being discovered.

Instrumentation

The data source for this qualitative study came from one in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interview of the participants lasting 45 to 60 minutes each. Interviews took place at a mutually agreed-upon time at the participant's or researcher's classroom after school hours. The participant's classroom was chosen for convenience whereas the researcher's classroom was for those teachers who were retired and no longer had access to a classroom. The location of the interview was also chosen to create a safe space where the participant could share his or her experiences.

Interviews were chosen as the data source for this study because Krathwohl (2009) pointed out that they are particularly useful when exploring, probing, and searching for what is

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especially significant about a person or situation. The interview questions were based on the information gathered in the literature review and the theoretical framework (Appendix C).

Preliminary questions were already piloted with seven veteran K-6 public school teachers from spring 2014 to winter 2015. Based on feedback from the researcher's dissertation chair and a faculty member who works as a dissertation chair at another university, questions were refined by merging and rewording them, as well as adding others to include probes. The rationale was to shorten the total number of questions and to allow the participants to speak more freely during the interview process.

After a brief written demographic form asking for the age, number of years of experience, grade levels taught, type of classrooms taught in, highest educational level, additional certifications and gender of the participant (see Appendix D), the interview began with two or three standard questions to establish rapport and test the recording equipment, and then continued with a sampling from 16 probes. The researcher was careful to ask appropriate probes from each of the three factors that influence a teacher's ongoing commitment as presented in the theoretical framework (e.g., the teacher's challenges, the teacher's personal characteristics, and the teacher's professional life phase) (Day & Gu, 2010). The nature of the interview protocol gave the interview process two advantages (Kula, 2013). First, use of the probes extracted the most salient factors related to veteran teacher commitment and engagement. Second, such a protocol allowed the researcher to explore the breadth of factors, even beyond the ones that might initially come to the mind of the participants. Sample probes included:

Theoretical Framework Factor: The Teacher's Personal Characteristics

1. Why did you become a teacher in the first place?
2. Have you ever felt teaching to be your calling? If so, explain.

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3. Do you feel as a teacher that you are effective with your students? Why or why not? Explain.
4. Tell me about the times when you felt fulfilled being a teacher. What made you feel this way?
5. What has been the best thing about being a teacher? What has been the hardest thing? Describe how these have impacted your teaching, if at all.
6. Imagine it is your retirement dinner, and one of your former students rises to make a speech about you. What would you like him or her to say about you?

(from Theoretical Framework Factor: The Teacher's Personal Characteristics)

Procedures

The researcher first used a list of teachers who have taught 24 years or more from the Human Resources Department of one of the districts. Upon receipt of this list, the researcher then identified eligible teachers and emailed them, inviting them to be interviewed. If the response was positive, the researcher then emailed a recruitment letter (Appendix A) and a list of possible dates and times for the interview. For teachers that were not from the first district, the researcher received these names from other teachers who nominated them. The procedure for inviting them was then the same as for the teachers from the first district. Teachers who agreed to be interviewed were sent a consent form via email (Appendix B). A total of 15 interviews were conducted with teachers from several districts. Interviewed teachers received a ten-dollar Staples gift card as compensation for their time.

In order to account for researcher bias, all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher for accuracy, resulting in over 150 pages of data. Member checking took place by each teacher receiving a transcript of his or her interview if he or she wished and being invited to make revisions or comments.

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Data Analysis

Data underwent a thematic analysis. As a first step, each transcribed interview transcript was imported into Atlas ti software. Opened-ended interview responses were listened to by the researcher and notes were then taken on main themes and any interesting or unusual perspectives that might be quoted for the “Results” section (see Chapter 4). The researcher went through the data (e.g., interview transcripts) and highlighted “significant statements,” sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Moustakas (1994) called this step “horizontalization” whereas others define it as “open coding” (Patton, 2002). Next, the researcher developed “clusters of meaning” from these significant statements into themes. This process is called “axial coding” (Patton, 2002). The theoretical framework, interview protocol and literature review were also consulted while performing axial coding. The data was then read another time, but this time it was coded systematically using the coding scheme developed in the previous step. This multi-stage coding process also facilitated deeper engagement with the data. Trustworthiness was established by member checks whereby participating teachers were asked to review the results for accuracy as a final validating procedure.

Positionality of the Author

Particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 2014). My perceptions of the veteran teacher experience have been shaped by my own journey. I am a retired veteran teacher (although I was still working during the data collection period), having taught a total of 27 years in one of the districts and eight years in a private setting in France. I have also experienced the phenomena of career

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plateauing, and depletion and burnout and attended two renewal retreats through Palmer's Center for Courage and Renewal to address these issues in my own career (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006).

Due to my prior involvement in these areas, I bring certain biases to this study, such as, a deep belief in the importance of a teacher's personal characteristics in helping him or her weather the more difficulty times in the profession. These biases may have shaped the way I view and understand the data I collected and the way I interpreted them.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question: *What factors influence the ongoing commitment and engagement of veteran K-6 public school teachers?* The semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 veteran K-6 public school teachers yielded illuminating results, some of which were confirmatory of past research and some of which were unforeseen.

This chapter is organized by the factors presented in the theoretical framework: teachers' challenges, teachers' personal characteristics and professional life phases. Factors from all three sections of the theoretical framework were present in varying degrees in the teachers' responses. Each factor presented is followed by a category which further defines the factor, then a discussion of themes seen in the responses to the interview questions. As themes in the interview data were discovered, a simple tally of the number of teachers who discussed each theme was kept to indicate how prevalently that theme was represented across participants (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Percentages were then generated from the tallies to represent the proportion of participants whose responses touched on each theme. These tallies and percentages will be shared as each theme is explicated in both narrative and table form; however, the focus of this chapter is on the lived experiences of the participants and the meanings they made of those experiences. For this reason, the words of the participants are used as much as possible in describing these experiences. Theme percentages that received 30 percent or less of the participants' responses did not receive their own sub-heading, but rather, were grouped with other themes as they were deemed by the researcher to not possess enough of a commonality in the analysis. The chapter will close with a summary of the results.

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Teachers' Challenges

The challenges faced by teachers occupied a large place in the participants' responses. The participants were all very vocal about the difficulties they faced as teachers over the course of their careers and how these difficulties impacted their ability to teach. At the same time, the participants spoke of the strategies they used to overcome or at least navigate these challenges. As in the theoretical framework, the challenges are divided into two main categories: environmental and individual (See Table 3). Environmental factors (cited in descending order by the percentage of participants who mentioned them) include: student behavior, lack of administrative support, lack of parental support, educational reform, overwhelming work load and instructional time constraints, and additional themes, such as, lack of colleague support and salary considerations. Individual factors include: family issues and personality.

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Table 3

Teachers' Challenges

Category	Theme	N	%	Representative Quote
Environmental				
	Student behavior	13	87	Now it's like we're dealing with very different behavior issues . . . when the student just grabs the chair and throws it across the room, you know.
	Lack of administrative support	12	80	I think you need to have a good relationship with your administrators. You have to respect them and they have to respect you as well.
	Lack of parental support	11	73	Now, it seems like the younger generation [of parents] . . . they see it as "You fix it. You need to deal with whatever. If they're [the students] not learning, that's why they go to school, so you can fix it."
	Educational reform	10	67	The schools and the state were always changing everything, and you just had to learn to adapt. We had no choice.
	Overwhelming work load & instructional time constraints	6	40	I'm doing more in kindergarten than I ever did those years even in first grade. We used to take time to play . . . there's no time for that now.
	Additional themes	4	27	I think the camaraderie of the teachers keeps you going. Because once you're in the classroom by yourself and you close the door, it's you . . .
Individual				
	Family issues	11	73	I picked a profession that we can't just check a time card and go home and the job is waiting just as it was.
	Personality	7	47	You know, I have this standard of what I want, of perfection, of what I would like to be and I can never get there.

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Environmental Challenges

Student behavior. Despite all of the participants having over two decades each of teaching experience, they frequently cited student behavior as posing the greatest challenge to their ability to teach and remain committed to the profession. Thirteen of the participants named increased student misbehavior as the major change they had seen over time and the most significant factor in why they felt teaching had become more demanding. The reasons for this change followed three paths in the interview responses: 1) increased defiance and/or mental health issues on the part of the students along with lack of training provided to the teachers, 2) a shift in the law and attitudes regarding the types of consequences for severe misbehavior,² and 3) decreased support from parents in holding their children accountable for their behavior.

Anita Garcia, a sixth-grade teacher, reflected on the defiance she has seen in some of her students:

I would say that what has changed is the issues that the kids have now . . . before you could have one or two kids who were street wise and so on, but now it's like we're dealing with very different behavior issues, very different. . . when the student just grabs the chair and throws it across the room, you know. Or just walks out or whatever.

Grace Boughman, a first-grade teacher, added to this by describing what she saw as the aggressive behavior of one of her students, possibly related to mental health issues:

² Since September 2014, California school authorities can no longer suspend students below the fourth grade from school or place them in “in-school” suspension for “willful defiance” (ACLUNorCal, 2018). Before then, “willful defiance” accounted for 54 percent of all suspensions in the Los Angeles Unified School District (K-12) and a quarter of all expulsions in California (Frey, 2013). The new law provides no alternatives to suspension or expulsion for “willful defiance.”

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I've had to take a lot of my things and put them away because he'll just get them and start throwing them around . . . he'll leave the room. I have tried to block the entrance . . . it didn't deter him. He just like went through all of this stuff to the back door.

For these teachers, dealing with such behavior day in and day out leads to an isolating sense of exhaustion. To make matters worse, they often feel they are poorly-trained to work with such students. Renee Boyer, a retired educator, explained her frustration when there were few directives or support from site administrators or district personnel:

But children now come and they're very, very disturbed. And the school district doesn't try to help you. That is what is the hardest thing to deal with because the child is sometimes violent. You tell the principal and a psychologist says, "I'll come in and help you" and I never saw the psychologist!

Emily Costa, a kindergarten teacher, shared a similar experience when relating the lack of outside support:

Last year, that was the first time I really felt unsupported . . . I didn't want to tell anybody. I didn't want to put that on anybody else, but they could see it on my face every single day and it was difficult . . . but I don't think they understood what I was going through until a very chaotic day happened. I was calling literally every 15 minutes for somebody to come help me because I couldn't even teach. . . because I was making sure kids weren't going out of the room or chasing each other. It took months of me calling every day until that one day . . . it was difficult being asked not to call the office anymore.

Grace Boughman complained about the lack of directives from her superiors in the face of the changing laws concerning suspensions or any kind of negative consequences:

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I think it would be super helpful if we could get some kind of direction as far as discipline. What can we do? What are we able to do for discipline? We feel that our hands are tied.

The participants who spoke of student behavior were particularly upset as they believed such conduct prevented the other students in the classroom from learning. Being able to learn in a classroom was viewed as a right that needed to be protected. As Dorothy Jacobsen, a former sixth grade teacher, lamented: “I was frustrated because she [another student] was *stealing* [the researcher’s italics] the learning from my other students.” The teachers often spoke about this and the insufficient attention given to the problem. They blamed administrators who could not disclose to other parents the extreme misbehavior of a child in the classroom due to confidentiality laws or being told that everyone needed to be served in the mainstreamed classroom, even if that setting may not have been suitable for the child with the misbehavior. Zonia Leond, a Special Education teacher, described a young child who would run out of her classroom and around the school without warning:

This is the kid that I chased all day long for 3 months. That irritates me because what about my other kids?

In addition to the rights of other children in the class, the teachers also spoke of the lack of parental support in dealing with these difficult students. Mary Dobson, a first-grade teacher, described her experience with E. and his father’s response to his misbehavior:

I’ll never forget E . . . E. got suspended in first grade for bringing a knife to school and he didn’t come back the day after his suspension [note: this was before the change in state law regarding suspensions] . . . he came back the following day and he comes up to me

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and he says, “Miss D., look, I got a whooping.” And E. had welts going across his two arms and he had bruises on his wrists.

And I was like, “Oh! And who gave you a whooping?”

“My dad.”

“And what did he use?”

“Two belts.”

So, I think that is the hardest thing . . . when you can’t do anything for those ones that you know things are bad which obviously turns into discipline . . . it’s like it’s out of my control.

For Mary, the parental response showed the lack of parenting skills on the part of the father, so much so that his reaction was reported to Child Protective Services.

For other participants, the parents did not back the teacher in discipline matters, which isolated the teacher even more. Dina Sawyer recounted how one parent she had was representative of more and more of the parents of her students in the classroom. When the parent’s child had misbehaved, the parent replied: “You do what you can. I’m just the parent.” A large number of participants spoke to the decrease in accountability by the parents for their children, not only in behavior issues, but academic matters as well (see section on “Lack of Parental Support”).

For the participants in this study, dealing with escalating student misbehavior and classroom management has not gotten easier over time. In fact, it was the trigger for what some of these teachers termed “the lowest point” in their teaching careers, prompting burnout or depression. As Mary Dobson admitted, “Discipline is exhausting.”

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Successful responses to the increase in student misbehavior have been crucial to the ability of these teachers to feel effective in the classroom and remain committed to the profession. Techniques included: 1) teacher disposition (being firm, yet caring and having a positive attitude); 2) effective collaboration between the teacher, administrator, parent, and behavior support interventionists (e.g., school psychologist, counselor, behavioral aide, and outside agencies); and 3) proper academic placement of the student (e.g., mainstream classroom, pullout classroom, etc.). Zonia Leond explained how she set a firm but caring tone in her classroom:

I'm very compassionate, but I'm also very strict in manners . . . I think that you have to start out your year riding a broom and you are the teacher. You are to be respected. I feel like if you start at the beginning of the year, the end of your year will be much better. . . sometimes I think what happens is that they [the students] are allowed to do that at home and in the real world, that does not fly. So, I have to be very, very careful that I say, "No! We're at school. You're not allowed to do that. At school this is how we do it."

Irene Jean, a retired third through sixth grade teacher, summarized her firm classroom management policy as follows:

There needs to be a professional division between the child and the teacher, so that they respect you, but don't take advantage of you.

Teachers also spoke of taking what could be considered a negative situation and turning it into positive resulting in a change in attitude. Gretchen Johnson, a fifth-grade teacher, related how she now sees difficult students as an opportunity to learn something new, and no longer just focuses on them in her classroom:

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I feel like every year I get the challenge child, and I think it's just purposely placed in my class . . . this is my year to learn about this . . . so, I think that's been a motivator because I think it's just me learning to be a better person. . . I think you just have to stay on the positive . . . you cannot always focus on those bad kids all day long . . . they'll wear you out . . . Be sure you're acknowledging those good kids because they are the ones that are going to keep you going.

