

**THE NOVICE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE IN
SENSEMAKING AND SOCIALIZATION
IN URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

A Record of Study

by

JOAN RAMEY BERRY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

August 2009

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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Approved by:

Co-Chairs of Committee, Jean Madsen
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ABSTRACT

The Novice Teacher's Experience in Sensemaking and Socialization in Urban
Secondary Schools. (August 2009)

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Teacher attrition is costly for districts, both financially and in terms of student achievement. Districts often address teacher attrition by focusing on recruitment practices or by offering induction support for novice teachers. However, new teachers continue to leave the profession at alarming rates.

This qualitative case study provides insight into how new teachers cope with the frustrations and challenges of entry-level teaching. The study examines the entry-level experiences of twelve novice teachers from urban secondary schools, including the perceptions of teaching they developed prior to entry, the aspects of teaching they found most frustrating, how they made sense of what was happening to them, and how they adapted their own behaviors in response to what they experienced.

Viewed within a theoretical framework for examining the “newcomer experience” developed by Meryl Reis Louis in 1980, the data suggest that traditional group approaches to supporting novices fail to address the highly individual way in which newcomers “make sense” of teaching as they progress through a series of stages

from anticipation through adaptation. From the data, implications may be drawn in terms of “what matters” in the design of support systems for new teachers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition is a subject of concern nationwide. Thirty percent of those entering the teaching profession leave the classroom within three years, and between 40 and 50 percent leave before the end of five years ((Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*, 2004). Teacher attrition is costly, both financially and in terms of student achievement (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*, 2004). School administrators need effective approaches for retaining teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), who often report isolation and inadequate support as reasons for their disillusionment with the profession (Brock & Grady, 2007; Rogers & Babinski, 2002).

Some studies suggest that socialization into the new culture is the most significant factor impacting retention (Brock & Grady, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2003). However, Louis (1980) contends that traditional group approaches to socialization are ineffective, because they fail to address the *individual* nature of how newcomers cope with the entry-level experience. The intent of this study is to examine how beginning teachers make sense of the surprises, unmet expectations, and frustrations of entry-level teaching along with the impact of that sensemaking on their retention in the teaching profession.

This record of study follows the style of *The Journal of Educational Research*.

A Critical Issue: Teacher Attrition

Nationwide, much attention has been given to problems associated with attrition rates among new teachers (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006). Over 30 percent of those entering the teaching profession will leave within three years, and almost 50 percent will have left by the end of the fifth year (Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high quality new teachers*, 2004). This situation impacts the nation's students and schools in several critical ways.

First, student achievement is negatively impacted by high teacher attrition. Experienced teachers (having taught more than five years in the classroom) have a greater impact on student achievement than those with less than five years experience (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Stronge & Tucker, 2000). In Texas, for example, the number of students passing all sections of the state assessment, the *Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills*, is 9.3 percent higher in districts where teacher turnover is less than 10 percent, compared to districts with a turnover rate of 30 percent or more (Strayhorn, 2004). Johnson (2004) says high teacher turnover "requires a school to restart their instructional focus each year, resulting in a less comprehensive and unified instructional program" (p. 13). When classrooms are repeatedly staffed with novice teachers, student achievement suffers.

Second, new teacher attrition exacerbates an already existing teacher shortage. Projections from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that between 2000 and 2010, over two million new teachers will be needed (Hussar, 1998). A number of

factors impact teacher shortages, including reduction in class size, an aging teacher work force, and increasing student populations (Ingersoll, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). However, both Ingersoll (2002) and Johnson (2004) view attrition of new teachers as the most significant of these factors in creating teacher shortages.

When teachers are in short supply, districts with high salaries, good working conditions and high academic achievement are able to recruit teachers. However, the “hard to staff” schools (such as those in high-poverty urban areas) are not able to compete (*Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*, 2004; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2004). These schools, where students are already struggling academically, are then forced to staff classrooms with teachers who are not certified or whose teaching expertise is in a different field from the one in which they are placed.

A report from the Alliance for Excellent Education indicates that the level of new teacher attrition is highest in economically disadvantaged areas and is more acute in inner city and remote rural schools than in suburban districts. In high-poverty areas the rate of teacher attrition may be as much as 50 percent higher than in affluent school districts (Ingersoll, 2001; *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*, 2004).

Ingersoll (2004) suggests that the availability of highly qualified teachers “is one of the most important, but least equitably distributed, of educational resources. Teacher shortages ... disproportionately impact students in disadvantaged schools and are a

major factor in the stratification of educational opportunity” (p. 3). Unfortunately, while teacher certification programs at the university level are producing more teachers each year, few of these new teachers are willing to face the difficulties associated with diverse, urban school districts (Gordon, 2000). The shortages caused by new teacher attrition add to the existing problems facing the students in greatest need.

Finally, new teacher attrition is extremely expensive in terms of recruiting, hiring, training, and providing mentors for new employees (Johnson, 2006; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; *Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*, 2004; *Teacher attrition: A costly loss to the nation and to the states*, 2005). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future estimates the cost of teacher attrition nationwide at \$4.9 billion annually (Carroll, 2007).

Calculated on a per-teacher basis in terms of school costs, \$12,546 is lost for each individual who leaves (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Additional expenses are accrued at the district level through posting of vacancies, interviewing, record-keeping, professional development and other processes associated with attrition. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future estimates the annual urban district cost associated with teacher leavers at \$70,000 per school (Carroll, 2007).

Efforts to recruit more new teachers, with the goal of increasing the supply of teachers for hard-to-staff schools, may diminish the shortages created by new teacher attrition. However, “data on new teacher attrition suggest that efforts to recruit more teachers – which have been the focus of much policy – will not, by themselves, solve the staffing problems facing schools. The solution must also include teacher retention. In

short, recruiting more teachers will not solve the teacher crisis if 40-50 percent of these teachers leave in a few short years” (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003, p. 33). What is needed may be a better understanding of the factors that lead to higher job satisfaction and commitment among new teachers.

Job Satisfaction and Socialization

Retaining new teachers may depend on the capability of schools to promote job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is a significant predictor of commitment to an organization (Abrams & DeMoura, 2001). Employees whose personal satisfaction levels are high and who “identify” with the organization are less likely to leave a position (Abrams & DeMoura, 2001). Work experiences, including relationships with others, roles, and acceptance of norms, influence job commitment and retention (Abrams & DeMoura, 2001).

Socialization is viewed as a dominant determinate in employee job satisfaction (Abrams & DeMoura, 2001; Angelie, 2006). Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999) define socialization as the process through which “the organization teaches the newcomer the skills of the new job and the norms and values or organizational culture that guide behavior and enhance the newcomer’s performance” (p. 315). They contend that increased socialization strategies have a positive correlation with improved attitudinal outcomes among new employees (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999).

Similarly, Riordan, Self, Vandenberg, and Weatherly (2001) found a positive correlation between investiture socialization practices and enhanced employee job satisfaction. In examining support systems for new teachers, Brock and Grady (2007)

found that the process of socialization into the culture of the school is one of the most significant factors impacting teacher attrition. According to Angelie (2006), “Socialization for the beginning teacher can determine whether the first year as a professional is a success or a failure” (p. 318). Socialization leads to identification and loyalty to the school, thereby determining the individual teacher’s intent to stay in the profession (Angelie, 2006).

However, most traditional approaches to new teacher socialization and induction are standardized for all new employees, while the individual nature of the concerns among new teachers, as identified by Veenman (1984) and Johnson (2004), suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. In a study of socialization tactics and their effect on entry-level employees, Riordan, Self, Vandenberg, and Weatherly (2001) found that “the more organizations train newcomers in a group setting, the more likely they are to leave” (159). They purport that group training is insufficient for addressing individual needs.

Taken together, these studies suggest that a more individualized approach to the socialization of new teachers is needed. However, creating such an approach might first require an in-depth examination of what the “entry-level experience” actually involves.

Sensemaking

One individualized approach to the experience of newcomers within an organization was developed by Meryl Reis Louis (1980); it is within this theoretical framework that this research study is positioned. Louis (1980) says that traditional group approaches to socialization do not explain why some newcomers leave, some

negotiate a shift in their role, and others remain in the new setting. She proposes that new employees are frustrated when they have unrealistic or unmet expectations about their job assignment (Louis, 1980). Those who are unable to overcome this frustration are less likely to be retained in the profession.