All the teachers who cited student misbehavior as an environmental challenge applauded the collaborative approach between all educational partners, sometimes leading to a different academic placement for the student. Emily Costa depicted what it took to restore her classroom to a positive learning environment:

Finally, everybody realized what I was dealing with. They were able to put them in different places. Place them with different teachers or with Special Ed, a Special Day class, kind of pull them out, time out with the counselor. So, it took a town effort to bring it back.

The teachers' union came to the aide of Gretchen Johnson to advocate for a one-on-one behavioral aide for one of her sixth graders. The school district finally started supporting Dorothy Jacobsen by hiring more counselors and behavior support team members. The use of technological support, such as, Google Hangouts to rapidly contact site personnel was often mentioned as an effective way for teachers to ask for help. If mainstreaming these students with the support of personnel was not enough, then an alternate placement was considered after the appropriate assessments. Mary Dobson's kindergarten student, who was constantly screaming and crawling under the table, was finally placed in a Special Education class after two semesters in the regular kindergarten class. Support for these teachers when faced with such students –

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whether it be in the mainstreamed or Special Education classroom – was seen as crucial to these educators' ability to teach and their students' ability to learn.

Yet, in reviewing the participant's interviews, it was clear that each teacher had to find solutions to student misbehavior on his or her own. Even though programs such as, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or Restorative Justice are prevalent in many of the public schools, none of the participants mentioned them in assisting teachers in working with the children with the most severe behavior problems.³ Rather, these programs were perceived to be designed for the vast majority of behavioral issues, not for those that needed special attention. For those challenges, the teachers felt like they were on their own.

Lack of administrative support. Closely linked to student behavior in the participants' responses was the lack of administrative support. Twelve participants cited this theme as presenting a major environmental challenge for them. The attitude of administration influenced Gretchen Johnson's effectiveness in the classroom:

I've seen administration, you know, differ and I think that administration makes a big impact on my output, you could say. So, that's where I see myself changing positively or negatively.

Four main topics arose when speaking about what effective administrative support would look like: 1) possessing strong leadership skills, 2) supporting teachers in student discipline, 3) prioritizing district goals and policies, and 4) respectfully advocating for certain programs and/or

³ Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) involves explicit prompting, modeling, practicing, and encouraging positive expected social skills across settings and individuals in order to create a safer, more respectful school climate (OSEP Technical Assistance Center, 2018). Restorative Justice is an alternative to punitive responses to wrongdoing by bringing together persons harmed with persons responsible for harm in a safe and respectful space, promoting dialogue, accountability, and a stronger sense of community (Davis, 2014).

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values. Dorothy Jacobsen voiced her frustration over what she perceived as her “weak” principal and the lack of leadership at her site:

I thrive best under a strong principal and a vision . . . I love seeing what my place is and making that vision come to fruition. So, when the need isn’t met, I become almost angry.

She also viewed the absence of support for student discipline as a lack of leadership:

I want to know that I have strong supports. . . when I’ve done all my tricks, and its behavior, and the kids are not responding, I [need to] know I can go to my vice principal or my principal for backup.

Gretchen Johnson believed that one of the administrator’s responsibilities was to prioritize district goals and policies for the staff:

As an administrator they have with the staff developed specific goals that they’re going to work on and that’s their goal. It’s not bringing in five other goals that have to go along with it, but being really productive in *that* goal . . . and filtering out the other things that are coming in . . . so there is not that heavy weight on you.

Anita Garcia related the incident of advocating for her program when the administrator questioned whether it was a valuable use of funds:

I’ve had to stand up for myself with a principal who had issues with the amount of time that I was spending with the students who were newcomers to this country. And I had to fight that principal left and right. I proved to the principal that the amount of time that I was spending with the children was being paid exactly by the funds that they were bringing in . . . this person [the principal] is trying to make your life miserable, you know. I said, “No! I’m going to keep it up!” And sure enough, the person left. I said, “I’m going to wait you out. Don’t worry. I’m not going anywhere.”

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For Renee Boyer, the lack of administrative support came in the form of a clash of values which left her feeling disapproved of and alone. Renee described the time she told her principal that she had obtained a divorce. This was during an era when few schoolteachers got divorced. The reply she received would most likely be cause for a lawsuit nowadays:

The year I got divorced, I went and told my principal. She prayed. I was very upset because of church and state. And she prayed and hoped that I would go back. That was the entire worst part of all my teaching . . . divorce was hard on my children and that particular thing that happened at school . . . I still think about that a lot.

Responses to a lack of administrative support ranged from frank discussions with the administrator to complete avoidance. Anita Garcia explained her technique to gain her administrator's approval:

Whatever I do, justify it. And I've learned that when you go to someone and you say, "Look, these are my reasons for doing this," the person goes like, "Okay, I see it now." So, I try to convince them. "Look, these are the possible consequences and this is my reasoning and it is based on studies and it is based on research."

Anita admitted that there were times when she just went ahead and carried out her actions without seeking her administrator's approval:

There are some things that I've done, you know, said I'm going to do it and I'm going to wait until they slap my wrist (laughter).

Other teachers, such as Gretchen Johnson, just avoided the administrators she didn't agree with and hoped for the best:

As far as just administration, you know, you have your good and your bad. When you get to bad, it's just like okay, you stay there and do your thing and I'll do my thing.

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A few teachers found their administrators to be supportive of them and their instruction.

Irene Jean portrayed one of her principals in glowing terms:

We were friends for years even after I left teaching. He invited me to come back and to work for another semester when my kids were little and I did it. He was so supportive. It makes a difference in who you work for.

In conclusion, the participants felt the most effective administrators were those who possessed strong leadership skills, supported teachers in student discipline, prioritized district goals and policies, and respectfully advocated for certain programs and values. Most importantly, the participants just wished for an administrator who trusted them as professionals. Kaenine Handler, a retired third through fifth grade teacher, remembered a principal he had had, “a great principal,” who was “a believer in opening up.” Zonia Leond was more realistic in her evaluation of the teacher/administrator rapport:

I think you need to have a good relationship with your administrators. Not that you have to be their best friend or anything like that, but you have to have a good working relationship with them. You have to respect them and they have to respect you as well.

Lack of parental support. This theme also ranked high among the participants, with eleven citing it as a challenge to contend with. At least half of the participants lamented the dearth of parent volunteers in their classrooms, which seemed mainly due to both parents working outside the home and/or language or cultural barriers. More problematic for the teachers, however, was the change in the actual relationship between them and their students’ parents. Sunshine Baker, a retired sixth-grade teacher, described the difference in her relationship with parents at the end of her career as opposed to the beginning:

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It's seems like there's a lot more distance between the teachers and the families. I think when you get to know a family a little more, you have a better understanding of what they have to deal with at home too. And we did that a lot with families at the beginning, you know. At Christmastime we'd go Christmas caroling together. They [the families] would invite us in for hot chocolate. . . they don't do those things anymore. We used to be able to take kids out for lunch, or out for an ice cream. You are not allowed to take any kids anywhere anymore. . . I had a couple of families invite me to go on vacation with them . . . so, there's a lot more personal things that are not allowed to be done, but I thought that really opened it up . . . those days are gone. They were real kind of simple days where you appreciated each other more.

Even those teachers who were not affected by the language or cultural barriers of their parents found a difference in relationship over time that led to a decrease in parental involvement and support resulting in an increased responsibility on the part of the teacher. Dina Sawyer, a fourth grade Dual Language Immersion teacher, who has been at her school from its founding and is very involved in the neighborhood, spoke of this difference:

We used to have a lot of first-generation families, and we don't have that as much anymore because there aren't that many families coming into the United States anymore. So, we have most of the families who have stayed – second, third generation . . . you see the differences and how the children are raised in a way. First generation are . . . I don't know, it seems to me that they are more involved, that they want to be part of the school. They want to learn everything there is to learn about school even though they may be working two or three jobs. For the majority of the times, they make time for their kids for school. Now, it seems like the younger generation, the younger parents, the second, third

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generation, it's like they see it as "You fix it. You need to deal with whatever. If they're not learning, that's why they go to school, so you can fix it." In that sense, that's changed quite a bit.

The teacher is now expected to handle all learning gaps and problems with or without parental support. Gretchen Johnson explained an incident that happened with one of her student's parents:

You tell a fifth-grade parent that their child is reading at second-grade level and it's like, they look at me, like "What are you going to do about it?"

And it's like, "No, what are *we* going to do about it? It's going to be teamwork here. I only have them for six hours, you know." It's just like there's kind of that expectation all on me. It's all on the teacher. "Well, that's *your* job, you know," that sort of thing.

This change was also apparent in discussing student misbehavior. Many of the teachers interviewed were surprised by the greater defensiveness of the parents in taking their child's side in behavior issues while questioning the role of the teacher. Sunshine Baker expressed her astonishment at the reaction of the parents of some of her students:

You'd say, "You know, this is what happened today."

"So, what did you do to provoke him?"

And I'm thinking, I didn't do anything to provoke him. They're just misbehaving. So, it changed in that the blame started always being the parent sticking up for their child, not really listening to your side of the point at all, but just saying, "What did you do to make him aggravated? What did you do to make him start swearing?"

The difference in parents' reactions was sometimes interpreted as a lack of respect for the teacher. Tina Fontana, a second-grade teacher, explained:

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It's funny because back then I remember . . . thinking that the parents were so respectful of the teacher. They seemed to regard the teacher in high regard. I don't see that anymore as much.

Sunshine Baker interpreted the lack of respect as indicative of poor parenting skills:

It was always, whatever did happen at school, you're going to get it at home. Now it reversed around. Well, nothing is going to happen at home. I had a parent one time tell me, "I don't want you to break my son's spirit." So, he could misbehave at school, but he didn't want me to break his child's spirit although he was breaking all the rules. I thought that was pretty sad because that parent is up for a rude awakening when the kid turns 14, 15, and he's taller than the parent. I guess they're going to say, "Oh, I guess your spirit's not really broken, is it?"

Despite the increased lack of parental support, the participants saw strong positive communication between teachers and parents as an antidote to distrustful relationships. Arlene Paulson, a kindergarten teacher, utilized two tools to open the pathways between her and the parents: 1) giving out her cell phone number without conditions, and 2) setting up electronic communication via technology to bring the world of the classroom to the parents. She explained its effects:

I tell them my phone is never far away. Contact me. Don't hesitate if it's nights or weekends. They have crazy work hours, these parents . . . so I do break the cardinal rule of, you know, clocking out. I don't do that to my parents. I'm here for them, whether it be the lost math paper or the book order. Or whether it just be letting me know that their child is sick . . . for the last few years, I have never had as good a relationship with the parents as I have lately. And I think it's because I'm really trying . . . through Class Dojo

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and SeeSaw and applications. I just send something out in English and parents who can read it, do. The parents who need translation, they push a button and it's there for them . . . I've had parents tell me, "I love this! I love that I can look over from my desk at work or I can be on the run and I can see that my kids are happy." That means the world to a parent.

Some teachers also praised the positive effects of parenting classes at their schools and the use of parent liaisons on school sites to strengthen the teacher/parent relationship.

Whatever the reaction and choices of parents, however, all of the participants emphasized the importance of advocating for the child no matter what their relationship with the parent was like. For the participants, this was not only the professional thing to do, but the moral thing to do. It also demonstrated the commitment these teachers had to their students. Anita Garcia explained:

We had this lady, oh my gosh! Seven kids and they were spread among four last names. I'm going, what!? What business have you having all these kids if you cannot support them? You cannot be there to help them. Come on, you know. . . So, I pick my battles. I wanted to tell her, give her a piece of my mind (laughter). Look, I could have had more than two, but I decided not to . . . so, you go like, I'm not going to change this woman. The only thing I can do is help the kid.

Educational reform. Ten participants mentioned the successive waves of educational reform as challenging their enthusiasm for teaching. More importantly, the participants viewed such reforms as a centralization of power by the state or district, which directly influenced the teacher's own professional judgement in the classroom. Arlene Paulson described her experiences as both a classroom teacher and a curriculum coach:

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If I take the students out of the equation of this job . . . in this top-down district with some of the ridiculous mandates and things that we have . . . if I persevere on that, I'd become disillusioned very quickly. And you know . . . I have been behind the cubicle and now being back at the school site, I recognize now more than ever that in my cubicle with my research books and my colleagues and my ideas and my PowerPoints, a lot of things make sense on paper, but everything that makes sense behind a cubicle doesn't necessarily make sense with human beings at a school site.

Most of the participants pointed to the reforms that accompanied No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as changing the tone of teaching forever. Although the idea of teacher accountability for the learning of their students was viewed by the participants as valuable, elementary teaching suddenly shifted from being one based on play and creativity, to one geared towards assessment and evaluation. Gigi Kay described this change:

There was very little emphasis on testing at the beginning, and then that progressively just became insane the year that I retired. It became your day. It planned your day . . . if there's a low part that would be the low part. Over the years the actual learning enjoyment that you felt the students had, the pressure was becoming more on passing a test . . . I think people coming into the profession now who don't have that 1970s approach, they don't know what real joy there was in sitting down and planning your weekly lesson plans.

Emily Costa, a kindergarten teacher her entire career, portrayed what this change meant for her and her students:

Even with kinder, we're asking them to do more and go above. We have the same children that come every single year . . . and we are asking more and more of them, but

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we're stepping ourselves up in kindergarten to teach a more aggressive, you know, the professional language that they have to use, the mature language, complete sentences . . .

Zonia Leond lamented the introduction of NCLB for the way it destroyed what she saw as the creativity in elementary teaching, particularly in the primary grades:

I think when I first started, it was like "open the door, go teach" . . . You know, it wasn't really designated, so I kind of feel like because there's so many standards and things you have to meet, that they've kind of taken the fun out of teaching.

Although the participants understood the reasons for a more standards-based curriculum, they felt it did not always address the true needs of the students. Zonia continued to criticize NCLB and her state's mandate to unnecessarily test her Special Education students on grade-level material:

I'm in Special Ed. Why do I have to do grade level assessments? I know where my kids are because I have to do different assessments . . . I don't need to have a district test to tell me what they don't know because I already know that they don't know that!

Sunshine Baker agreed that NCLB prevented her from making the professional decisions she was trained to make in guiding her students to subject mastery:

I think from the beginning I was allowed to be more creative. I think I was allowed more to accomplish a goal, but do it my way . . . whereas at the end, I was being told what chapter to be on, what lesson in math to be on, what page to be on . . . I don't think I was meeting everybody's needs. Like in math, if I needed to go onto Lesson 15, but we really didn't get 14, I would normally have stayed on 14 until I really knew that they got it because I knew somewhere along the line, I could catch up because there might be something that was easier for them to handle. I felt like my hands were kind of being tied.

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Even more frustrating for the participants was the knowledge that those who were driving the reform were not in the classroom and did not solicit the input of educators. Renee Boyer explained:

We had no choice. I mean it was like the district decided this was what you were going to use and you just had to say, “Okay! I’ll learn to love that!” I don’t think we had a big say in it, to be honest with you.

Moreover, the teachers, after having learned to “love that,” were then asked to push aside what they had newly-learned and go with another later reform. For Gigi Kay, this seemed like madness:

So, every year, every two years, they wanted to make these big major changes and they wanted you to go along with these changes. It’s like, but wait a minute! I haven’t had time to do number one! Now, you want me to do two, three and four. And what happened to one? I put so much of my time into doing one. Doesn’t that count?

The participants had experienced two major educational reforms in their careers: 1) the shift from phonics-based reading instruction (i.e., the memorization of letters and the sounds these letters make) to Whole Language (i.e., the memorization of sight words and their meanings in relationship to the text), and 2) the introduction of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) (i.e., standards-based instruction based on measurable goals that were assessed by the states, thereby, holding teachers and school districts accountable for their results).

The introduction of the Common Core – although judged by most of the participants to be better than NCLB – was seen as just another mandate coming from above that was poorly thought-out.

Grace Boughman described what it was like to be a first-grade teacher during this shift:

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Common Core came . . . we didn't have a curriculum . . . I love having a book that I can put my hands on. We just didn't feel like we could get to do the job we needed to do to teach the children to read . . . we told the second-grade teachers, "We're really sorry. We don't feel like we're sending on readers like we wanted to."

The only educational reform that the participants unanimously lauded was their state's class size reduction law of 20 students to one teacher in the primary grades. Grace expressed her enthusiasm:

So, 20 to one. What a dream! Very few children could fall through the cracks at 20 to one if you had no help . . . it was lovely because I remember sitting in my [prior] classroom . . . I had first grade, no help, 32 kids, and filling out this one report card for this one little girl and thinking, I barely know this child! This is how this child fell through the cracks.

Otherwise, in the face of educational reform, the participants recited various strategies they had used to meet the challenge, even if it meant "bucking the system" to some extent. Dina Sawyer gave her strategy:

You just learn whatever new thing they want us to learn . . . So, it's like, let me see what I can tweak that I already know and add what they want me to address. So, that's how I deal with it.

Zonia Leond advised beginning teachers how to face these challenges:

What's handed to you in a box may not be what your kids need . . . don't feel like you should do something if it doesn't work for you.

Gretchen Johnson made sure to incorporate what she felt was also important, although she did praise her district for providing her with professional development in order to teach the new programs:

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I think the district has provided training. They have to keep up-to-date with everything just as much as we have to keep updated. I miss the fluff, you know. But I still try to bring it in every once in a while. Come on, I mean they [the students] need to have some fun.

On the whole, however, most of the participants saw it as their job to just “fall in line” as they were asked to. As Renee Boyer said:

I mean, the schools and the state were always changing everything, and you just had to learn to adapt. We had no choice.

Overwhelming work load and instructional time restraints. Six participants stated that the overwhelming work load - and five participants instructional time restraints - posed challenges for them as teachers. The lack of time that these participants had to teach what they were expected to teach led to increased frustration and stress. Many of the participants spoke of the higher expectations in academics, even for the early primary grades. Mary Dobson remembered what it was like when she first started teaching:

It used to be when I first got my first graders, if they knew their numbers to ten, their letter sounds, and could write their first name, we were super happy.

But in the interview she grumbled that “those kids coming in at that level are already considered below.” In addition, Mary criticized the lack of time to fulfill these mounting expectations:

I still don't have enough time . . . I don't have enough time at the end of the day to prep everything and if I add time to the day of teaching, then I just have less time after school to do what I need to do as well . . . There are so many things I want to do with these kids that I can't do.

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Arlene Paulson compared her time as a kindergarten teacher to her previous position as a first-grade teacher:

I'm doing more in kindergarten than I ever did those years even in first grade. It doesn't even matter if we know English. We are learning text features. We are learning geometry and algebra in kindergarten. We are learning how to make inferences . . . we used to take time to play . . . There's no time for that now.

Arlene voiced her frustration with the gap between the high expectations and the reality in the classroom:

I've got a dozen of them [students] who might not know the alphabet. They don't have phonological awareness. They don't have foundational skills and I just need to be okay with teaching the inference.

Moreover, Arlene pointed out that the lack of time affected her students who needed more one-on-one attention:

My main thing that I think just matters so much is . . . just getting that face-to-face time. When you are looking at somebody in the eyes and you have the opportunity to just sit and listen to them, to ask him questions, to talk about things. And with large numbers of students and so little time, I just feel that makes such a difference.

Add to the lack of time something like a new curriculum adoption, and the stress could become overwhelming. According to Dorothy Jacobsen:

Any time there was a new adoption in curriculum or, you know, we're going to adopt this new thing . . . you feel like there is so much on your plate and you can't get to it, it would be a burn-out period.

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Yet, these teachers would somehow find strategies to help them deal with the overwhelming work load and instructional time constraints. Some participants like Mary Dobson would just learn how to “wing it” the next day if she wasn’t as prepared or prioritize what was really needed and effective with the students. Others, such as Grace Boughman, rejoiced at any opportunity to receive another human body in the classroom, be it a student teacher or a teacher on special assignment. Grace along with most of the other participants stressed the importance of working with your grade level team in order to cut down the work load: “Work with a team. Don’t be an island!” Anita Garcia warned beginning teachers about the lack of time and the need to make it: “You don’t have the time . . . and in some cases, you *have to* find the time.” Finally, Gretchen Johnson reminded beginning teachers that working long hours is just part of the job:

It’s a lot of work, a lot of extra hours, but it’s worth it all. It really and truly is. If they [the beginning teachers] truly have a passion to be a teacher, then they are not going to see the wrong in it.

Additional themes. Two themes grouped under environmental challenges received less than 30 percent of the participants’ responses: the lack of colleague support and low salary. The lack of colleague support (four participants), although frustrating, was usually limited to one or two staff members on the team. Grace Boughman complained about her grade level colleague who she nicknamed “the Squeaky Wheel” because she would gripe about her class composition to the administrator and then be allowed to send more of her below grade level students to Grace. Dina Sawyer was shocked to discover that her colleague was spreading untrue rumors about her to the children in her previous class that the colleague now had a year later. This was uncomfortable for Dina until the administrator stepped in and placed the colleague on administrative leave. On the other hand, Arlene Paulson found that her colleagues were not

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“accustomed to solving problems or reading or researching or really doing the professional part of being professional.” Although this bothered Arlene, she found a support network online and through professional development workshops. In fact, all of the participants who mentioned colleague support – whether the lack or existence of – agreed that it took a “town effort” to be an effective teacher and that a school culture that emphasized camaraderie and teamwork was preferable to working in isolation. Tina Fontana, a second-grade teacher, credited her colleagues with her continued commitment to teaching:

I think the camaraderie of the teachers keeps you going. Because once you’re in the classroom by yourself and you close the door, it’s you, you know. But to have other teachers that you can talk with, do things with, takes the stress off it.

Another environmental challenge - low salary - was more significant for teachers who had begun their careers in the 1960s (three participants). Kaenine Handler remembered leaving his manufacturing job to take up teaching only to find out he was taking a \$1,200 pay cut. He spent the next 25 years working part-time as a security host at the local amusement park while teaching full-time to make up the difference. Sunshine Baker recalled still qualifying for affordable housing even though she had been working 13 years as a teacher. Both Kaenine and Sunshine credited the negotiating skills of their teachers’ unions with raising their salaries so they had a living wage.

Individual Challenges

Family issues. With the majority of K-6 teachers still being female, the difficulty of working as a full-time teacher and mother rose to the top of the participants’ responses with 11 participants describing it as challenge. Mary Dobson expressed her dilemma: “There was no way I was going to be a full-time teacher and a fulltime mother.” When successive principals either

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approved or blocked her job share arrangement, she had to make a choice: “I wasn’t going to leave the thing [my teaching position], but I had to put my family first.” Dorothy Jacobsen remembered the advice of an experienced colleague: “The day you come home and you don’t have time for your kids, that’s when you’re working too hard.” Dorothy recalled how that stuck with her and helped her to maintain balance in her life.

What made teaching and motherhood so difficult to do simultaneously was the emotional labor involved. Grace Boughman described teaching as a “second marriage” that never leaves the teacher’s mind: “There are so many priorities and so many children who just nag at me and it’s like, what do I do? How do I help this child and how do I help that child?” Arlene Paulson continued:

I picked a profession that we can’t just check a time card and go home and the job is waiting just as it was. I go home with bags of work. I go home with things in my head. I have things I have to figure out. I go home with questions.

For Dina Sawyer, it was obvious that such a profession would affect her family life:

My family knows, okay, there are days when I’m drowning in paperwork and you’re not to talk to me. My door is closed. And then there are days that I’m here until all hours.

Yet, teachers also found ways to solve the problem of their work lives overflowing into their family lives and vice-versa. Renee Boyer described how she would compartmentalize her two lives when she was going through a trying divorce: “I’m one of those people that I have a little box. Just put it in that box. You can’t let it affect you.” On the other hand, Dorothy Jacobsen felt fortunate that her husband was also in education as the two of them could compare their days and give each other advice. Gigi Kay reveled in the fact that her daughter attended the same school she taught in, tightening the bond between them. Zonia Leond credited her two boys

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– one in Special Education and one in GATE – for helping her to teach to the needs of her own students: “I think it’s helped me to understand that everybody’s a little different . . . that everybody learns at a different pace.” And Dina Sawyer had a family that came to the school to offer a hand: “If you have kids, you bring them in. If you have a husband, he knows it’s time to volunteer.”

Personality. Certain personality characteristics proved to be more problematic than others in facing the challenges of teaching. Seven out of 15 participants cited these characteristics in their responses. The first characteristic portrayed a somewhat controlling and perfectionistic personality. In talking about students with serious discipline problems, Mary Dobson remarked how hard it was for her as a teacher when she realized she could not do all she wanted to do for these students. She recognized that “it’s like out of my control, because I’m a control freak.” Grace Boughman mentioned how all-consuming her job could be, even just choosing gifts at holiday time for her colleagues: “You know, I have this standard of what I want, of perfection, of what I would like to be and I can never get there.” Emily Costa noticed that even during her most difficult days the previous year with a class with serious discipline problems, she wouldn’t take days off and delegate the tasks to someone else: “I feel that I can handle them [the students]. I think in my head that I’m the only person that can take care of this.” For all three of these teachers, they found themselves exhausted, burnt-out, and in the case of Mary Dobson, clinically depressed. Their personalities – according to Freudenberger and Richelson (1980) – put them at greater risk for depletion (See Chapter 2).

On the other hand, those teachers who were able to be flexible, patient, and more easy-going were more likely to weather the challenges they faced in the profession. Anita Garcia offered some advice: “You learn to be flexible. You have to. It comes with the profession.”

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According to Anita, along with flexibility came the ability to “learn from your mistakes . . . don’t be too hard on yourself” and to know “when to pick your battles.” Such an attitude, according to Dina Sawyer, also allowed the teacher to have perspective on the situations at hand, to remember that “you can have the most God-awful year, but it’s only one year at a time . . . so you just have to hang in there and enjoy it.”

Zonia Leond took a more assertive view of how to respond in difficult situations. First of all, she advised teachers not to “force yourself into a box that’s not you.” She believed that if the teacher feels miserable, the students will sense it and feel miserable as well. She admitted that sometimes teachers needed to embolden their personalities in refusing to carry out a directive that they felt wasn’t right. When she believed that the curriculum she was given by her district did not meet the needs of her Special Education students, she did not use it, but rather, documented her adherence to the Independent Education Program (IEP) goals that were set for each student and how she brought her students to mastery. She laughed, “So, I’m not using the curriculum. Fire me! Really, I don’t care! I am meeting their IEP goals, which is my first thing that I need to do.” Dina Sawyer would even take risks by doing what she thought was right without asking for permission:

You will find other ways, you talk to other people, you look for what you enjoy doing with the kids. And then you hide! (laughter) You write your lesson plans and you say, “I’m doing this, but let’s do something else today!”

Summary of Teachers’ Challenges

The participants in this study were very vocal about one environmental challenge in particular: the negative change they viewed in student behavior. Intense aggressive student misbehavior seemed to have increased over the course of these teachers’ careers, wreaking

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havoc on the participants' ability to teach effectively. Whether this was due to the increased defiance and/or mental health issues on the part of the students, the shift in the law and attitudes regarding the types of consequences for severe misbehavior, or decreased support from parents in holding their children accountable for their behavior, the participants all lamented the lack of training in dealing with these disruptive behaviors. More importantly, the participants felt very alone in dealing with them as parents did not seem to want to share the responsibility any longer in finding solutions and too few administrators would assist the teachers by either providing clear directives and/or additional support personnel. If the teachers have learned how to cope with this challenge, it was more through their own devices in order to effectively meet the needs of the all the students in the classroom.

Other than the implementation of 20 to one, the data presented in this chapter show that educational reform was not perceived as being effective by the participants. Instead, reform has more likely added to the frustration and stress of an increased work load and instructional time restraints. This coupled with the desire to balance work and family responsibilities weighed heavily on the participants.

Teachers' Personal Characteristics

Although participants in the study spoke at length about the challenges they faced as teachers over the course of their careers and how these challenges impacted their ability to teach, the participants also exhibited certain attributes, features or qualities – what the researcher termed “personal characteristics” - in their interview responses. These personal characteristics from the theoretical framework serve as the major categories for this section. They are: 1) a passion for teaching, 2) a passion for students, 3) teacher identity and integrity, 4) teacher efficacy, and 5) resilience. Two to eight themes were apparent for each of these categories (See

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Table 4). The prior evidence in the literature (see Chapter 2) had suggested that those teachers who possessed these characteristics continued to remain committed to their work in part because these characteristics helped them to overcome the external challenges they faced day in and day out (Day & Gu, 2010). The results of this study presented below contribute evidence to that assertion.