Louis builds upon organizational sensemaking, as defined by Weick (1977). She extends Weick's theory with the inclusion of a series of stages identified by Merton (1957) through which newcomers pass. Applying Merton's stages to a school setting would look like this: the *anticipatory socialization* stage, when the new teacher has not yet come into the school but is developing notions about what to expect in the new role; the *encounter* stage, when the novice teacher begins to learn the culture and processes of the school; and the *adaptation* stage, when the new teacher begins to feel a part of the organization and is considered an insider (Louis, 1980).

Under Louis's (1980) theory, any new teacher develops a set of expectations during the *anticipatory socialization* stage. These expectations may be based on the teacher's past experiences or on information provided during the hiring process. However, the expectations may later lead to frustration, if the reality of the job does not match the employee's perceptions (Louis, 1980).

Louis (1980) says the newcomer is then confronted by three distinct experiences when progressing through the *encounter* stage. The first is *change*, as adjustments are made to new surroundings, new equipment, new requirements, and a new hierarchy of authority (Louis, 1980). In keeping with Louis's (1980) theory, new teachers must adjust to new surroundings such as their own classrooms, unfamiliar equipment (such as

SMART boards and LCD projectors), requirements for which they are unprepared (such as monitoring the cafeteria or keeping detention) and a new system of authority (including principals, assistant principals, departments chairs, and facilitators).

The second aspect of the encounter stage identified by Louis (1980) is *contrast*, as the newcomer, such as a novice teacher, encounters situations that are different from previous experiences or different from the expectations developed prior to entering the new role. The third is *surprise*, which can occur when conscious expectations about the job are unfulfilled or when the teacher's expectations about the ability to do the job successfully are unrealized (Louis, 1980) (see Figure 1).

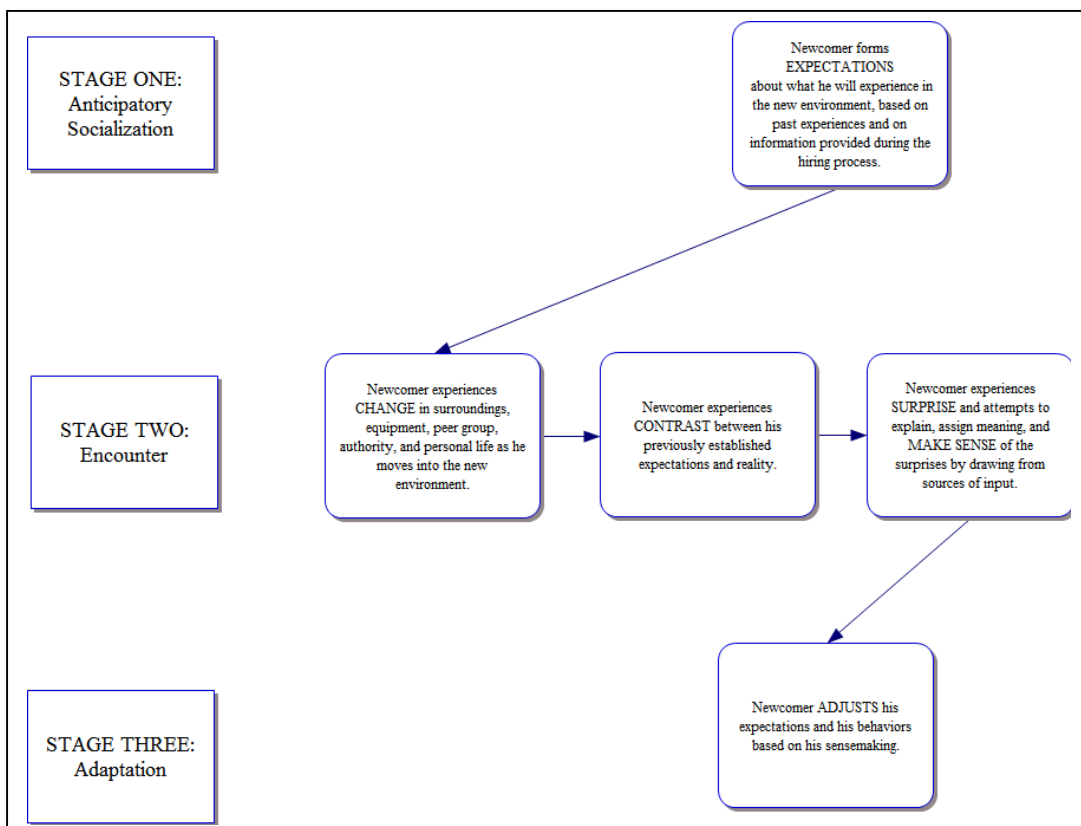


FIGURE 1. Stages experienced by new teachers (Louis, 1980)

Louis (1980) proposes that it is because of the *surprise* element that newcomers engage in “sensemaking”, which she explains in this way. Much of the time, individuals operate in patterns of behavior that are automatic or scripted. However, when an individual encounters something that is in contrast with the “script”, an attempt is made to assign meaning to the surprise, based on past experiences, personal characteristics, or cultural assumptions (Louis, 1980). This process of assigning meaning is called sensemaking. Weick (1995) says sensemaking is an inherent part of entry into any new environment, and it is through an understanding of how novices make sense of their environment that organizations can develop policies and build structures to support and retain employees.

Louis (1980) identifies five sources of input that often drive the sensemaking of newcomers within organizations. When the new member in the organization is faced with something confusing or frustrating, the newcomer may rely on the information from one or more of these sources in order to explain what has occurred. One source is personal experiences or background. For example, a new teacher might base his expectations about teaching based on his memories of being a public school student, even if those experiences are not necessarily like the school that teacher attended.

A second input involves what Louis (1980) refers to as local interpretation, meaning the way the individual uses the data that are provided within the organization. For teachers this might include orientation materials, handbooks, administrative communication, mentoring, induction programs, and similar activities. Two of the input sources involve the individual’s perception of people, including the characteristics seen

in oneself as well as the characteristics or traits assigned to others (Louis, 1980). An additional source of input may be the individual's cultural biases. This is particularly important among teachers, since the majority of teachers entering the profession are white and female, but student populations are much more diverse.

The final source involves what Louis (1980) refers to as insider information. This data comes from someone with more experience in the organization who guides the thinking of the newcomer (1980). In terms of teaching, this might be a veteran teacher or an administrator. As individuals attempt to make sense of their new environment, they may use information from all of these sources or they may choose from among them in varying degrees (Louis, 1980) (see Figure 2).

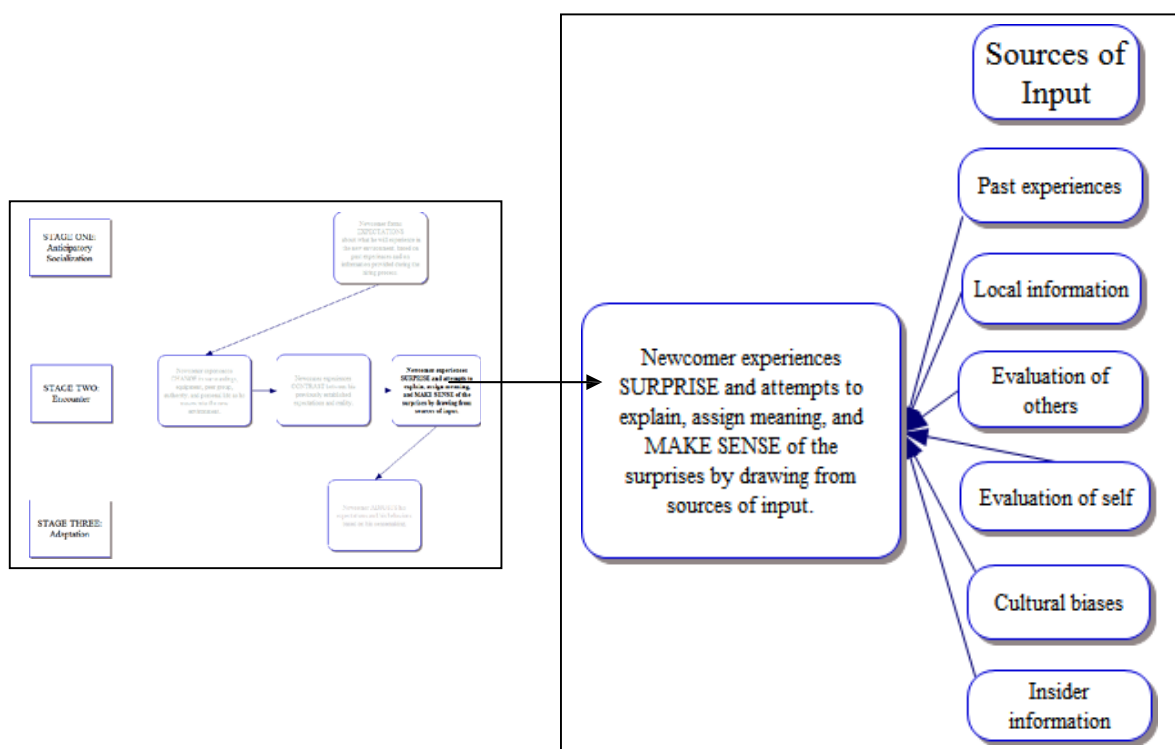


FIGURE 2. Sources of input utilized by new teachers (Louis, 1980)