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Table 4

Teachers' Personal Characteristics

Category	Theme	N	%	Representative Quote
Passion for Teaching				
	Teaching as a calling	13	87	I really truly feel that if they [teachers] don't have it, that "calling" as you said, then they are going to struggle.
	Less concern for external expectations in solving obstacles	6	40	I know what I have to teach my kids . . . and this book, it doesn't have anything like that . . . So, I'm not going to use this book. I'm going to teach my standards.
Passion for Students				
	Making a difference	11	73	The impact you can have on a student . . . you don't on a day-to-day basis realize what that impact is. They [the students] don't realize that at the moment, but years later.
	Caring	11	73	I think [what's important is] loving students and sharing that love, the love of learning and loving them as individuals and all of their potential. I want that to shine through because it's relationship first in this job.
	All students can learn	6	40	Understand that kids are different. Kids do need different things to learn. The kids will get there. It just might take them longer.
	Teacher as a human being	6	40	Very important: if you make a mistake, be the first one to admit that you made it because that way you are teaching your kids that it's okay.

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Category	Theme	N	%	Representative Quote
Teaching Identity & Integrity				
	Professional growth	9	60	[The Masters' degree] was a shot in the arm because it made me stop and think what an important role I have.
	Teaching as all-encompassing	4	27	I picked a profession that we can't just check a time card and go home and the job is waiting just as it was.
Teacher Efficacy				
	High efficacy	8	53	Because when I am able to motivate a child and I see them succeeding . . . that is what makes you want to come back to work or keep trying as you are wandering around a room of 35 kids.
	Low efficacy	6	40	It makes it [lack of success] hard because then you feel that if your students don't get it, you're to blame.
	Recognition as a teacher	5	33	A parent . . . asked her, "Did you used to teach at Washington School?" When Mary replied that she did and in return asked her if she had been one of her students, the parent answered, "No, but I wanted to be."

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Category	Theme	N	%	Representative Quote
Resilience				
	Adaptability	10	67	It was either go with the flow or quit. Either you were going to adapt or you were not.
	Renewal	10	67	You need to be refreshed now and then . . . not be scared of change!
	Relational resilience-supportive & collaborative relationships	8	53	Get a team. Find a team. Share with your team.
	Organizational resilience-importance of leadership	5	33	You feel supported and you know, if we said something, they would stand behind us, whereas with some principals, we didn't get that same support.
	Individual resilience-personal efficacy	6	40	If you really kind of keep your sphere of influence into those things that you can control, you feel much better about this longevity-wise. But if you begin to think too much and resent too much, all of these pressure and outside things that you have no control over, that are being shoved at you, you get burned out rather quickly. So, yeah, keep your influence small.
	Burnout	6	40	It was a terrible year. I would pull up in front of the school in the mornings and not want to get out of my car. I would leave crying . . . I was just a mess!
	Learning from experience	6	40	The reason I'm still standing after 29 years . . . Being able to reflect on yourself and don't be disappointed in yourself . . . one of my favorite things is progress, not perfection, like don't be perfect.
	Strength	6	40	Stay the course. It's going to be tough. There are going to be some good years. Don't let things defeat you. . . Just remember those waves and be up for them.

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A Passion for Teaching

Teaching as a calling. This theme received the highest number of participants responding of all the categories in the field of teachers' personal characteristics. Thirteen participants answered "yes" to the question: "Have you ever felt teaching to be your calling?" Many of the participants believed that to be an effective teacher under increasingly difficult conditions, one really had to want to do it. Gretchen Johnson explained:

I really truly feel that if they [teachers] don't have it, that "calling" as you said, then they are going to struggle. They are really, really going to struggle.

Sunshine Baker emphasized this point when she said:

I don't know what it is that made me really persevere except for I got a lot of enjoyment out of it. I felt like every day when I was in bed and I got up, I looked forward to the day.

I was anxious to get into the classroom and get started with whatever we were doing.

Gigi Kay added: "I enjoyed every day I went to work . . . It was my life. It was my home."

Arlene Paulson differentiated between those who saw teaching as a calling as opposed to those who saw it as a job when defining outstanding teachers: "I notice that about people: is it their calling, rather than their job? I feel that that is kind of a common factor . . ."

About half of the participants either had always known they would become teachers or had prior experiences that naturally led them into the teaching field. Dorothy Jacobsen remembered how she used to play school when she was little, trying to emulate her grandmother who was a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in the Midwest. Gretchen Johnson recalled how she had always worked with kids, whether it be at her church or as an instructional aide.

Sunshine Baker just knew she was "really good" with kids, how they just "flocked" to her.

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Approximately one-third of the participants were encouraged by another adult to go into the profession. Zonia Leond noticed that even though she had always wanted to be a teacher, her specialty changed when her parents took her to Las Vegas and picked up a friend's daughter from the local school for the deaf. Zonia recalled how the two of them managed to converse even though Zonia didn't know sign language. The experience changed Zonia's direction to later become a Special Education teacher. Dina Sawyer "swore on a Bible" to never become a teacher, but as part of her studies to get a degree in Spanish, she was sent to a school to tutor and she loved it. She then became an instructional aide whereupon the principal encouraged her to pursue her teaching credential. Sunshine Baker was working as a playground director to help her pay for college when a teacher came up to her and said, "I think that you should be a teacher," and invited her to his classroom to observe and get a feel for the profession.

No matter what path these teachers took, they all felt that they had chosen the right profession for themselves. But it was the fact they realized teaching was a calling – a kind of summons to a certain way of life that provided them with personal meaning and fulfillment – that supported them in facing the obstacles and challenges inherent in the profession (McMahon, 2003; Schwartz & Alberts, 1998). As Dina Sawyer chuckled, teaching was her calling because "it had to be. Or otherwise I wouldn't have lasted this long."

Limited concern for external expectations in solving obstacles. The challenges inherent in teaching led the participants to find solutions to them. They viewed such action as part of their role. Yet, in doing so, these teachers were more likely to consider all possible solutions, not just those that followed their district's guidelines. In other words, these teachers had limited concern with the external expectations demanded of them, but rather, studied other ways of resolving the obstacles before them, even if it meant they would be taking risks. Dorothy

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Jacobsen recalled the complaints of her colleagues that their sixth-grade students were not bringing in their homework. Up until that point, she and her colleagues would hold study hall detention, thinking it would motivate the students to bring in their homework the next time, but the teachers soon realized it wasn't working. Dorothy remembered thinking:

Why am I punishing these students for not doing their homework? I had that "ah-ha" that when they go home and they don't have a bed to sleep in, or a dining table or computer to do their homework, or they are babysitting their younger brother or sister . . . I started letting things go and there was this rejuvenation of liking kids again, and liking them deeper . . . I reconciled this [because] the kids were coming back successful . . . I still had students get into the high school district's academic academy . . . you can show responsibility with other stuff than homework . . . you can give them other leadership opportunities, other responsibilities that will build [their] capacity to make them be okay in junior high. It's a risk because you are trained to think, because that's how we learned! We had homework . . . well, that was 50 years ago. This is a different world.

The teachers spoke of various moments when they went "off script" and gave into those "teachable moments," even if it meant they were not following the pacing guide as directed by their districts. Anita Garcia humorously recalled her reaction to "going rogue": "Sometimes I find myself going like, *gasp!* I didn't use the book today!" Gretchen Johnson remembered the times she couldn't find what she needed to teach in the district-mandated textbook: "I know what I have to teach my kids . . . and this book, it doesn't have anything like that . . . So, I'm not going to use this book. I'm going to teach my standards." Zonia Leond advised beginning teachers to "understand that kids are different . . . and not to worry about the curriculum so much. What's handed to you in a box may not be what your kids need."

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Such detours were not without risk, however. Kaenine Handler described having to defend his methods before his administrators:

Teaching is a skill. It's an art. Not everybody does it the same way. That's one thing that would just burn me. The administration would say, "Well, you're not doing it like Susie over here."

And I'd say, "Hey, Susie does it one way and I do it another way. As long as we get what we're supposed to do, and the kids get it, what different does it make?"

As Sunshine Baker quipped in quoting the famous Frank Sinatra song, "I did it *my way*."

A Passion for Students

Making a difference. Eleven participants said that "making a difference" in the lives of children was the most important thing to them about teaching. In addition, all of these eleven participants pointed to "making a difference" as what gave them the most positive meaning in their careers. It made teaching worthwhile, despite the challenges these teachers faced day in and day out.

Grace Boughman believed that the best thing about being a teacher was the influence she had on others: "I get to help the children see that there's more. That what they know isn't enough and they can always learn more." Dina Sawyer described one of her students who had come back to his former school, specifically to find her. To Dina's joy, he had become a doctor. He told his former teacher:

I just wanted to thank you because without that program [the local university's science program that Dina had brought to the school for her students], and without your help and your love of science, this never would have happened.

Gretchen Johnson recalled one of her students, Jorge:

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I told him, “I know you want to try to play football. But if you want to play football, you have to be able to read. The coaches are not going to have you on their team if you don't have your grades at least beginning C's.” So, I worked with him after school, but he was just that rough and tough kind of kid . . . and he came back to me when he was in high school and he got on the football team.

Gretchen was amused because she said that even the kids who “hated” her came back to visit. For those like Gretchen, these visits were proof that their teachers had made an impact. When asked what advice she would give a new teacher coming into the profession, Gretchen mentioned that her niece, who was becoming a teacher, once asked her, “How do you do it, Aunt Gretchen?” Gretchen responded:

You just have to keep remembering that it's about the kids. And if you could make that impact on just one of the three kids that you had that year, then you've done your job. You may not be able to change them all. You may not be able to touch each one of them in their hearts, but if there's just one that you can just have that connection with and make a difference, even in just that school year. . . that's what makes you go, you know, so, you can see the light in their eyes and the smile that they come in or the cheers when they're leaving the last day. Because you know you've touched them.

At the same time, the participants realized that having an impact was a serious responsibility. Dina Sawyer confided:

You always have to think like, okay, is the thing I'm doing the correct thing? Because I'm affecting all these little lives, and it's not just this year . . . you have such power over these kids that you have to be careful.

Sunshine Baker advised beginning teachers to remember the power of having an impact:

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They [beginning teachers] might be the best thing that ever happened for the kids that's walked into the room. And I don't think that they [beginning teachers] really understand that yet.

Gigi Kay agreed on the clout that a teacher can have on a child :

The impact you can have on a student . . . you don't on a day-to-day basis realize what that impact is. That impact has to accumulate over days and over years of their lives.

They don't realize that at the moment, but years later.

Gretchen Johnson believed that it was that impact that led her to choose teaching as a career and influenced her to stay in it: "I don't know of any other career that has that, that same reward. I really don't." Zonia Leond spoke for all the participants who voiced this theme:

I always wanted to be a teacher who is making a difference. And if I'm not that teacher, then you need to tell me to retire because I don't want to be that person who should have retired 10 years ago.

Caring. It's not surprising that according to Day and Gu (2010), students universally identify outstanding teachers as those who care. All of the participants mentioned that their passion for their students was centered around the concept of caring, whether that caring be beneficial for the student or the teacher or both. Noddings (1992) claimed that caring is a fundamental human need and in the empathy teachers have for their students, they can identify with them and be their advocate. The evidence presented below confirmed that.

Eleven participants spoke to the theme of "caring." Arlene Paulson felt that a teacher's love in the teacher/student relationship is what teaching is really all about:

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I think [what's important is] loving students and sharing that love, the love of learning and loving them as individuals and all of their potential. I want that to shine through because it's relationship first in this job.

For Sunshine Baker, the love of children was crucial to being able to care about them:

What was important was that I was compassionate and not everybody is compassionate or can show a lot of empathy. I learned a lot about them [the students] as individuals, but I felt it was a really good trust level. I always felt that the kids trusted me to talk or to ask me something that was bothering them. I think I tried not to be too judgmental. I think I took a lot of extra time with students that needed it. Even if I was doing something else and they were just doing their homework, it seems like it was a safe place for them. I think I took more time than most people did with the kids that needed it.

True caring involves responsibility, responsibility for the learning and well-being of the students. When asked what was the best thing about being a teacher, Anita Garcia answered: “. . . that you feel responsible for others.”

Caring takes not only compassion and empathy, but it takes time even when time is not something that teachers always have. Sunshine Baker told the poignant story of the time she took with one of her students:

When I was teaching 5th grade, I had a girl. She was a 4th grader and she wanted to be in my class. She brought me flowers and stuff. And then after she got into my class, her mother died and it was the saddest thing. The mother had a brain tumor. I'd be working in my class after school, and she'd come running up and she'd say, “Miss Baker! My dad's in the car. Can you go to dinner with us?” She had two sisters. She had an older sister that kind of had to start taking over being the mother because she was like in junior

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high and she was the oldest girl in the house, and she had a younger sister. I'd go over there some times and we'd watch TV, but they would also have me over for dinner. One day we were riding in the car and the girl in my class reached over the seat and she said, "Miss Baker, do you think you could act like our mom for us? Would you be like our mother?"

The girls made it through that difficult time and later became successful in life, in part thanks to the loving care of Miss Baker.

A caring teacher can expand a student's horizon and make an impact. Irene Jean made this recommendation to beginning teachers: "Just encourage them [the students] to take the next step, to go beyond what they thought they could do." Arlene Paulson's hope was that one day at her retirement dinner, a student would stand up and say, "My teacher believed in me when I didn't believe in myself." Gretchen Johnson added, "I would like a student to say that I cared and I hopefully inspired them to be a passionate person, good to all people, and not give up. You know, to follow those dreams and goals." Moreover, a caring teacher always roots for his or her students. Dorothy Jacobsen explained: "It is the cheerleader and the motivator and the inspiration that is the most powerful part of my job." Motivating others gives a purpose to the teacher as well and becomes a reason to continue to teach. Dorothy clarified this concept: "When I am able to motivate a child and I see him or her succeeding, then that motivates me to keep that positivity going and that is what fuels me."

In sum, caring is what teaching is made of. One can have exemplary pedagogical knowledge, but without caring, the learner will not learn and the teacher will not be happy which will ultimately affect the learning in the classroom. Grace Boughman elucidated on this concept:

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I know some people who are really good at teaching and the minutiae of it, great posters. They really understand the education part, the lesson part, but they don't like children. They might like the idea of children. But you have to like children and you have to really believe in what you're doing because otherwise you just won't be one of those happy people.

All students can learn. Six participants spoke about this theme in their interview responses. The idea that all students are capable of learning flows naturally from the concept of caring. However, for the participants, this is not just a "high five" or a "you can do it" based on empty promises. Rather, the belief that all students can learn is based on the knowledge that all students are different and learn in various ways, and it is the teacher's job to accommodate these differences while still holding high expectations. Zonia Leond explained: "Understand that kids are different. Kids do need different things to learn. The kids will get there. It just might take them longer . . ." Kaenine Handler's advice to new teachers is to "be aware of the classroom and the kids . . . Don't focus on just your good kids. And don't just focus on your bad kids either. You have to just be aware." Arlene Paulson told the story of one of her kindergartners that the principal moved into her room because she and her mother were unhappy with the previous teacher. Although the girl came into her new classroom with this prior experience, Arlene started fresh:

But this girl has been such a surprise and such a delight. I can't even tell you. Oh my gosh! It didn't really take me that long to build a relationship with her, but she is smiling now. I get several hugs a day . . . I sat down with her just yesterday and I took out a really hard book. . . she sat there and we had the best time reading this book together. My heart was just singing! And this child, you know, that I was afraid of her mom, and I was afraid

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of her. Oh no! We just had the best time, and that just has happened over and over and over again.

Learning can occur when students feel accepted as they are. Renee Boyer recounted her experience as a mother and how that has helped her in her teaching:

I always tried to accept everybody for the problems that they had because not only did I have difficulty with my education when I was younger, but my first-born child is autistic . . . And I spend a lot of time as his advocate. So, I always thought you had to accept the child the way they came to you and just try to work around any of the problems they were having.

Mary Dobson described how this acceptance is celebrated in her classroom:

We start every day a new day. That's what I tell the kids. Whatever happened yesterday, it's a new day. So, we're always going to start just positive. I sing "The Morning Song" with them every day.

Enthusiasm, acceptance and positivity are all ways to carry out the motto "All students can learn."

Yet, the participants also felt that to truly mentor student success, systems need to be in place that find the correct placement for every student. Renee Boyer remembered the students who fell in between the cracks in the educational system:

I think all along that you have children that you can tell they either have problems that are not diagnosed and often the school districts drag their feet. They don't want to do any testing because it's going to cost them money. As an advocate for children, if I saw that, I would tell the parents what their rights were . . . they [district personnel] would keep saying things like: "Well, he's only in Kindergarten. He's only in the first grade. She's

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only . . . we have to wait until we can find a discrepancy between their intelligence and their ability.” I’m thinking, you can find that when they’re three! The idea that you have to wait with speech problems and vision problems . . . it’s just ridiculous! There needs to be more focus on each child making sure they reach their potential, rather than waiting. The waiting game. They don’t get better with age. Most of them suffer because they don’t get help.

The teacher as human being. A major way that participants motivated their students to learn was by showing them that even though they were teachers, they were human. Six participants demonstrated this theme in their responses. Sharing one’s passion with one’s students was a powerful motivator for Anita Garcia: “If there’s something that you’re passionate about apart from your teaching, bring it into your classroom, and share it with your students. And bring it down to their level.” Dina Sawyer stressed the importance of curiosity with her students:

I want them to be curious. I think that’s something that I would like to achieve. That’s what I was telling them, you have to always learn because I think the day you stop learning, you’re dead. Then they asked me, “So, what do you learn?” “Well, I don’t know. I read. I’ll try something new, just challenge myself all the time.”

Learning also means making mistakes on the way. Grace Boughman told her students: “I can admit that I made a mistake and I used to not be able to admit it. And I want the children to understand that it’s okay to make a mistake and I made it. . . I used to have a poster. It says, ‘life is about making mistakes and learning from them’. For Anita Garcia, mistakes mean acceptance. She said, “Don’t be too hard on yourself. And know that you have to learn from your mistakes. Very important: if you make a mistake, be the first one to admit that you made it because that way you are teaching your kids that it’s okay.” For Arlene Paulson, making mistakes means

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sometimes you need to go off by yourself to cool down and reflect on what you've done. She told a kindergarten student of hers how being in “time out” wasn’t such a bad thing:

“Let me tell you what time outs are. Every person in the whole wide world sometimes needs to come down. You need a little time to yourself and you know what? I'm going to create a little special place over here for you.” And I put him behind the pocket chart there and I gave him a special place and I put that box of fidgets there. And I said, “You know, you can breathe, you can fidget and play and you can feel yourself calm down.”

Showing that you are human, make mistakes, and find solutions so that you don’t make the same mistake again - even as a teacher - is the ultimate form of self-acceptance. In addition, it also allows the teacher to empathize with the student. Or as Tina Fontana said, it's one way of the students remembering the teacher as “kind.”

Teaching Identity and Integrity

Professional growth. Nine participants cited “professional growth” as a major component of their identity as teachers. For some of these participants, pursuing a further degree in education (e.g., Masters’) solidified who they were as teachers. Sunshine Baker claimed that when she went back to school to obtain her Masters’, “it was a shot in the arm because it made me stop and think what an important role I have.” Gigi Kay admitted that she got her Masters’ degree because she wanted to “better” herself. Arlene Paulson explained that after ten years of being a Reading Recovery teacher, she started to “hit” her “stride,” so she went back to school to get her Masters’ in Reading.

For other participants, their professional development did not necessarily have to be a formal degree. Instead they went to professional conferences, read professional journals and books, developed curriculum materials for other teachers, took part in site-based leadership

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decisions or were coached by colleagues. All of these participants described how much they enjoyed challenging themselves to learn and grow in the process. In fact, professional development made them feel just that, more “professional.” It also kept them fresh. Dina Sawyer exclaimed: “I like the challenge of having to learn something new almost every year. It keeps me young, and so, I just love it!”

Teaching as all-encompassing. One theme grouped under “Teaching Identity and Integrity” received less than thirty percent of the participant responses, but is worth mentioning. These participants spoke of how teaching seeped into other parts of their lives. Dorothy Jacobsen described how her mission in teaching has given her purpose and a strong identity:

Currently, what keeps me coming to work every day is being an advocate for the children in the classrooms. You asked me earlier, “Is this your calling?” Yes, it is . . . So, I find my purpose right now.

However, this purpose comes with a price; it can be all encompassing. Arlene Paulson explained:

When I think about my personal life and my professional life, they blend a lot because I’m a person who chooses to do a lot of professional things in my free time . . . I think that probably I haven’t always been the best at my career at maybe balancing professional and personal, but here I picked a profession that we can’t just check a time card and go home and the job is waiting just as it was . . . I go home with questions. My professional life kind of defines me in a sense because I take it home like that. And I couldn’t even tell you if it’s a good thing or a bad thing. I don’t even know that. But it’s there . . .

Grace Boughman hesitated to blur these lines: “I have to be really careful that this isn’t all that I am . . . a teacher. That there’s something other than that . . .” No participant had an answer on how to keep the professional and private lives separate, but they did agree that it was very hard

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to identify being a teacher if one wasn't actually teaching. Arlene Paulson remembered her stint as a Teacher on Special Assignment when she was no longer in the classroom and had lost touch with her teacher identity and therefore, could not demonstrate her integrity:

Some of my lowest times as an educator was when I was behind a cubicle because you're dealing just with ideas and with policy and things. You become disconnected with the school and the school sites. Teachers don't even want anything to do with you . . .

Teacher Efficacy

High self-efficacy. Eight participants referred to their satisfaction as an effective teacher with their students, which the researcher has termed as "high self-efficacy." The majority of these participants maintained that it was very rewarding and motivating for them when their students "got it." Mary Dobson's experiences are emblematic of those of the other participants who spoke to this theme. She described an encounter with her student, Juan Pablo:

Like the other day last week, I was teaching a lesson – they were reading a book – and Juan Pablo was like, "Oh, look! They're being an engineer!" I taught him the engineering design process, and just that he transferred that from one to another, that was a high point.

In fact, student success is crucial to teacher motivation and commitment. Mary commented: "Just seeing them actually succeed is exciting. It is. It still is." Furthermore, the student may not realize his or her success for many years, but that delay doesn't stop the teacher from interpreting the positive experience as proof of his or her efficacy. Mary continued:

I think that I somehow just made an impact upon their life. That I did something that they remembered or that helped them to become a better person, a success story, you know, whatever it is. Like you taught me to read. I mean, that's huge! Like learning to read.

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Like that's what I teach them. I teach kids to read. And like I said, they don't always remember, but, yeah, that that made a difference.

For Mary, knowing what you are good at and being able to capitalize on it was essential to being an effective teacher. She explained:

I think I'm good at teaching them [the students] how to read. Like I have a lot of background, experience, knowledge, training in that beginning reading stage . . . being able to break it down, get it down to their very beginning level, and teaching that most basic beginning reading skill and how to do that and helping them see that they can do it.

Mary's experiences fit the definition of teacher efficacy by Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) when they stated that teacher efficacy is a teacher's belief or conviction that he or she can shape how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated (see Chapter 2).

Mary continued: "I've had some low kids. [I tell them] we can get past this, we can do this, you might not be the most fluent reader, but you are going to read at some point."

Dorothy Jacobsen summed up the feeling a teacher experiences from being successful with students: "Because when I am able to motivate a child and I see them succeeding . . . that is what makes you want to come back to work or keep trying as you are wandering around a room of 35 kids."

However, teacher efficacy does not happen in a vacuum. The same participants who experienced it argued that the working conditions teachers find themselves in directly contribute to or diminish the opportunity for a teacher to feel effective. Grace Boughman revealed in her memories of the effects of class size reduction and a classroom aide: "So, 20 to 1, what a dream? Because very few children could fall through the cracks at 20 to 1 . . . and if you had help, well, it was like delightful! In the Bay Area, I had help." Zonia Leond recounted her experience of

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being a Reading Specialist. Thanks to the support of her administrator, the program thrived and so did the students:

“I kind of followed a principal, and then I moved schools. . . there wasn’t such a negative connotation with the pull-out programs as there is now. . . we found the kids who had reading troubles. Kids were coming and going, but I felt like I was really making a difference for some of those kids because I was teaching multiple grades. There were multiple resources that we were using and I felt like it was really a high point because . . . those kids were getting what they needed, number one. And I also felt like it was a safe place for them to read a book that wasn’t necessarily at their grade level. And so it gave them the confidence that “I can read. I can do this.”

Unfortunately, when there was a change in principals, the program was disbanded and Zonia went back into a self-contained classroom.

For Renee Boyer, high efficacy came when she was assigned a 5/6 combination class and there were no books available. As this was before the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, Renee was able to count on her creativity and professional training to create her own curriculum. She described this experience with great pride:

I put the children in charge of all of the bulletin boards . . . I remember saying to the kids, “What should we learn?”

The first person said – I remember his name was Randy – “I know how to use a slide rule. How about if I show us how to do that?”

And then it just kind of went on from there. Whatever it was, we did it. We did a geodesic dome. Every section of it needed to be measured and cut and folded and stapled together . . . That was definitely the best thing. We did a movie: an 8 mm movie of

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President Kennedy's physical fitness test. We went to Hearst Castle because I had taught art history. I also taught decoding. I had something on that every day. One of the gals that I have been in contact now as an adult said that because I did that every day, she really found that that was something she was going to get into. I found out later she worked for JPL (the Jet Propulsion Laboratory), and she helped with the Rover on Mars.

For Dorothy Jacobsen, being able to be independent in making professional decisions is a big part in how effective she felt in the classroom: "As long as I'm teaching the state standards which I believe are good standards . . . I don't see anyone hindering me because I feel that the district is allowing me . . . I have teacher autonomy now."

Low efficacy. In contrast, six participants spoke of their experiences in not being able to be as effective as they would have liked to have been. The researcher has termed this theme as "low efficacy." Mary Dobson described low efficacy as the difference between where the teacher wants the students to be and where they are. She said: "Where I want them [the students] to be, and how we actually are . . . it's still not there. I don't know if it's every going to get there, but we just keep plowing." Kaenine Handler expressed the frustration he and other teachers felt when the students didn't get it: "If you want a lowest point, a low point is asking the kids to do something they can't do, and I don't mean just a half of a grade difference. I'm talking about two or three grades difference."

In addition to the students lacking the skills necessary for the grade level, Grace Boughman felt that not all students were ready for the subject matter "maturity-wise." Mary Dobson described how each class was different. She lamented that her current class was not able to comprehend the things she taught to the previous year's class: "Things that I did last year, I can't do with this class. It's not happening."

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However, low efficacy is not just the result of a mismatch between student skill level and grade-level curriculum. Just as working conditions can increase teacher efficacy, so can it diminish it. The response to environmental challenges played a major role in how successful the participants felt (see “Teachers’ Challenges”). Mary Dobson expressed her relief when her administration finally realized after two trimesters in her class that one of her students needed a more restrictive setting. All through kindergarten and the first two trimesters of first grade, the sluggishness with which the administration responded to the needs of this child led to both of his teachers feeling highly ineffective and emotionally drained.

In addition to administrative response time, lack of collegial support was another factor affecting a teacher’s sense of efficacy. Grace Boughman described her first-year teaching fourth grade after a long absence:

I was doing everything I could. Standing on my head and moving kids from here to there, and I would ask in the teachers’ lounge . . . I’m really struggling here, any ideas? I couldn’t get any help of ideas from anybody, just always, “isn’t it awful?”

Grace’s sense of isolation while being surrounded by colleagues who possibly could have helped her was felt by other participants as well. Anita Garcia held herself responsible for any failure when she admitted: “It makes it [lack of success] hard because then you feel that if your students don’t get it, you’re to blame.”

Recognition as a teacher. Five participants spoke of how being recognized by students, parents and/or peers reaffirmed their sense of positive self-efficacy. Support or recognition of worth in their work environments led to increased self-efficacy, commitment and enthusiasm. Mary Dobson proudly recalled a parent who asked her, “Did you used to teach at Washington School?” When Mary replied that she did and in return asked her if she had been one of her

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students, the parent answered, “No, but I wanted to be.” Emily Costa felt a certain pride when she told people she was a teacher. “When you say you’re a teacher, people always remember a teacher who was in their life.” Grace Boughman remembered how parents in one of her districts valued her and her fellow colleagues. “There teachers were valued so much . . . [the parents would always say] thank you so much, Teacher.” Tina Fontana fondly spoke of how she has had the kids of her former students: “My husband calls them ‘legacies.’ But it’s a compliment that the parent wants them in my class . . . they have fond memories and they ask for me. I’m excited . . .” Both Kaenine Handler and Emily Costa mentioned that the highest point they had experienced as a teacher was receiving an award from their peers: the PTA Silver Award for Kaenine and Teacher of the Year for Emily. For all of these teachers, the recognition that they were excellent teachers meant a lot to them and contributed to them continuing to give their best each day.