As the newcomer makes sense of the surprises in the new environment, sensemaking may lead to changes in attitude or behavior (Louis, 1980). These changes mark the individual's progression into the *adaptation* stage, possibly contributing to the identification, job satisfaction, and intent to stay alluded to by Abrams and DeMoura (2001).

Purpose of the Study

While sensemaking has been examined in several contexts (Hogg & Terry, 2001; Van Maanen, 1998; Weick, 1995), no study has focused on how the theory is reflected among new teachers. The intent of this study is to add to and extend the existing research about the factors influencing new teacher retention by examining how beginning teachers make sense of the entry-level experience, and how sensemaking impacts their retention in the teaching profession. Through interviews and reflective dialogue, a picture of the teaching experience emerges in the perspective of the novice teacher.

Significance of the Study

Teacher retention is impacted by job satisfaction, and job satisfaction is influenced by socialization practices (Angelie, 2006). Traditional approaches to teacher socialization include mentoring, pre-entry induction programs, peer support programs, and school/university partnerships (Brock & Grady, 2007; Rogers & Babinski, 2002; Scherer, 1999). Most of these approaches are provided in a uniform, systematic way for all new employees, and most occur during the first year only. Despite these approaches, teacher attrition continues to be a problem.

The teacher shortage created by new teacher attrition impacts states in critical ways. First, staffing all classrooms with highly qualified teachers is difficult if not impossible for school districts with high turnover rates. Secondly, teacher attrition is expensive. Nationwide, the cost of teachers leaving the profession is estimated at \$4.9 billion (*Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high-quality new teachers*, 2004). Moreover, student achievement is lower in schools with a high percent of teacher turnover (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Finally, teacher attrition contributes to an existing critical teacher shortage.

Significant research has been devoted to the reasons given by teachers for leaving the profession (Guardino, Santibanez, and Daley, 2006; Johnson, 2004). However, no study has examined, as the locus of causality, the relationship between new teacher sensemaking and the decision to stay in teaching or to leave the profession, and none have considered the proposition that new teachers are more apt to continue in the profession if they are able to make sense of the surprises in their environment in specific ways.

A better understanding of how individual newcomers in the profession assign meaning to events, conflicts and frustrations they encounter, and the relationship between this sensemaking and their decisions about teaching, could be used by districts in designing policies regarding recruiting methods, orientation programs, professional development, mentoring approaches, and in ongoing peer and administrative support to new hires.

Since little research has been done to provide this, documenting novice teacher sensemaking strategies as they progress through the first years of teaching contributes to that understanding. Louis (1980) contends that an understanding of entry-level sensemaking could lead to “designing organizational structures that facilitate newcomer transitions” (p. 239), possibly leading to enhanced job satisfaction and higher retention levels. Implementing such organizational support structures in schools might increase the retention of new teachers, positively impacting student achievement.

Methodology

Data Collection

For this qualitative case study, data were collected through interviews, field notes and document review. Interviews using a set of pre-established questions as a springboard (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) centered on factors frequently associated with teacher attrition. These included the teacher’s expectations about teaching along with perceptions of support provided by administrators, the level and type of support provided by peers, student behavior and academic achievement, self-efficacy, autonomy, and opportunities for advancement (Certo & Fox, 2002). The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded for recurring themes.

Data Sources and Context

Studies indicate that typical teacher leavers are white, female, under 30 years of age, and teaching in a secondary school in a central city or urban district (Johnson, 2004; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). The percent of teacher attrition is higher in the western and southern states (Marvel et al., 2007). While the percent of

teachers of color leaving the profession within the first five years is only slightly greater than the percent of white teacher leavers, teachers of color are significantly underrepresented in comparison to student population demographics (Gurarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). Therefore, attrition within this population is of great concern. Similarly, while attrition of female teachers is slightly higher than that for males, males are significantly underrepresented in the teaching force compared to the general population (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006). Thus this is a population of concern.

For this study, the goal was to include entry-level teachers representing typical teacher-leavers or representing populations of special concern, such as teachers of color and males. All participants were from urban districts, since these districts have the greatest difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers (Johnson, 2004; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). Data were collected from a group of twelve full-time first-, second-, and third-year public school secondary teachers from three urban school districts in Texas, Arizona, and Louisiana.

Texas, Arizona and Louisiana were selected in part because of researcher accessibility. However, they are also diverse in size and population, located within the southern or western portions of the United States (where teacher attrition is highest), experiencing teacher shortages, and currently assessing students using criterion-referenced tests aligned to state standards. Urban schools are defined as the largest districts located in urban areas (counties of 650,000 or more) and serving student populations that have a high rate of poverty and a high proportion of students of color or

students who are Limited English Proficient. The source group consisted of eight females and four males, including six first-year teachers, three second-year teachers, and three third-year teachers. The group included seven teachers of color and five white teachers.

Data Analysis

The study was designed using a qualitative thematic analysis and code development, which enables the researcher to systematically understand and interpret observations about people within organizations (Boyatzis, 1998). Structured participant interviews served as the unit of analysis. Interviews were scheduled, audiotaped with the permission of the participants, and later transcribed and coded.

Using the qualitative thematic structure (Boyatzis, 1998), codes were established based on the way new teachers think about and react to surprises in entry-level teaching, to what factors they attribute these unexpected occurrences, and how they react to these unexpected experiences. Sources of input commonly associated with newcomer sensemaking include past experiences, local information, perception of self, perception of others, cultural biases, and insider support (Louis, 1980) (see Figure 2). These served as starting points in looking for patterns among the new teachers in the study.

A prior-research-driven approach to establishing the coding system was utilized (Boyatzis, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this approach, the researcher builds upon or extends assumptions and theories previously espoused by another researcher (Boyatzis, 1998). In this study, Louis's (1980) theory of how newcomers explain and

react to entry-level experiences (sensemaking) is built upon and extended to reflect the experiences of entry-level teachers.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research may be established through triangulation of data, observation over time, member checks, peer review, and researcher reflection (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2003). This study involved multiple interviews with twelve individuals, 250 pages of transcriptions, field notes, and document review. These data sources provided “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 97).

The data were gathered over the course of an entire year. In addition, the researcher regularly engaged in peer review and researcher reflection. The researcher established construct validity, internal validity, and external validity by maintaining a chain of evidence, establishing an explicit coding system, maintaining fidelity to the codes, and following an established protocol and timeline for the study. All of these are means of insuring reliability (Boyatzis, 1998; Merriam, 1998). A constant-comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) was used to view each interview in relation to the others as well as to view the findings against the existing research about socialization and sensemaking.

Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. First, the study examines data gathered from novice teachers currently in the profession. No data were collected from teachers who

had already left the profession. While all novice teachers from the selected schools were invited to participate, not all teachers volunteered. The study represents the viewpoints of twelve secondary-level public school teachers from urban districts in three states only, possibly limiting the application of data in other contexts. Teachers in other parts of the country, teachers employed in different types of schools, or teachers at the elementary level might demonstrate a different approach to sensemaking than is evident among the participant group in this study.

Second, despite the fact that participants were assured anonymity, some may have been reluctant to be totally open about administrators or district policies, fearing that their words might be shared with others in the school. Since the data were collected from interviews conducted by an outsider, participants may have provided answers they felt the interviewer wanted to hear.