Resilience

Adaptability. Ten participants cited “adaptability” as the most important quality a teacher can have in continuing in the profession. For these participants, adaptability was a kind of personal mantra, a way of being resilient in the face of change. When asked what was the hardest thing about being a teacher, Gretchen Johnson responded, “Keeping up with the times.” Yet, all the participants stressed the importance of flexibility and adaptability as a survival skill. Dina Sawyer advised: “Be flexible more than anything because if you’re not flexible as a teacher – oh my gosh! – it’s going to be miserable.” Dorothy Jacobsen put this advice into context:

The student is so different now, so the teacher has to be different . . . for some reason, I have been able to evolve into that teacher that they need me to be. I’ve been able to change my pedagogy or change my philosophy or change my priorities.

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Gigi Kay saw adaptability as the key to being able to continue in teaching:

It was either go with the flow or quit. Either you were going to adapt or you were not. . . things are going to come down the pike and you're going to think they're stupid . . . but I can tell you, do it. Give it your all. You can have your own little opinions . . . but 33 years later, do those opinions really matter? No.

If you were going to fight back, choose wisely. Dorothy Jacobsen remembered the parents of one of her students who were very intimidating in their demands: "Sometimes you just have to give in and that's fine. Pick your battle."

Renewal. Ten participants also spoke how teachers can renew themselves in order to help them be resilient in the profession. Dina Sawyer found that teaching has its own cycle of renewal built in, thanks to the possibility of being a lifelong learner: "I think the fact that you are always learning [is the best thing about being a teacher]." For Sunshine Baker, the knowledge that each year is different is a kind of renewal and an antidote against negativity:

I just got through that year and realized that in teaching, that's one good thing. It's that you have a beginning and you have an end, and then it all starts over again . . . so that if you had a bad year, you always have a chance that the next year could be delightful.

Three participants recommended that teachers who are waning in their commitment to the profession instigate change for themselves. Mary Dobson was particularly adamant about this:

I think if they [the teachers] are waning . . . they need to change, do a change of some sort. Change grade levels. Change schools. Something to mix it up. Because if they are not happy with what they are doing, just continuing to do the same thing is not going to make them happy.

Dina Sawyer agreed:

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Find something that you like, maybe the level is not where you're happy. Maybe you can switch schools. Maybe you can become a specialist and something else. Maybe a different type of training. Not do the same thing all the time. You need to be refreshed now and then . . . not be scared of change!

Renee Boyer recommended some serious self-evaluation and reflection:

They [teachers] need to find their passion. Maybe idealism has gone, but they still have to look at the job as a whole and find out where they think they would fit. And they have to find a new calling within that parameter of teaching.

Teachers can even introduce change on a small scale. Anita Garcia said: "If there's something that you're passionate about apart from your teaching, bring it into your classroom . . . and share it with your students . . . because that helps you quite a bit."

Relational resilience – supportive and collaborative relationships. Eight participants cited how they were able to weather the hard times during their careers thanks to the supportive and collaborative relationships they had created with their colleagues. Grace Boughman and Renee Boyer both stressed the importance of not being "an island" in a school. Grace advised: "Get a team. Find a team. Share with your team." Arlene Paulson suggested teachers build a professional learning community with like-minded individuals in order "to stay fresh" and have a meaningful longevity in the profession. Staff members that share ideas and, as Kaenine Handler said, "treat each other like professionals," tend to stay at their school sites. In fact, the atmosphere takes on that of a family, whereby every member is involved. Dina Sawyer recalled the atmosphere at her school site: "When I first got here, it was a brand-new school . . . everybody knew everybody. There was a lot of group work. We worked very closely with our team. We were running the school." As Day and Gu (2010) found, teachers working in schools under challenging

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socio-economic circumstances quickly learn the importance of mutual trust and support in order to sustain their morale, sense of efficacy, well-being, and effectiveness.

Organizational resilience – the importance of leadership. Five participants stressed the importance of leadership in creating a climate where organizational resilience can thrive. When asked what a good leader does to make a teacher feel fulfilled, Gretchen Johnson replied: “You feel supported and you know, if we said something, they would stand behind us, whereas with some principals, we didn’t get that same support.” For Mary Dobson, support from the principal meant that she did not have to deal with the problem in isolation, which could cause a steep decline in her sense of self-efficacy: “She [my principal] keeps telling me, it’s not you. We need to do what’s best for this kid. It’s not that you’re not doing a good job. He has issues. It’s not you.” Ways that the principal supported this teacher was to take calls directly from demanding parents and setting up a system whereby the teacher could text administrative or specialized staff for support in the classroom with difficult students. For Gigi Kay, good principals always encouraged her to attend professional development trainings that would provide her with better support. As most studies had concluded, the key to organizational resilience is the presence of good leadership (Fullan, 2008; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Leithwood & Day, 2007; Ross, Gray, & Sibbald, 2008 – See “Chapter 2”).

Individual resilience – personal efficacy. For the six participants who spoke of their individual resilience as being a factor in their ability to remain committed to the profession, relational and organizational resilience did not support these efforts. Arlene Paulson offered this advice to teachers who might be questioning their effectiveness in the profession:

If you really kind of keep your sphere of influence into those things that you can control, you feel much better about this longevity-wise. But if you begin to think too much and

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resent too much, all of these pressure and outside things that you have no control over, that are being shoved at you, you get burned out rather quickly. So, yeah, keep your influence small.

Gretchen Johnson added to this practical advice:

I think you just have to stay on the positive . . . What good did I do today? Even if it was one small thing. Did Angel smile today? So, it's these little things that are going to make or break you.

Renee Boyer agreed by reminding teachers that whatever it is that is distasteful that is happening, it shouldn't affect what you have been hired to do: teach. Emily Costa advised all teachers to "stay the course . . . no matter how bumpy it is. If you question, talk. Don't just quit and pull the rug out from under your own self." These findings correspond to what the researcher found in the literature on a teacher's individual resilience. "Useful amnesia" gave teachers the uncommon ability to forget bad experiences, to put aside unpleasant or depressing events in a school day, and move forward (Cohen, 2009).

Burnout. Five participants spoke candidly about their experiences with burnout. As Strayton (2009) concluded, the demands of teaching can challenge the reserves of even the most dedicated teachers. Maslach (1982) cited emotional and physical exhaustion as the first step in burnout whereby the person experiences such stress that he or she does not feel capable facing people or responding to the demands of the job. All five participants in this study who experienced burnout believed that their encounter was in part intensified by their feelings of isolation and lack of control.

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Mary Dobson recalled having an autistic student who constantly screamed in her class while she was battling the effects of what her doctor later diagnosed as postpartum depression after the birth of her daughter:

A--- was screaming all the time, crawling under the table . . . that sent me in a very bad spiral. That was the straw that broke the camel's back on something that was physically happening to me, probably most likely as a result of postpartum. . . his screaming was so intense and we had those old air conditioners that were really noisy and I couldn't take it, I was like I just had to open the windows so I could turn the air conditioner off. And I turned it and when it stuck, I literally put my arm through the window . . . I can show you a scar right here.

Grace Boughman related having a very difficult fourth grade class her first year of teaching upper grade:

It was a terrible year. I would pull up in front of the school in the mornings and not want to get out of my car. I would leave crying . . . it was hard to come to school and leave school. Fridays, I was just a mess!

Gretchen Johnson also had a challenging student who triggered her burnout:

I got really discouraged because I wasn't getting support from administration. I wasn't getting support from the district. I was getting nothing . . . it was exhausting. It was just draining and I felt so bad for him [the student]. I was not doing my job. And I wasn't doing my job to my other 29 kids either. So, that was my hardest, having him be in here and being unable to teach.

For Dorothy Jacobsen, it was not necessarily student behavior, but changes coming from above:

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Just to summarize, a burnout area would be when you're just so overwhelmed. Any time there was a new adoption in curriculum or whatever . . . you feel like there is so much on your plate and you can't get to it.

Emily Costa aptly summed up her feelings of isolation while trying to hold on during her burnout period: "It wasn't me to complain. It was me to try to fix this. It was my job to overcome it."

Learning from experience. Although dealing with burnout was traumatic for the participants, six teachers were able to take away lessons from that experience that made them stronger and more resilient in the long run. Emily Costa summed up the feelings of many of the participants by her recommendation of not to dwell on one's failures, but to see the positives as steps forward. Grace Boughman saw the moving forward as the first step in learning balance in her professional life: "You need to figure it out. Do what's important." When faced with a very difficult student, Grace didn't wait for directives for the administration; instead, she and her aide started documenting his behaviors for the school psychologist in order to get him observed and tested for further services. Finding that balance also means knowing one's limits. Zonia Leond described the overwhelming feeling she and her colleagues felt in dealing with a newly-arrived large group of students who need social services beyond what the teachers can offer. Zonia admitted: "I can't [always] fix that one. I can only fix what I've got in here [in my classroom]" Having choices in how one can react in difficult situations is the message in Anita Garcia's responses about dealing with an unsupportive principal: "This person is trying to make your life miserable, you know. I said, 'No!'"

For all of these teachers, isolation was partly to blame for their feelings of exhaustion. Dorothy Jacobsen spoke from experience when asked to give advice to teachers who were struggling: "Smart people ask for help. There is no such thing as a dumb question. If you don't

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know how to do something in your classroom, find someone safe that you can ask.” Dorothy then added her thoughts on self-acceptance:

The reason I’m still standing after 29 years . . . Being able to reflect on yourself and don’t be disappointed in yourself . . . one of my favorite things is progress, not perfection, like don’t be perfect. Just make one little tweak and get from here to there, and when you get there, make another little goal, and maybe go farther.

However, if looking in the mirror, the teacher sees an unhappy person, then considering leaving the profession may be the only option. Dina Sawyer gave some advice on this:

If you really hate it, then just get out. I think that’s the best thing. I’ve seen it with some of my colleagues where one of them specifically just said, “I hate what I’m doing. I don’t want to be here anymore.” And she retired early. She said, “It’s not good for the kids when I don’t want to be here.”

Strength. In their research on the lives of teachers, Day and Gu (2010) discovered that teachers’ experiences serve as important sources of wisdom and strength, which will enable them to bounce back from adverse circumstances. Six participants found strength as the basis for their resilience in the profession. For Mary Dobson, facing the challenge of teaching an emotionally-disturbed child in her class would have been unthinkable before. But now that she is “physically and mentally healthy enough to take on that challenge,” she is no longer afraid of burning out as she had in the past. Most importantly, the participants spoke of a kind of inner power that saw them through their years of teaching. Dina Sawyer called it “courage,” because “I think you need a lot of courage to stay in teaching.” Irene Jean would advise new teachers to be persistent: “Don’t give up! Keep going!” Emily Costa would tell beginning teachers:

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Stay the course. It's going to be tough. There are going to be some good years. Don't let things defeat you. Don't let anything defeat you or get you down. Just remember those waves and be up for them.

Kaenine Handler recommended getting involved in the teachers' association or professional organizations to gain that inner power. After being elected as president of his district's association, he claimed that he "gained a lot of strength in a way." He remembered the superintendent sitting at the back table of his room before school to talk about the school board agenda, and he said to his superior:

"Here I am sitting with the superintendent and I'm not quaking in my boots."

The superintendent replied: "Well, why should you?"

And I said, "Yeah! Why should I?"

Summary of Teachers' Personal Characteristics

The personal characteristics of teachers have a definite influence on the commitment to teaching expressed by the study's participants. All of the participants were able to talk about their passion for teaching, with all but two teachers agreeing that teaching was a "calling" for them. As a calling, teaching provided them with a strong reason to love what they did and to always try to do it well. It provided them with a powerful identity, so much so that the physical and emotional work that was involved often permeated other areas of their lives.

However, the principal reason they remained teachers and found such meaning in it was that they felt they were making a difference in the lives of their students. Such an impact was made possible because of the way the participants cared about their students, not only in an academic sense, but in a deeply personal way. These teachers were able to empathize with the highs and lows of their students' lives because they accepted their students as they were, even with the next

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goal always set. In fact, making an impact on their students' lives was a responsibility that each of these educators took very seriously. Because they believed that all students could learn, they saw it as their job to adapt their teaching to make sure that happened.

Consequently, student success was a reality (along with some failures), which led to the participants' sense of efficacy as educators. Their sense of efficacy fueled their motivation and commitment. Yet, this trajectory could be heightened or diminished by the environmental conditions they experienced in the public school system. High or low administrative support, proper or improper placement of a special needs student, or a collegial or isolated workplace could make efficacy a joyful or stressful journey.

Most significantly, however, a teacher's ability to be resilient while navigating changing circumstances and contexts was seen as the key to longevity in teaching. For these participants, adaptability was the most important quality in the face of change. A teacher may unfortunately experience burnout from stress and exhaustion, but his or her ability to weather the crisis, learn from the experience and feel renewed with a newfound strength will prove whether he or she can thrive once again in the profession.

Professional Life Phases (PLPs)

A Professional Life Phase (PLP) is a unique time period over the course of a teacher's professional career characterized by similar professional features, needs, and concerns as other teachers (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Vonk, 1989). In analyzing the responses of the study's participants, the researcher found that they were exhibiting characteristics of not one, but the various PLPs from different researchers in the field (see Chapter

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2).⁴ Themes that could be gathered from these interviews were: 1) Maintaining Enthusiasm, Motivation and Commitment (Day & Gu, 2010), 2) Career Frustration and Dealing with Roadblocks (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1991; Huberman, 1989), 3) Serenity or Conservatism (Huberman, 1989), and 4) Disengagement or Career Wind-down (Day & Gu, 2010; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Vonk, 1989). These themes and their representative quotations are located below in Table 5.

Table 5

Professional Life Phases (PLPs)

Theme	N	%	Representative Quote
Maintaining Enthusiasm, Motivation and Commitment	13	87	You know, what really gets me all excited every day is all the high fives, and “I’m so proud of you! That really does keep me coming to work every day.
Career Frustration and Dealing with Roadblocks	13	87	This is a completely different job than I joined 28 years ago . . . in all the different schools and all the different roles I’ve taught in, this is by far the most rigorous.
Serenity or Conservatism	10	67	Be flexible more than anything . . . and just buckle up because it goes like this.
Disengagement or Career Wind-down	0	0	N/A

Maintaining Enthusiasm, Motivation and Commitment

Day and Gu (2010) viewed this PLP as a period whereby teachers can maintain enthusiasm, motivation and commitment to teaching if they successfully navigate the roadblocks that have appeared in their careers. Thirteen participants demonstrated this theme in their responses.

Although the participants spoke of the difficulties they had experienced in their 24+ year career,

⁴ In keeping with the theoretical framework of this study, PLPs are one of the factors that influence a teacher’s ongoing commitment (the other two are a teacher’s challenges and personal characteristics).

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the happiest moments for them was when they saw “the light bulb go off” in their students. Mary Dobson described it as “all those little ‘ah ha’ moments when they [the students] do it.” Arlene Paulson recalled how student enthusiasm propelled her own enthusiasm:

You know, what really gets me all excited every day is all the high fives, and “I’m so proud of you! Look! You’re noticing your sight words everywhere in the world,” and all those little things. That really does keep me coming to work every day . . . just those little smiles in line. I go to pick them up in line and then they are excited to learn. Wow! That has never gone away for me. It truly hasn’t.

Dorothy Jacobsen reiterated this point when she said, “When I am able to motivate a child and I see them succeeding, then that motivates me to keep that positivity going.”

Sometimes the teacher does not know until later if he or she was successful. The return visits or Facebook “friending” of former students also helped to maintain enthusiasm and commitment on the part of the teacher in working with his or her present students. Dorothy continued:

My former students find me on Facebook or they send a letter to the school. They seek me out and to me the high point is when a student comes back . . . I’m doing this or that and they’re successful and they remember me. Oh my gosh! That’s a high point!

The sense of efficacy that teachers like Mary Dobson, Arlene Paulson and Dorothy Jacobsen felt when their students responded positively to learning resulted in a stronger sense of purpose for becoming and remaining a teacher despite the challenges they experienced.

Career Frustration and Dealing with Roadblocks

Like the number of participants that expressed their enthusiasm and commitment to the profession, thirteen participants – many of them the same - also described their struggles and

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frustrations triggered by challenging roadblocks. All of these participants spoke to how their jobs as teachers had changed dramatically over the years, producing more uncertainty and stress than ever before. Arlene Paulson explained:

This is a completely different job than I joined 28 years ago. It's the same in the affective way that I connect with students and I build relationships with them and I teach them, but in all the different schools and all the different roles I've taught in, this is by far the most rigorous . . . very stressful.

The roadblocks took the form of environmental and individual challenges: the same as described by Fessler and Christensen (1992) in their Career Cycle Model (see Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 4)). For Gretchen Johnson, it was student behavior with a lack of parental support that proved to be, what she called, her "biggest challenge" in her entire 30-year teaching career.

Gretchen's description of feeling exhausted and drained while trying to meet the needs of a fifth-grade student who needed one-on-one attention in academics and behavior intervention resonated in the responses of at least half of the study's participants. Interestingly enough, neither Gretchen nor any of the other participants left teaching during these difficult periods. They each found their own way of breaking free from these low points in their careers and were able to resume teaching and re-experience the joy the profession had given them before.

Serenity or Conservatism

Huberman (1989) wrote about the period of questioning and possible self-doubt that followed the challenging roadblocks. In his research he found that teachers could choose one of two phases: serenity or conservatism. In serenity, teachers learn to accept their real selves in their professional roles, even if it means recognizing the difference between their initial and current levels of enthusiasm and energy. Ten participants met this definition in their responses. Grace

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Boughman advised beginning and veteran teachers to “learn balance” and to learn “which deadlines are soft and which are hard.” She saw this as a survival skill for teachers, a technique for being able to adapt to the multiple and sometimes overwhelming demands in the profession. Anita Garcia reminded teachers not to be “too hard on themselves,” that despite all the best efforts at preparation, mistakes will happen. Zonia Leond told the story of witnessing increasingly aggressive behavior by students at her school, but she learned not to “fix” every student she came in contact with. Emily Costa spoke of how she doesn’t dwell on “failures,” but rather, looks at the “positives” and the successes of each day. For all of these participants, serenity was not a constant state of happiness; instead, it was a kind of realistic calm after the storm, an inner knowledge of what one can and cannot do.

The other phase Huberman (1989) described was that of conservatism, whereby teachers may exhibit rigidity, reluctance to accept innovation, and discontent with the profession. Interestingly enough, none of the participants interviewed really fit this definition or did not speak to me about it. Although almost all of the participants had experienced some low point in their careers, none of them had refused to change or become so distraught as to consider leaving the profession. Rather, most of the participants stressed the importance of not giving up, of “staying the course, and riding the waves.” In fact, a number of participants viewed change and innovation – no matter how difficult it might be to adapt to or initiate – to be part of the profession and even something to look forward to. Dina Sawyer advised teachers to “be flexible more than anything . . . and just buckle up because it goes like this.” But to those same teachers, she said that “it’s only a year at a time . . . You know next year will be different.” Adaptation seemed to be the key to a successful and long career.

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Disengagement or Career Wind-down

As described by Huberman (1989), the phase of disengagement is characterized by the withdrawal from professional commitments for teachers at the end of their career as they anticipate retirement. This period can be either serene or bitter (Huberman, 1989). Likewise, for Vonk (1987) and Fessler and Christensen (1992), this career wind-down or running down phase can also be either a pleasant, reflective experience or a bitter and resentful one. Digging further, Day and Gu (2010) found that the tenor of the disengagement phase depended on whether teachers could cope with change and remain committed, or descend into feeling tired and trapped. Even though five of the participants interviewed were already retired and four were expecting to retire at the end of the school year in which the interview took place, surprisingly none of them expressed a career wind-down phase that was bitter or resentful. The already-retired participants spoke fondly of their years in the classroom, and even went back regularly to their former district on a part-time basis to evaluate English Language Learners on the state language competency test. Those who were planning to retire in the near future were both excited and anxious about their soon-to-be status, but a sense of relief – especially in no longer having to implement new curriculum mandates or cope with increased student misbehavior – was evident in their voices. For these teachers, the time before and during retirement provided a period in which they could reflect upon their long careers without the stress and rush of their earlier years.

Summary of Professional Life Phases

Four themes arose in analyzing the data based on Professional Life Phases. Most strongly was the phase of Maintaining Enthusiasm, Motivation and Commitment. All of the participants who demonstrated this theme in their responses spoke of the joy they received when their students were successful, whether while in their classes or later in life. This was the overriding thread in the

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interview responses and was the main reason for why these teachers continued to teach. Despite the fact that the same number of participants described a phase of Career Frustration or Challenging Roadblocks, none of them expressed a desire to leave the profession, whether during their difficult periods or after. The motivation they were able to continue renewing throughout their careers was like an underground source: no sooner had a student showed their enthusiasm for learning and demonstrated their success than the source came forth, strengthening the teacher's commitment.

Granted almost all of the participants had a more realistic view of teaching towards the end of their careers, but this did not seem to dampen their commitment. If anything, surviving the "combat zone" was almost worn like a badge of honor, giving these teachers the right to advise beginning and experienced teachers. The stereotypical image of the veteran teacher as a cranky individual who refuses to change in the line of duty – although perhaps partly based on anecdotal experience - was not at all reflected in these participants and their responses. Whether still working in the trenches or retired from the force, all of the participants spoke of their careers with much pride.

Summary of Results

The findings related to the research question of the study suggest the influence of clear factors on the ongoing commitment of these veteran K-6 public school teachers from all three categories listed in the theoretical framework. Environmental challenges most frequently cited by participants as having had an influence on their enthusiasm and commitment included student behavior, lack of administrative and parental support, educational reform, overwhelming work load, and instructional time constraints. The change in student behavior over the course of the participants' careers weighed the most heavily in the interview data. This negative change in

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behavior produced a decrease in the participants' feeling of self-efficacy, not only with the students in question, but the entire class. More significantly, without the support of parents and administrators, the participants felt frustrated in their isolation and lack of training in dealing with the increase in aggressive student misbehavior. Whereas the successive waves of educational reform could have addressed these behavioral challenges, they instead added to the participants' stress levels by producing an increased work load, thereby, underscoring the lack of time the participants already felt in trying to meet the mandated instructional standards. The frustration was multiplied by a constant attempt by the participants to balance work and family responsibilities throughout their careers.

On the other hand, the personal characteristics demonstrated by the participants were a source of strength in both combatting the challenges that faced them and positively influencing their commitment to the profession. The participants' overwhelming passion for their students exemplified by their acts of caring and mission to make a difference in their lives was paramount in how these participants saw their role as educators. A majority of the participants considered teaching as their calling and were adamant about finding solutions for the obstacles that blocked the path of their students' achievement. Although only half of the participants cited high self-efficacy in carrying out their mission, all of them continued to forge ahead, highlighting their ability to adapt during their long careers.

While the characteristics of various professional life phases were apparent in the survey data, they did not seem to affect the commitment of the participants in any meaningful way. More significantly, the fulfillment teaching seemed to provide for the participants came from their more tempered view of what they could achieve as educators, an adaptation to the working conditions inherent in the public school system. This kind of serenity – to quote Huberman (1989) in his work

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on professional life phases – was woven into the participants’ tremendous resilience, propelling them to get up every day and get to work with purpose.

The next chapter will delineate the implications of these findings for policy, practice and research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This qualitative study examined the factors that influence the ongoing commitment and engagement of veteran K-6 public school teachers. Fifteen K-6 public school teachers – each having taught a minimum of 24 years - from several Southern California school districts provided perspectives on how the varying personal and professional experiences that made up their educational careers contributed either positively or negatively to their longevity in the profession. The analysis of interview data indicates the affirmative power of the teachers’ personal characteristics in influencing their ongoing commitment and engagement. In particular, three personal characteristics played the most significant role: the teachers’ passion for teaching and their students and the teachers’ resilience. These personal characteristics overshadowed and even helped to combat the trying environmental and individual challenges faced by the participants during the various professional life phases of their careers. These key findings along with the other results of the study point towards implications for policy and practice for veteran and beginning teachers, administrators and teacher educators as well as recommendations for further research.

Key Findings

The theoretical framework utilized in this study is adapted from Day and Gu’s study that explored how teachers manage personal, work and external policy challenges during their careers (2010). In this study’s framework, teachers’ ongoing commitment to teach to their best for the benefit of their students while navigating demanding circumstances and changing contexts depends on three factors: 1) the teacher’s challenges, 2) the teacher’s personal characteristics, and 3) the teacher’s professional life phase (See “Theoretical Framework” in Chapter 1). Yet, the findings resulting from this study suggest the overriding significance of three of the teacher’s personal

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characteristics – the teachers’ passion for teaching and their students and the teachers’ resilience - as a factor influencing ongoing commitment and engagement.

Thirteen of the study’s participants lamented the escalation of the environmental challenges they were confronting. In particular, the participants pointed to the increased aggressive misbehavior of some students along with the decline in support from both parents and administrators who seemed ill-equipped or unwilling to find effective solutions to problems such as misbehavior caused. For some teachers, this phenomenon left them feeling disrespected, isolated, and even burnt-out. For others, they saw this trend as an opportunity to problem-solve, seek training, or do some deep soul-searching as to how they could realistically respond. The environmental challenges cited above, along with the mandates from educational reforms and an oftentimes overwhelming workload, made teaching more arduous according to the participants than at earlier points in their careers.

In response, certain strategies helped. Supportive colleagues became crucial, both in breaking the isolation these teachers sometimes felt as well as lifting the morale when problems seemed insolvable. In addition, empathetic and pro-active administrators could establish a positive school climate by nurturing the determination and optimism of the staff in confronting these challenges as well as providing training and coaching in best practices on how to confront the challenges. The best leaders fostered a kind of family atmosphere at the school, making every staff member feel respected, supported, even special, along with the students.

Unfortunately, in reviewing the participants’ responses, effective leadership seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. For many of the participants in this study, they had to rely on their own means for negotiating with the challenges they faced. The teachers spoke about aspects of their intellectual and emotional selves, or what was defined in the theoretical framework as

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“personal characteristics,” as being instrumental in their ability to combat these challenges and hence, exercise an important influence on their commitment and engagement.

The three characteristics that were the most powerful in the responses were the teachers’ passion for teaching and their students, and their own sense of resilience. Thirteen of the participants considered teaching to be their “calling”: a kind of summons to a profession that provided them with personal meaning and fulfillment. In fact, they believed that to be an effective teacher under increasingly difficult conditions, one really had to want to do it. At the same time, eleven of the participants believed that they had a passion for their students. All of those participants who described a high point in their careers expressed the sense of fulfillment they felt when former students came back to visit and told them about their successes. For these teachers, the realization that their years of caring had made a significant impact on their students was paramount to their sense of self-efficacy and emotional satisfaction. It seemed that such visits, along with evidence of students in their classes who finally understood the concept of a lesson or changed their behavior in some major way thanks to the caring and patience of their teachers, made everything worthwhile, despite the challenges and the daily frustrations.

Parallel to this sense of passion was the resilience that these teachers demonstrated, sometimes even without a supportive context to nurture it. The participants talked about their passion for teaching – their calling – as though it were their badge of honor. Not one of the participants interviewed expressed a desire to be anything other than a teacher. The multiple strategies they described to withstand and adapt to the changes over the course of their careers aided them in sustaining their commitment to the profession. When asked what they would advise a teacher who was losing his or her enthusiasm, they all suggested some form of renewal: changing grade levels, moving to a different school, enrolling in a class. For these teachers, calling it “quits”

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was not an option unless under extreme circumstances. They always reminded this researcher that change, whether imposed from above by administration or propelled from within, was actually one of the benefits of teaching: one year, even one day in the classroom, is not like another and that in itself, is a form of renewal.

Implications

The findings related to the research question of the study have implications for veteran and beginning teachers, administrators and teacher educators.

Implications for Veteran Teachers

The veteran teachers in this study expressed four principal areas of need in the profession that could benefit them in their continued commitment and engagement: recognition, growth, variety and interaction with colleagues. Firstly, veteran teachers need to feel recognized for their expertise and experience. Evans (1989) wrote that recognition is a powerful antidote to a teacher's loss of motivation or sense of self-efficacy that can appear in the later professional life phases. Rather than be considered irrelevant, out-of-date or just taken for granted, these teachers should be appreciated for their years in the trenches from both peers and administrators. Appreciation can take different forms: from monetary incentives to awards and honors, from professional development opportunities to teacher leadership possibilities. Secondly, veteran teachers benefit from growth opportunities. They can provide input into worthwhile professional development, both in its planning and delivery. Moreover, veteran teachers make outstanding mentors to pre-service or beginning teachers and have much to offer them in the way of modeling, problem-solving, and advice. The recent emphasis on teacher leadership – by which teachers influence their colleagues, principals and other members of the school community to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and

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achievement - is perfect for veteran teachers as it allows them to contribute to policy-making, and curriculum and hiring decisions. All the participants in this study had obtained Masters degrees, additional certifications or worked as Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs).