A third limitation involves the researcher. The study was conducted from both an “insider” and an “outsider” perspective. The researcher is a white female educator who began her 25-year teaching career as a secondary teacher in an urban district in a southern state. At one time, she fit the description of the typical “teacher leaver” and might therefore have the biases of an insider. On the other hand, schools have changed considerably since she was an entry-level teacher. In addition, seven of the participants are teachers of color. Andersen (1993) says some researchers believe that “only minority scholars can produce knowledge about racial-ethnic groups” (p. 43), and that white researchers may have difficulty understanding the issues of persons of color and the experiences of racial minorities.

An additional limitation involves the nature of case studies. Case studies are limited in several ways. Readers may misinterpret case studies as being representative of the whole, rather than as an examination of some part of the whole (Merriam, 1998). Also, since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis, “the investigator is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout much of the research effort” (Merriam, 1998, p. 42), and this may lead to unethical, unreliable, or invalid data. In this study, the triangulation of data from a combination of extensive interviews, document review, peer review and researcher reflection is intended to offset these potential problems.

Research Questions

This study involved the following research questions:

1. In what way is the entry-level experience of new teachers impacted by their prior perceptions about teaching?
2. How do new teachers make sense of or explain conflicts and frustrations they encounter in their first years in the profession?
3. In what way are novice teachers’ decisions to leave teaching or remain in the profession impacted by their reaction to conflicts and frustrations?

Definition of Terms

Terms used in the study and their definitions are as follows:

Administrative support, according to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, refers to the way in which principals and other school administrators demonstrate communication skills, assistance with problems, trustworthiness, fairness, respect, and guidance to teachers (Cogshall, 2007).

Attrition rate refers to the number of teachers who exit the teaching profession annually, due to retirement, death, the decision to pursue a different career path, or other reasons. New teacher attrition refers to the decision of first-, second-, or third-year teachers to exit the profession.

Induction program refers to a planned program of professional support for new teachers provided by the school district. Induction programs may include all or some of the following: orientation sessions, interaction with administrators, opportunities for classroom observation and conferencing, mentoring and peer group interaction.

Leaver is a term used by the U. S. Department of Education (1997) in referring to the teacher who makes the decision to leave the teaching profession, regardless of the reasons given.

Mentor refers to an educator who undertakes the responsibility of assisting a beginning teacher in becoming accustomed to the classroom and policies of the school, general school district and campus procedures, materials and approaches for teaching, or concerns expressed by the new teacher. In some school districts, the mentor is assigned this responsibility, and if so, most districts require mentors to attend training programs in

strategies for collaboration and support. Within the context of this study, mentors who are assigned by the school or district to support a beginning educator are referred to as “official” mentors. Teachers who assume the role of guiding and supporting a new teacher without being assigned or asked are referred to as “unofficial” mentors or insiders.

Novice teacher, for the purposes of this study, refers to a first-, second-, or third-year teacher.

Public school refers to an institution providing educational services for students in at least one of grades 1–12 (or comparable ungraded levels) that is staffed with teachers to provide instruction to students and which receives public funds as its primary means of support.

Secondary school refers to grades 7-12. According to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.-a), “in elementary school, classes are generally organized under a single teacher who is responsible for teaching all subject areas. For secondary school students, generally grades 7-12, the school day usually consists of several scheduled periods of instruction, each devoted to a single subject or activity. There are usually five or six periods during the typical school day, and students go to a different classroom for each period” (U. S. Department of Education, n.d.-a).

Stayer, based on terminology established by the U. S. Department of Education (1997), refers to teachers who are satisfied with teaching and have made a decision to continue in the profession.

Teacher certification, according to the Texas State Board for Educator Certification, is the process through which teachers obtain licensure to teach. It requires a bachelor's degree and the completion of an approved course of training. In most states, in order to be certified to teach at the secondary level, a degree in the content area is required. In addition, most programs require student teaching or some sort of practicum.

Teacher retention involves maintaining the teaching force by keeping teachers in the profession.

Urban school is the designation provided by the Texas Education Agency as the largest district located in an urban area (counties of 650,000 or more) and serving student populations with high rates of poverty and a high proportion of students of color or students who are Limited English Proficient. This definition was used across all districts in the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The need to support and retain new teachers is clearly documented. Nationwide, approximately 30 percent of those entering the teaching profession leave the classroom within the first three years, and the number leaving by the end of five years is between 40 and 50 percent (*Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality Teachers*, 2004; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). This exacerbates an already existing critical teacher shortage, where the most severe impact is in schools with high populations of economically and educationally disadvantaged children (Ingersoll, 2004).

While recruiting efforts are essential, more important are efforts to slow the attrition of new teachers from the nation's schools (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). From an organizational standpoint, preventing attrition requires *behavioral commitment*, which Weick (1995) defines as the individual's understanding and acceptance of his role in the overall structure of an organization.

This chapter examines the literature about new teacher attrition, including the impact of high attrition rates on the public schools, factors contributing to the loss of new teachers from the profession, and current approaches for supporting and retaining beginning educators. The chapter also explores propositions from Weick (1995) and others that understanding the experience of newcomers, such as new teachers in a school district, is best approached through the lens of organizational socialization.

Organizational socialization of new teachers, under Weick's (1995) theory, involves the "sensemaking" of novice educators, or their assumptions and reactions to sequences of events over time. These patterns of sensemaking may be used as predictors of future occurrences, including their commitment to continue as teachers (Weick, 1995). Extending Weick's (1995) theory, this study examines the sensemaking of new teachers as they progress through a series of stages identified by Meryl Reis Louis (1980). The intent is to determine the impact of their behaviors and attitudes within each stage on their decisions to remain in the teaching profession. Therefore, this chapter provides a review of the relevant research about organizational socialization as well as an examination of the theory of sensemaking as proposed by Louis (1980).

The Issue of Teacher Attrition

Magnitude of the Problem

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) reports that 232,232 teachers entered the teaching profession in the year 2000. That same year, 287,370 teachers left, for a loss of 55,138 teachers (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). This gradual drain from the profession is increasing annually (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Projections from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that between 2000 and 2010, between 2.3 and 2.7 million new teachers will be needed (Hussar, 1998). In certain content areas (including special education, math and science), the shortage of teachers is more acute (Johnson, 2004). The problem is also widespread. In 2000, 58 percent of school districts faced problems with filling teacher positions (Ingersoll, 2004).

The high attrition rate among new teachers is not typical of other professions. While the overall turnover rate in many *semi-professional* areas is similar to that for public school teaching, in comparison with other *professional* areas, the rate of teacher attrition is significantly higher (Ingersoll, 2004). For example, among nurses the attrition rate is 18 percent and among clerical workers it is 30 percent, while the attrition rate for college professors, technology specialists, and scientists are 9 percent, 4 percent and 9 percent respectively (Ingersoll, 2004).

The percent of teachers leaving the profession declines steadily each year after the fifth year, until teachers reach retirement age (Bolich, 2001). Therefore, efforts addressing the attrition of new teachers, rather than those targeting the profession of teaching as a whole, seem advisable. Such efforts are needed, because the rate of new teacher attrition negatively impacts students and schools in several critical ways.

Impact on Schools

First, a number of studies have shown that student achievement is lower in schools with a high percent of teacher turnover. Experienced teachers (those with more than five years in the classroom) have a greater impact on student achievement than those with less than five years experience (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003; Stronge & Tucker, 2000). Darling-Hammond (1999) found that teacher effectiveness had a greater impact on student achievement than class size, resources, or other factors.

Supporting the link between teacher retention and student achievement is a report from National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003) which states that

the most significant consequence of high teacher turnover is the impact of poor teacher quality on student achievement. The fact that new teachers are less effective than experienced teachers constitutes an “urban crisis”, because if the current pattern of hiring continues, between half and two-thirds of the teachers hired between 2000 and 2010 will be first-time teachers (Gordon, 2000).

The urban crisis identified by Gordon (2000) is related to an existing teacher shortage. This shortage is in part the result of changing demographics within the profession. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the baby boomers entered the teaching profession in large numbers (Johnson, 2004). This was followed by a reduced demand for teachers in the 1980s, due to declining student enrollments (Johnson, 2004). At that point, there was a bell-shaped curve among teachers. Few were entering teaching, few were retiring, and many were in the age group of teachers most likely to continue to teach.