Thirdly, veteran teachers expressed the need for variety in their duties and spoke of their own trajectories changing districts, schools and grade levels. Encouraging these teachers to use their special talents, develop new skills, and increase occupational independence could deepen and expand their knowledge, thereby strengthening the competencies of the entire staff. Lastly, veteran teachers strongly value interaction with their colleagues. Many of the participants interviewed described the collegial atmosphere of their schools as making them feel supported and less isolated, especially in times of great difficulty, whether it be with school-related or personal challenges.

Implications for Beginning Teachers

Veteran teachers can provide a wealth of resources to beginning teachers, especially if both teachers teach in the same school. Professional dialogue between teachers with varying levels of experience can be encouraged through formal or informal means. Formal means could include professional learning communities or walkthroughs while informal means could include dialogue before or after school or during breaks. Placing veteran teachers as support providers for beginning teachers in such mentoring programs as Teacher Induction can provide a more official place for professional dialogues to take place. If such programs do not exist, informal mentoring or lesson demonstrations and observations could benefit both veterans and beginners. Through these activities and dialogues, beginning teachers can also gain perspective on the profession's inevitable ups and downs and what it takes on a more personal level to achieve

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meaningful longevity while veteran teachers can experience recognition for their expertise and growth in teacher leadership opportunities.

Implications for Administrators

According to Leithwood and Day (2007), the qualities of administrators and the contextually sensitive strategies they enact over time are key to building and retaining the commitment, engagement and collective loyalty of teachers⁵. In their research on leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2012) listed five practices of exemplary leaders: 1) model the way, 2) inspire a shared vision, 3) challenge the process, 4) enable others to act, and 5) encourage the heart. All these practices are applicable to the recommendations for administrators based on the results of this study.

Model the way. Administrators model the way and inspire a shared vision by encouraging and developing trust. According to Day and Gu (2010), trust and trustworthiness have been identified as key ingredients in the work of educational leaders and essential to school improvement and success, and the results of this study validated that finding. Administrators can create and nurture a community at their schools and in their districts by involving key stakeholders (e.g., staff and parents). Veteran teachers often hold the keys to the culture of a school and getting to know and respect them is a powerful way to recognize their expertise and experience in assisting in building this community. Soliciting the input of veteran teachers before implementing changes can ease the transition for everyone involved and possibly sway hesitant teachers by adding a seal of approval to the new policies. Even involving reluctant

⁵ The term “administrator” in this chapter can apply to any person or agency charged with the effective operation of a school, not just building level administrators.

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veteran teachers in the decision-making process can inject momentum into an administrator's agenda for change.

Challenge the process. Administrators should not be afraid to challenge the process if it results in increased student learning. More than half of the veteran teachers in this study criticized the lack of time and focus they had to implement quality teaching. Administrators who understand the challenges of the classroom know how to prioritize the maze of federal, state and district mandates in order to focus on what they and their staff think are the most important for their students. Alleviating the workload of teachers so that they can teach what needs to be emphasized is what administrators should be doing, producing better results for staff and students alike.

Enable others to act. Administrators enable others to act by creating the conditions for them to be successful in their jobs. Student behavior was the major challenge veteran teachers said they faced in their careers. Administrators can effectively support their teachers by outlining and adhering to consistent student expectations and discipline policies to nurture a positive school climate through Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) or Restorative Justice practices as well as providing relevant training and support on how to deal with the most disruptive behaviors. Including behavioral specialists in the daily classroom management issues of the school can go a long way in insuring a positive learning climate for *all* students. District administrators need to delineate the process for discipline matters which require more assistance in a clear and transparent manner that teachers and site administrators can refer to. Likewise, site administrators should publicly support their teachers in student discipline matters when students, parents and the community are involved.

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In addition to adhering to a consistent behavior plan, administrators should communicate clear guidelines for the proper placement of students. Many behavior problems can be avoided if students are placed in classrooms where they feel successful. The oftentimes slow process to obtain the necessary help for struggling students – both academically and emotionally – needs to be reviewed and revamped to give students what they need, not what might be convenient for the school or the district. On a more local level, site administrators should ensure that class lists at the beginning of the year are balanced so as not to stack a class with students who are known to have overwhelming behavior issues.

Administrators can also enable others to act by inspiring leadership qualities in veteran teachers. This can be done by providing these teachers with leadership opportunities to have a voice in school policy such as in the hiring of new teachers, expenditure of funds, and choice of textbooks, or professional development such as exercising choice of workshops, leading by facilitating, or coaching colleagues.

Encouraging the heart. Administrators can revitalize teachers by encouraging the heart. Providing celebratory moments both at the school site and throughout the district can do much to raise the morale of all teachers. In addition, supporting teachers in times of personal crisis through the creation of support groups, private counseling, or even time off can destigmatize the burn-out that some teachers experience, provide them with a safety net and decrease the isolation they feel. Successful renewal programs, such as, Palmer’s the Center for Courage and Renewal and Gallagher’s social-emotional district pilot in Northern California, are exceptional models to consult (see “Teacher Renewal” in Chapter 2).

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Implications for Teacher Educators

If teacher educators train preservice or in-service teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills they will require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, then studying how veteran teachers retain their commitment and engagement in this profession will give these teacher educators insight into what it takes to stay in the profession in meaningful ways. Preservice and newly-certificated in-service teachers can learn how veteran teachers navigate the various environmental and individual challenges throughout their careers, thereby, giving new teachers role models with positive strategies on how to deal with the challenges on the road ahead. In addition, teacher educators can share with their students the influence of a teacher's personal characteristics on their commitment to the profession. Focusing on this "inner landscape" of the teacher (Palmer, 1998, p. 4), would help new teachers to explore the personal meaning of their own values, choices and experiences in order to better understand the link between a teacher's own beliefs and practices in the classroom. Studying the "whole" teacher, so to speak, both the external and internal necessities to survive and hopefully, thrive in the profession, could give preservice and in-service teachers a deeper foundation of what it really means to be an effective *and* fulfilled teacher.

Limitations

The design of this study may contain limitations. One of these is possible sampling bias due to the fact that participants were volunteers and not a random sample of the population. As volunteers, the participants could have been more motivated to talk about their experiences as veteran teachers, thereby biasing the results of the study. Another limitation pertains to breadth. While interactivity of many factors (both internal and external) is significant to the research questions being posed, looking into so many influences on veteran teacher commitment and

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engagement at once does not allow for great depth into any one of them. What is lacking is a more comprehensive effort in explaining the internal factors of veteran teacher commitment and engagement over the long term

Recommendations for Further Research

Conclusion

This phenomenological study utilized a qualitative design through in-depth semi-structured interviews to identify the factors that influence the ongoing commitment and engagement of veteran K-6 public school teachers. The results indicate the affirmative power of the teachers' personal characteristics – most significantly, the teachers' passion for teaching and their students and the teachers' resilience - in contributing to the teachers' commitment and engagement. These three personal characteristics helped to tackle and even sometimes eclipsed the difficult environmental and individual challenges faced by the study's participants during the various professional life phases of their careers.

Through the development of future research in this field along with efforts to create positive working conditions that recognize the role of “the head and the heart” in teaching, the likelihood of seeing more teachers achieve meaningful longevity in the profession may become possible. It can only happen though if policymakers take note of the needs of veteran teachers. This study indicates that *all* stakeholders – beginning and veteran teachers, teacher educators, and administrators – must work together to enable teaching careers that are full and meaningful. Finding and nurturing the source of what motivates teachers to give of themselves every day is vital to any discussion on quality education, teacher training and educational reform.

The challenge of teaching is to decide who you want to be as a teacher, what you care about and what you value, and how you will conduct yourself in classrooms with students. It is to

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name yourself as a teacher, knowing that institutional realities will only enable that goal in part (if at all) and the rest is up to you (Ayers, 2001, p. 23).

One of the most significant implications for this kind of research is by understanding the driving force of veteran teachers, we can engage in finding ways to improve teacher commitment and effectiveness for all teachers. If we teach who we are, as Palmer (1998) asserted, then each and every person has a stake in investing in the long-term fulfillment of our veteran teachers in order to move education forward.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER



Research Study Opportunity

Dear Fellow Educator,

My name is Leslie Young and I am a 6th grade GATE teacher at James Madison Elementary School in the A Elementary School District. I am also a Ph.D. student at Claremont Graduate School. I'm writing to ask you to consider participating in a dissertation study I am doing involving the characteristics of veteran (or experienced) teachers. My study intends to explore how veteran K-6 public school teachers find meaning in their work and identify what factors they attribute to their ongoing commitment and engagement. I believe that understanding these factors can become a motivating force for pre-service educators considering teaching as a profession and in-service educators who may be questioning their commitment in the face of professional and personal challenges.

To complete the study, I need to interview 15-20 K-6 public school teachers, each who has taught a total of 24 years or more. These teachers do not have to be currently teaching nor do their years of service need to be consecutive or in one district. Although Claremont Graduate University has approved of my intent to conduct this study, no one, except for myself, will be able to connect these teachers' responses to their actual names or places of employment. Only pseudonyms will be used in the published study. Your participation, of course, is purely voluntary.

Participation in the study would entail the following steps:

1. After your agreement to participate, I would contact you to arrange an interview date and time at your convenience. At this time, I would also send you a consent form outlining my commitment to maintaining your confidentiality.
2. The interview consists of five (5) open-ended questions with possible probes about your experiences during your teaching career and how your responses to them have contributed to your longevity in the profession, if at all. You are free to abstain from any questions you do not wish to answer. The interview will be audio-recorded and will take approximately 45-60 minutes.
3. Once I have transcribed the interview, you would be invited to read the transcript for accuracy and provide any comments.

If you are willing to consider participating in this study, please contact me via email at LYoung@anaheim elementary.org or at (714)856-3151 (cell phone). I will also follow up the receipt of this letter with a courtesy phone call in case you may have any questions.

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I understand that participation means that you are giving up your valuable time, but I believe your participation would bring a fresh perspective to what teaching “for the long haul” really involves. To thank you for your participation, you will receive a \$10 Staples gift card as a token of my appreciation.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.
Thanking you in advance . . .

Sincerely yours,
Leslie Young
6th Grade GATE Teacher
James Madison Elementary School
X2229

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APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN “VETERAN K-6 PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS: REMAINING COMMITTED AND STAYING ENGAGED IN THEIR CAREERS”

STUDY LEADERSHIP. You are being asked to take part in a research project that is led by Leslie Young, doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University who is being supervised by Dr. Thomas Luschei, Associate Professor of Education at Claremont Graduate University.

PURPOSE. The purpose of this study is to identify what factors veteran K-6 public school teachers attribute to their ongoing commitment and engagement.

ELIGIBILITY. To be in this study, you must be or have been a K-6 public school teacher for a minimum of 24 years.

PARTICIPATION. During the study, you will be asked five questions with possible probes in one face-to-face recorded interview that will take approximately 45-60 minutes on a mutually-agreed upon date between November 2017 and May 2018. The researcher will ask you about your experiences during your teaching career and how your responses to these experiences have contributed to your longevity in the profession (if at all). RISKS OF PARTICIPATION. The risks that you run by taking part in this study are minimal. Risks may include discomfort that may result from the personal nature of the questions asked. Hence, you are free to skip any interview questions that make you feel uncomfortable, or stop the interview at any time.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION. I do not expect the study to benefit you personally. The study will benefit the researcher by helping me in completing my PhD. This study is also intended to benefit other teachers, teacher trainers, administrators, and researchers by exploring

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how veteran teachers are able to find meaning in the profession, remain committed and stay engaged, if at all.

COMPENSATION. For participating in the study, you will be given a \$10 Staples gift card after the completion of the interview.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from this study at any time without it being held against you. Your decision regarding your participation will have no effect on your current or future connection with anyone at Claremont Graduate University. CONFIDENTIALITY. Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. I may share data I collect with other researchers, but I will not reveal your identity in doing so. In order to protect the confidentiality of your responses, I will not disclose or make it possible for anyone to learn your identity and will use pseudonyms in all transcriptions of the data and in the resulting papers. Audio files of the taped interviews will be maintained in a password-protected laptop computer. All audio recordings will be erased after transcribing, coding, and summarizing to protect your privacy.

FURTHER INFORMATION. If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Leslie Young at (714)856-3151 or leslie.young@cgu.edu. You may also contact my faculty advisor for this study, Dr. Thomas Luschei at (909)607-3325 or thomas.luschei@cgu.edu.

The CGU Institutional Review Board has determined that this project is exempt from IRB supervision under university policy and federal regulations . You may contact the CGU Board with any questions or issues at (909)607-9406, irb@cgu.edu, or at Claremont Graduate

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University, Harper Hall Room 152, 150 E. Tenth St., Claremont, CA 91711. A copy of this form will be given to you if you wish to keep it.

CONSENT. Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form, that someone has answered any and all questions you may have about this study, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in it.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Participant _____

The undersigned researcher has reviewed the information in this consent form with the participant and answered any of his or her questions about the study.

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Researcher _____

APPENDIX C: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Note: Questions were not necessarily asked in this order.

The Teacher's Challenges

Probes:

1. What keeps you going into work every day? Do you have any special strategies or techniques to stay motivated? If so, describe them.
2. If you were not a teacher, what would you do for a living?
3. To what extent – if at all – have your personal life and career influenced each other?
4. To what extent – if at all – has the school system and/or district supported or hindered you in meeting your personal and professional needs during your career?
5. Have you ever felt discouraged/dispirited or burned out being a teacher? If so, explain. How did you deal with these feelings?

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The Teacher's Personal Characteristics

Probes:

6. Why did you become a teacher in the first place?
7. Have you ever felt teaching to be your calling? If so, explain.
8. Do you feel as a teacher that you are effective with your students? Why or why not? Explain.
9. Tell me about the times when you felt fulfilled being a teacher. What made you feel this way?
10. What has been the best thing about being a teacher? What has been the hardest thing? Describe how these have impacted your teaching, if at all.
11. Imagine it is your retirement dinner, and one of your former students rises to make a speech about you. What would you like him or her to say about you?

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The Teacher's Professional Life Phase (PLP)

Probes:

12. What do you feel are your needs as an experienced veteran teacher?
13. To what extent – if any – has *your role* as a teacher changed over time?
14. How have *you* changed as a teacher over the course of your career, if at all?
15. Now that you've had time to reflect, what advice would you offer to a teacher who has been in the profession for a few years and the early anticipation and idealization may be waning? What do you believe is necessary for this teacher's meaningful longevity in the profession?
16. Is there anything you want to add that I may have forgotten to ask?