Now, however, the balance has changed, because of an aging teacher workforce (Johnson, 2004). In 2000, one of three teachers was over the age of 50 (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 2000; Murnane & Steele, 2007). Approximately half the current teaching force will leave the classroom by 2010, as these teachers reach retirement age (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 2000). With increased student enrollment, high new teacher attrition, and a dwindling teacher force over the age of 50, a U-shaped distribution of teachers by years of experience has replaced the earlier distribution with one in which the heaviest teaching force is in the categories most likely to leave the profession

(Johnson, 2004). This means that if the current pattern of new teacher attrition continues, teacher shortages will become even more pronounced.

Second, staffing all classrooms with highly qualified teachers is considerably more difficult in areas with high rates of teacher turnover. This is especially troublesome for urban schools, because attrition rates are higher in schools with many low-income and minority students and in schools with high numbers of students who struggle academically (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2007). Johnson (2004) explains this phenomenon by pointing out that both attrition and transfer affect low-performing and low-income schools more heavily than affluent schools.

Ingersoll (2004) says that high poverty urban schools are unable to compete with affluent districts in recruiting adequately trained teachers. Therefore, many urban schools staff classrooms with under-qualified teachers (Ingersoll, 2004). This aligns with data from the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers that indicate unlicensed teachers are more prevalent in high-poverty schools, because these schools are unable to recruit highly qualified teachers in a market of teacher shortage (Johnson, 2004). This trend for hiring ineffective teachers creates a significant challenge for serving a rapidly growing and often underserved population of impoverished children (Murnane & Steele, 2007).

Finally, teacher attrition is costly due to several factors. One involves the expense associated with recruitment efforts. In the face of teacher shortages, districts have implemented a variety of recruitment programs aimed at expanding the quantity of teachers supplied (Ingersoll, 2004). Some involve alternative routes to certification and

“career-change” programs, such as *Troops-to-Teachers*, the Call Me Mister recruiting programs in South Carolina, and *Teach for America* (Ingersoll, 2004; Lewis, 2006).

Others involve aggressive financial incentives. These include signing bonuses, student loan forgiveness, or assistance with housing (Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll, 2007).

Additional district expenses are incurred through the posting of vacancies, interviewing, and record keeping. Districts provide new hires with mentors, induction or orientation sessions, and professional development (Strayhorn, 2004). Unfortunately, a significant financial commitment is required of districts in implementing support systems like these.

The annual cost of teacher turnover in the United States has been estimated at \$4.9 billion (Carroll, 2007). For each individual who leaves, \$12,546 is lost at the school level (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future estimates the annual urban district cost associated with teacher leavers at \$70,000 per school (Carroll, 2007). Universities and community colleges are also impacted financially. The amount spent preparing teachers for certification who then leave the profession within a few short years further compounds the financial drain associated with teacher attrition.

Not only are these efforts expensive, but they have not been successful in solving the teacher shortage problem. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) contend that even highly successful efforts to recruit new teachers will not solve the staffing problems in the schools if 40-50% of the new recruits leave the classroom within five years. Both Johnson (2004) and Ingersoll (2004) insist that retention, not recruitment, is the best

solution, because if all the teachers who entered the profession stayed, the teacher shortage would not exist. It would seem important, then, to understand patterns of teacher attrition, including which teachers are most likely to leave and why they are so willing to leave a profession they spent years preparing to enjoy.

Causes of Attrition

Why do new teachers leave the profession? A common assumption is that they leave because of low salaries. It is true that teacher attrition is higher in school districts where beginning salaries are below \$30,000 annually (Luekens, Lyter & Fox, 2004). Low salaries are characteristic of many high-poverty public schools (Ingersoll, 2004; Murnane & Steele, 2007). However, Certo and Fox (2002) and Bolich (2001) found that in most cases, salary was not as significant a factor in job dissatisfaction as workplace conditions, including inappropriate workloads, lack of opportunity to interact with peers, lack of autonomy, and difficult student behavior.

In a case study involving 50 new teachers, Johnson (2004) identified the following as concerns among entry level teachers that can lead to job dissatisfaction and the decision to leave the profession: (a) uncertainty about what to expect from students due to a difference between the teacher's background and student demographics, (b) concerns about student discipline and classroom management, (c) challenges from struggling readers and English language learners, (d) lack of knowledge about diverse student populations, (e) a lack of empowerment, and (f) failure to achieve a sense of efficacy.

Several other factors appear to impact new teacher attrition. Ingersoll (2004) identified inadequate support from the administration, limited time for planning, and few opportunities to engage in decision-making as contributing factors. Lewis (2006) found that the lack of opportunity to advance was one reason for attrition, especially among African American males. In addition, Johnson, Berg and Donaldson (2005) found that inadequate facilities, poor equipment, insufficient supplies, and out-of-field placements were among the reasons new teachers became dissatisfied with teaching.

Attrition may also be related to the fact that much is expected of new teachers that was not expected of veteran teachers when they entered the profession in the 1960s and 1970s. Johnson (2004) says today's teacher is expected to teach very diverse populations, including children from poverty, English language learners, and students with special needs. Today's teacher is not only expected to be highly qualified under the NCLB definition but is expected to meet the challenge of continually raising students' test scores as well (Murnane & Steele, 2007).

Viewed collectively, these studies indicate that new teachers face a myriad of frustrations in entry-level teaching. Retaining new teachers may depend on how well districts address the specific frustrations experienced by new teachers (Ingersoll, 2004). Helping novices deal with the problems they face is the goal of socialization (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld, 2005). Weick et al.(2005) contend that the purpose of organizational socialization is to shape or channel the intrinsic experiences of individuals in a way that leads to behavioral commitment. Understanding the link

between new teacher socialization and behavioral commitment, then, may be a step toward higher teacher retention (Abrams & DeMoura, 2001; Angelie, 2006).

Job Satisfaction and Socialization

Behavioral commitment is viewed by Weick (1995) as both a desired result and a natural outcome of effective socialization. He sees socialization and job satisfaction as inexorably linked (Weick, 1995). In terms of the teaching profession, Brock and Grady (2007) found that the process of socialization into the new culture is one of the most significant factors impacting new teacher job satisfaction and retention. Similarly, Angelie (2006) contends that socialization for the beginning teacher is the determining factor in whether the first years are viewed by the novice as successes or as failures.

Socialization may be defined as the process through which new teachers learn the norms, values and skills needed in order to survive and succeed in the school culture (Greenhaus, 1999). Greenhaus (1999) contends it is through socialization that a new employee, such as a new teacher, masters the skills needed to perform well, learns what is significant to others in the new environment, develops a higher level of self-awareness through interaction with others, and arrives at more clarity about the expectations associated with the new culture. If so, more effective socialization strategies should have a positive correlation with improved attitudinal outcomes, higher levels of behavioral commitment, and increased retention levels among new teachers.

While Riordan, Self, Vandenberg and Weatherly (2001) found a positive correlation between fixed socialization practices and employee *aptitude*, they did not find these to impact employee *satisfaction* or long-term career goals. However, they did

find a positive correlation between investiture socialization practices and enhanced employee job satisfaction (Riordan et al., 2001). In other words, socialization practices that focused on helping people “feel better” about their job had an impact on retention (Riordan et al., 2001).

Similarly, Louis, Posner, and Powell (1983) found only a minimal relationship between standardized orientation sessions or employee training and job satisfaction (Louis et al., 1983). The impact of mentors was slightly more significant. Daily interactions with peers had a greater impact on an employee’s job commitment and tenure than any other effort (Louis et al., 1983). Despite this correlation, they contend that few organizations provide the kinds of peer interaction and socialization that are needed (Louis et al., 1983).

Some schools have attempted to address the need for socialization of new teachers through induction programs and mentoring along with university-school partnerships. The content of these programs is often focused on district policies and procedures or “fixed” socialization practices (Riordan, Self, Vandenberg, & Weatherly, 2001). Socialization “content” most certainly should include practical job-related aspects, such as understanding attendance procedures or approaches to lesson planning (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999).

However, socialization should also address new teachers’ goals, their understanding of their role in the school, and the relationships they form with students and peers (Anakwe & Greenhaus, 1999). Unfortunately, of the typical approaches to new

teacher orientation, most do not sufficiently address these aspects of the new teacher experience.

Induction Programs

Many districts attempt to address the socialization of new teachers through new-employee induction programs. Induction programs vary in the services they provide, and many include mentoring as one aspect of their approach. According to the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005), comprehensive induction programs typically include a combination of mentoring, professional development, and formal assessments of teachers for at least their first two years.

Induction programs appear to have some positive impact on teacher retention. Among a group of five school districts that implemented new induction programs for novice teachers in the 2000-2001 academic year, Wong (2003) found that attrition rates dropped as much as 35 percentage points. He includes the following as potential elements in successful induction programs: intensive training in classroom management prior to the beginning of the school year, systemic professional development over the course of the next two years, study groups for peer support and interaction, mentoring, administrative support, modeling of best practices by veteran teachers, and opportunities for novice teachers to visit demonstration classrooms (Wong, 2003).

Similarly, Heidkamp and Shapiro (1999) found several factors of induction programs as helpful in impacting teacher retention. They identified administrative support and direction, a strong pre-service orientation program, ongoing support from

peer networking and mentoring, and opportunities to make connections with the broader professional community as critical elements of induction programs (in Scherer, 1999).

However, not all of these aspects of induction programs are aimed specifically at the socialization of new teachers, and for that reason, their impact on teacher attrition may be minimized. Gold (1996) identifies two basic types of support needed by novice teachers. The first involves instruction-related areas, such as classroom management, subject-matter knowledge, and teaching strategies (Gold, 1996). The second involves socialization efforts, which deal with personal attitudes, emotions, and concerns (Gold, 1996). While many induction programs focus in the first area, she contends that a second type is more important. Unfortunately, it is socialization efforts that are often missing from induction programs. Gold (1996) says that while induction programs may be described as socialization efforts, most induction programs center on the logistics of the teaching act, ignoring the new teacher's need for psychological and social support.

One typical new teacher induction program is the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program (LaTAAP), which combines mentoring, professional development, and teacher assessment as part of a two-year program embedded within the state teacher certification system (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b). Certainly some activities associated the LaTAAP and similar programs have a positive correlation to retention (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that when a combination of support efforts like those in the LaTAAP program is implemented, employee retention increases.

However, while many districts have implemented programs similar to LaTAAP, these are only minimally successful in slowing teacher attrition (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004). Apparently, they fail to provide the type of socialization needed by novice teachers, and other solutions are needed.

Mentoring

Another widely used approach for new teacher socialization is mentoring (Norman & Ganser, 2004). Mentoring programs have been used as a way of assisting new teachers since the 1970s, but many districts have not changed their approaches significantly, even though the routes for teacher certification have evolved dramatically (Norman & Ganser, 2004). Perhaps because of rising attrition rates among novice teachers, the number of districts employing mentoring programs has grown exponentially in recent years (Norman & Ganser, 2004). Over 50 percent of teachers within their first three years of teaching have been involved in some way in a mentoring program (Ganser, Marchione, & Fleischmann, 1999). Mentors serve as role models, motivators, advisors, guides, and even protectors (Johnson, 2004).

While there are many successful mentoring programs, Martinez (2004) cautions that there are several drawbacks related to mentoring programs as approaches to new teacher socialization. First, due to high teacher attrition rates among experienced as well as novice teachers, it may be difficult for districts to find enough qualified veteran teachers to adequately meet the needs of all new teachers (Martinez, 2004). Districts may be forced to pair first year teachers with mentors who have only a year or two of experience.

Second, changes in how mentors are trained and in how they interact with new teachers may be needed, since the number of teachers entering the profession through alternative routes is growing (Martinez, 2004). A mentor who was certified through a traditional, four-year university program may not understand the needs and frustrations of alternatively certified teachers (Martinez, 2004). Also, as the specificity and specialization required in the teaching profession become increasingly complex, it may become difficult for districts to find mentors with the same subject-area skill-sets as novice teachers (Martinez, 2004).

These issues may limit the effectiveness of mentoring programs in providing for the socialization of new teachers. Despite the fact that most large urban districts have employed mentoring programs, the rate of teacher attrition has not slowed (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004).

University-School Partnerships and Peer-Support Systems

While mentoring pairs individual novice teachers with individual veteran teachers, a third approach to the socialization of new teachers centers on peer collaboration on a broader scale. For example, in the Peer Assistance and Review program (PAR) collaboratively developed between an urban school district and Ohio State University, specially trained consulting teachers are released from classroom responsibilities for a three-year period in order to provide coaching, assistance, feedback, and support to both new and veteran teachers through classroom observations, discussion groups, and mentoring (Stroot et al., 1999). Participants in the program indicate a high level of satisfaction with the resources, emotional support, and

opportunities for professional development they receive and a diminished need for assistance with management issues (Stroot et al., 1999).

Similar to this is the Master Teacher Program in Texas, in which the state provides stipends to highly trained individuals in math, science, or reading. These “master teachers” have fewer teaching responsibilities than other teachers, allowing them time to mentor and support groups of teachers through observation, co-teaching, and professional development (U.S. Department of Education, *State initiatives: Induction and mentoring*, n.d.-b).

Such associations between university programs and public school systems might help to prevent the “reality shock” novice teachers experience in their transition from university life to the classroom (Allard, Chubbick, Clift & Quinlan, 2001). A study involving 37 teachers in a school-university partnership in Illinois called the Novice Teacher Support Project (NTSP) indicates that some concerns of teachers are best addressed by mentors or peers within the school district. Others, however, are best addressed by professionals without district ties.

Through this type of partnership, the university support provided to pre-service teachers is continued after they are placed in classrooms, giving them a broader community of professionals with whom to collaborate and from whom to ask advice. Novice teachers feel more emotional support and safety than in situations where district support alone is available (Allard, Chubbick, Clift, and Quinlan, 2001).

Unfortunately, despite the implementation of mentoring, induction programs, school-university partnerships, and other socialization efforts, teacher attrition continues

to be a problem for school districts. Ingersoll (2004) says that effective schools are characterized by a positive sense of community, effective communication among members, and a sense of cohesion and collaboration. However, such factors are often ignored in the design of teacher induction programs, mentoring approaches, or other attempts to increase teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2004). Other approaches to new teacher socialization may be indicated in order to address teacher retention more aggressively and at a more individual level.

New Approaches to Socialization for Novice Teachers

Most of the approaches addressed above are provided in the same way for all new employees, and most are provided during the first year of employment only (Riordan, Self, Vandenberg & Weatherly, 2001). However, Veenman (1984) and Johnson (2004) suggest that the one-size-fits-all approach to new teacher socialization is ineffective given the individual nature of the concerns expressed by new teachers. This is supported by Riordan, Self, Vandenberg, and Weatherly (2001), who found that when newcomers were trained in group settings, they were more likely to leave than in situations where newcomers were provided with individual socialization practices.

Similarly, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that neither seminars/classes for beginning teachers nor general induction programs significantly reduced teacher attrition. Given the limitations of standard approaches for socializing new teachers, alternative approaches seem warranted.

Approaches to new teacher socialization should assist individual novice teachers in understanding or making sense of the entry-level experience (Weick, 1995). Weick

contends that it is not possible to support newcomers without first understanding what they experience intrinsically. He says that the socialization of new teachers should help them identify their role in the organization and should guide their thinking as they try to understand why some aspects of teaching are not as they expected them to be. This guidance through the process of sensemaking is a missing element in most new teacher induction programs, most mentoring programs, and most university-school partnerships. These approaches tend to focus on the logistics of the teaching act rather than the psychological and social aspects of teaching.

The process of sensemaking described by Weick (1995) has seven properties or characteristics. First, sensemaking is “grounded in identity construction,” or it is highly connected to the individual’s self-image (Weick, 1995, p. 18). Second, it is retrospective, or tied to the individual’s past and current experiences. This supports Louis’s (1980) contention that sensemaking is often driven by past experience or by local interpretation. In addition, Weick says sensemaking is enactive, in that once meaning has been attributed to a situation by the individual, the person then changes his behavior based on his new assumptions. This may be problematic if the assumptions made are inaccurate (Weick, 1995).

Weick (1995) contends that sensemaking is also social, because the individual bases assumptions about meaning by watching and interacting with others. In addition, sensemaking is ongoing and recursive. The individual encounters a contrast, experiences surprise, attributes meaning to the situation, adjusts behavior accordingly, and then moves on – only to encounter another contrast that causes the person to rethink

the adjusted assumption. Finally, sensemaking is plausible and reasonable, but not necessarily accurate (Weick, 1995).

Both Weick (1995) and Louis et al. (1983) contend that retention for new employees is positively related to sensemaking. When new teachers are able to understand, explain, and overcome problems they encounter, they are more apt to remain in the profession (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). Through a better understanding of how new teachers make sense of entry-level experiences, schools may be able to design programs to guide and support them (Weick, 1995). One way of reaching this understanding, then, may be to examine the process of sensemaking from the viewpoint of individual novice teachers.

Sensemaking: A Framework for Understanding the New Teacher Experience

Meryl Reis Louis (1980) created a framework for examining sensemaking among novice employees. Within this framework, data drawn from the new teachers involved in this study are positioned. Louis extends two previously established theories about why novices choose to leave. The first indicates that new teachers enter the profession with *unrealistic expectations* about what they will experience (Louis, 1980). This is sometimes due to recruiting practices on the part of the school (Louis, 1980). These unrealistic expectations then lead to frustration when the new teacher is confronted with working conditions and rewards that are less satisfactory than anticipated (Louis, 1980). The second theory indicates that the novice teacher's expectations are realistic but that the job experience is different from what was expected or anticipated (Louis, 1980). The *unmet expectations* then become a source of frustration (Louis, 1980).

Each of these explanations for entry-level dissatisfaction assumes a rational reaction to the experience of being new in an organization. Louis (1980), however, purports that what new teachers encounter is a social and emotional experience in addition to the practical one. While she recognizes that beginning teachers need a functional/practical understanding of their new roles, she contends that the entry-level experience is primarily a social one (Louis, 1980). This is in keeping with the theories of Van Maanen and Schein, who propose that in order to offset the anxiety created in transitioning into a new environment, individuals need assistance in understanding both the “functional” and the “social” aspects of their roles (Tuttle, 2002).

Veenman (1984) purports that the interaction between the novice teacher and the teaching environment leads to a kind of “reality shock,” as the new teacher’s expectations fail to be met, leading to frustration and disillusionment. Weick (1995) adds that the shock may be the result of (a) *ambiguity*, because several conflicting explanations about a surprise in the environment have been provided to the newcomer, or (b) *confusion*, because no plausible explanation has been provided to the newcomer.

Louis (1980) describes socialization as the process through which the new teacher learns the values, abilities, behaviors, and social understandings needed for assuming an organizational role and for becoming an insider within the new culture. For the new teacher, this means learning the history of why things are done the way they are, which teaching behaviors are most valued among staff members or most successful with the students, on whom to rely for guidance, and what is expected, both informally and formally.

Louis's (1980) framework for understanding sensemaking is built around a series of stages identified by Merton (1957) through which newcomers pass. These include *anticipatory socialization* (when an individual develops expectations about what the job will involve and the abilities needed to accomplish the goals), *encounter* (when the newcomer's expectations are not met and a feeling of surprise is experienced), and *adaptation* (when the employee changes attitudes and behaviors based on the experiences during the encounter stage) (see Figure 3).

Stage One: Anticipatory Socialization

The first stage described by Louis (1980) is *anticipatory socialization*. During this period, the new teacher forms images of what it will be like in the new role (Louis, 1980). These perceptions may be based on prior experiences or on the information conveyed during interviews or other aspects of the hiring process (Louis, 1980). For example, new teachers might base their ideas about teaching on their own experiences as students, even if the school they attended was markedly different from the one in which they are teaching. Louis says the novice teacher then brings these "expectations" about both personal capability to do the job and what the job will involve into the new environment (Louis, 1980). If these expectations are unrealistic, the transition into teaching may be extremely frustrating (Louis, 1980).

Stage Two: Encounter

The second period is the *encounter* stage, when the novice teacher begins to learn the inner workings, processes, and cultural traditions of the organization. Beginning teachers must learn attendance procedures, processes for checking out equipment,

expectations for lesson planning, and a myriad of other practical systems. It is in this stage that the new teacher may experience the frustration of unmet expectations (realistic or unrealistic), followed by attempts to rationalize or justify why the situation is not as they expected.

At this point, Louis's (1980) theory of sensemaking parallels Festinger's (1957) theory of *cognitive dissonance*. Festinger (1957) contends that when an individual experiences new events or receives new information, there is at least temporarily a feeling of "dissonance" or a conflict between prior beliefs or situations and the newly acquired ones. The newcomer enters any situation with cognition or existing knowledge about feelings, desires, or abilities, along with experiences that have led the individual to this point.

Festinger (1957) contends that reduction of dissonance is a common human process. He proposes that when a person is faced with dissonance, the individual will try to resolve the inconsistencies encountered. This may be accomplished by changing behaviors or by changing beliefs. However, reduction of dissonance may also be accomplished by leaving the environment that has led to the dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Louis (1980) says that when individuals encounter conflicts and frustrations, they try to rationalize or justify what they are experiencing. If they are able to do this, they are apt to stay. If not, they are apt to leave. Thus, a connection between sensemaking and attrition of new teachers may be drawn (Louis, 1980).

The encounter stage is further complicated because it is a time of personal transition as well as career transition. Brock & Grady (2007) found that many novice

teachers are newly experiencing the challenges of being adults instead of students. They may have lost their family and peer support systems (Brock & Grady, 2007). This difficulty with transition may be especially true of teachers who were trained in alternative certification programs, because they are attempting to transition into full-time teaching while at the same time learning pedagogy, classroom management strategies, and curriculum (Brock & Grady, 2007).

Louis (1980) proposes that during this *encounter* stage, novice teachers need two types of information. One is role-related, meaning the knowledge and skills needed to do the job well. For new teachers, these are the practical aspects of teaching, such as understanding the curriculum and demonstrating competence with methods. The other type of information Louis (1980) identifies is culture-related, meaning the assumptions, norms, values and belief systems in which other teachers operate. It is in this stage of learning “how to be” that many new teachers feel disillusioned (Louis, 1980).

In Louis’s (1980) theory, during the second or *encounter* stage the new teacher is confronted by three distinct experiences. The first is *change*, as adjustments are made to new surroundings, new equipment, new requirements, and a new hierarchy of authority. The second experience encountered in this stage is *contrast*, as the beginning teacher is faced with situations that are different from prior expectations or that are different from previous experiences (Louis, 1980). The teacher may experience contrast due to new job experiences, but the contrast may also originate from the trauma of “letting go” of old habits and activities.

For the new teacher, contrast may be created when personal experiences in school were in environments significantly different from the current one. In addition, many new teachers indicate they were prepared for teaching responsibilities, but they were not prepared for the “extra” expectations of the teaching profession such as organizational sponsorship, hall monitoring, meetings, committees, and grading (Brock & Grady, 2007).

The third experience Louis (1980) associates with the encounter stage is *surprise*, which can occur in several forms. Surprise may be the result when conscious expectations about the job are unfulfilled, when the novice teacher’s expectations about personal ability to teach successfully are unrealized, when unanticipated (and sometimes unpleasant) aspects of teaching are encountered, when unexpected personal emotions or reactions are experienced, and when the culture of past experiences fails to align with the culture of the new school environment (Louis, 1980).

Louis (1980) proposes that it is because of the surprise element that teachers engage in sensemaking, which she describes as the process a new teacher uses to assign meaning to unexpected occurrences. Louis (1980) says people operate in patterns of behavior that are automatic or “scripted” most of the time. However, when the new teacher encounters something that is different from what was expected or what was in the script, cognitive processing begins, and the individual attempts to assign meaning to the experience.

The meaning assigned may be based on several sources of input identified by Louis (1980). For example, one source of input is the teacher’s past experiences, even if

those experiences are not necessarily related to the current school situation (Louis, 1980). For new teachers, this might be their own experiences as students.

A second input source involves what Louis (1980) refers to as local interpretation, meaning the way the entry-level teacher uses the data that are provided within the organizational structure of the school. For new teachers, this might be conveyed through handbooks, administrative communication, mentoring, induction programs, and similar activities. Two of the input sources involve the individual's perception of people, including personal characteristics as well as the characteristics or traits of others (Louis, 1980).

An additional source of input may be the teacher's cultural biases (Louis, 1980). A fifth input source involves what Louis (1980) refers to as insider information. This is data that comes from someone with more experience in the school, such as a veteran teacher, who guides the thinking of the newcomer (Louis, 1980) (see Figure 3).

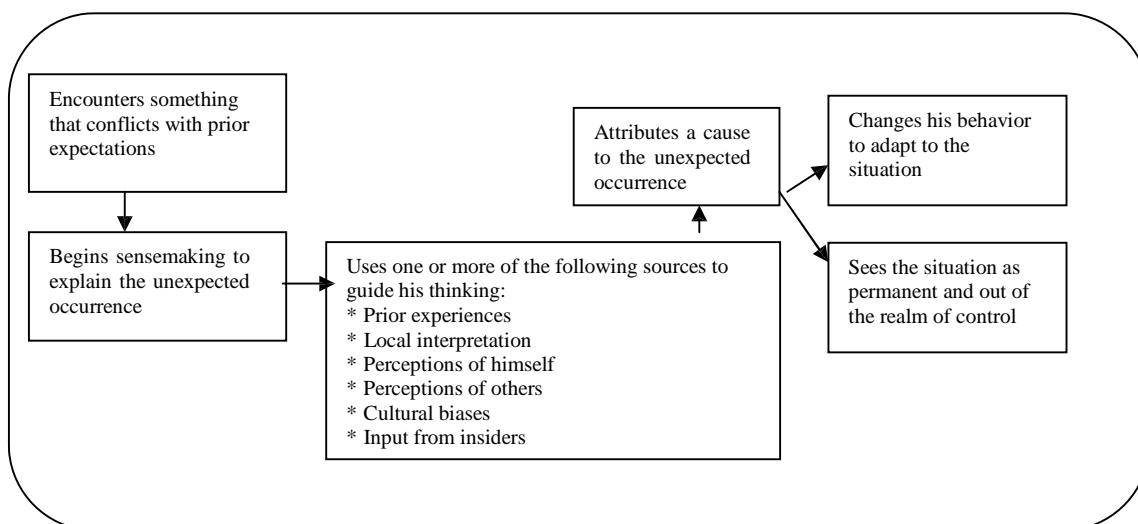


FIGURE 3. Use of input sources in sensemaking (Louis, 1980)

Louis (1980) cautions that the meaning assigned by new teachers in response to surprises in the environment may not be accurate. She cites a number of reasons for inaccurate assumptions. First, the novice teacher does not have enough relevant background knowledge about the situation to fully understand it. The individual may assign permanence to a temporary condition or may believe a permanent occurrence to be temporary (Louis, 1980). Also, the beginning teacher does not know other faculty members well enough to make judgments about them, and the person has not had time to develop relationships with others in the school, so trust is placed in the wrong people (Louis, 1980).

In addition, the novice teacher does not have enough experience with the school culture to understand it, so meaning may be assigned based on previous experiences and cultures, and the cultures may not be similar (Louis, 1980). Brock and Grady (2007) found that new teachers often encounter situations where norms, peer groups and social relationships are already established. They frequently report feelings of stress and isolation as well as inadequate support, guidance, professional growth, and preparation (Brock & Grady, 2007; Rogers & Babinski, 2002).

In addition, new teachers experience several changes in their “definition of themselves” (Brock & Grady, 2007). First, they must change their dress, behavior, and lifestyle to match that of the adult world (Brock & Grady, 2007). Second, they must move from being “successful” as a student to being insecure and uncertain as a teacher (Brock & Grady, 2007). This may extend beyond the classroom, as they are faced with understanding benefits, schedules, and contracts – all the while transitioning to the adult

world of banks, physicians, housing, and travel in a new community (Brock & Grady, 2007). Finally, they must move from the interpersonal support network of their parents and friends to the difficult to enter and sometimes non-existent support of veteran teachers (Brock & Grady, 2007).

Stage Three: Adaptation

The third stage identified by Louis (1980) is *adaptation*, when the novice teacher begins to feel a sense of efficacy and success. The entry-level teacher may even be sought out by others for input or guidance (Louis, 1980). A correlation may be drawn here between the sensemaking efforts of the newcomer, as described by Louis (1980), and what Bandura (1998) identifies as attempts by members of an organization to “exercise control” over their environment.

Bandura (1998) contends that people who believe they can exercise control over obstacles they encounter are motivated to persevere, while those who feel a lack of control “slacken their efforts or give up quickly” (p. 75). He purports that people anticipate situations, set goals for themselves, and visualize themselves in future situations (Bandura, 1998). When they are faced with threat to their preconceived image, their sense of self-efficacy determines whether or not they will be resilient in spite of failure or difficulty (Bandura, 1998). He says the sense of self-efficacy may be bolstered by success in past experiences, the level of difficulty in the current experience, or peer influence.

Louis (1980) also notes the importance of peer influence. She says that new teachers are more apt to change their behavior if they attribute the surprises in their new

environment to stable causes rather than temporary or unstable causes. Because of this, she emphasizes the importance of the “insider” in assisting newcomers with the sensemaking process:

Since reality testing is seen as an important input to sensemaking, it seems particularly important for newcomers to have insiders who might serve as sounding boards and guide them to important background information for assigning meaning to events and surprises. Insiders are seen as a potentially rich source of assistance to newcomers in diagnosing and interpreting the myriad surprises that may arise during their transitions into new settings” (p. 243). She points out that the insider understands the history of the organization and may be able to help the newcomer interpret some of the surprises he encounters and perhaps even avoid others. (Louis, 1980)

Brock and Grady (2007) agree that support from an insider is critical for new teachers. They contend that without support from peers, new teachers are easily frustrated by the many difficult experiences they encounter. They may blame themselves for their failures. They may not realize that the problems they are facing are typical for new teachers. They may feel that their experiences indicate personal weakness. Without support through interaction with peers, they may decide they are in the wrong profession and decide to leave (Brock & Grady, 2007).

A comparison might also be drawn between the experiences of novice teachers as reported by Brock and Grady (2007) and the intergroup differences and boundary heightening described by Madsen and Mabokela (2005) in their studies of cultural differences between European American teachers and teachers of color. Like the minority workers in Madsen and Mabokela’s (2005) study, Brock and Grady (2007) found that new teachers feel uncertain about how things work in the new situation and are unsure of the traditions, cultures, and inner workings of the school.

Unfortunately, new teachers often report feelings of isolation and a lack of support from veteran teachers (Brock & Grady, 2007; Rogers & Babinski, 2002), similar to the experience of minority workers when majority workers “polarize,” expecting the newcomer to “conform to the organization’s norms and socialization process” (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005, p. 37). Key to the new teacher’s job satisfaction, then, may be the ability to establish open dialogue with the inner group. This is one of the properties of sensemaking identified by Weick (1995).

Properties of Sensemaking

The framework of surprise and sensemaking, then, has application in understanding the experiences of novice teachers. Gold (1993) found that that psychological factors such as insecurity, conflicts between personal life and professional expectations, lack of control over the environment, isolation from peers, and entering a new setting were strongly related to the dissatisfaction of entry-level teachers. They found these factors to be highly unique to each individual (Gold, 1993). That is, two new teachers may encounter different surprises in the same environment, based on the differences in their previous experiences, previous cultures, and preconceived expectations (Gold, 1993).

In addition, different individuals may move through the phases or stages of socialization at different rates, depending on their ability to make sense of the contrast and surprises they encounter (Louis, 1980). Weick (1995) purports that when change is encountered in an open system, interaction among the individuals in the system results in

new understandings and new “scripts”, which become institutionalized over time until another change is introduced.

In keeping with Weick’s (1995) theory, no one approach to assisting new teachers is applicable to all schools. Instead, sensemaking is inherently individualized and specific. However, by studying the *patterns* of interaction of individuals involved in sensemaking, leaders can design structures to facilitate the process in the future (Weick, 1995). Since little research has been done to provide this understanding of the patterns in sensemaking among newcomers in schools, documenting the sensemaking strategies of a group of novice teachers as they progress through a year of teaching contributes to that understanding and could facilitate the creation of better models for supporting and retaining new teachers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology used in the study. The intent of the study is to examine how new teachers make sense of the conflicts and frustrations of entry-level teaching and the impact of that sensemaking on their retention in the profession. Such an understanding is important, because between 40 and 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years (*Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality Teachers*, 2004; Fieman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). This is costly for school districts both financially and academically (Ingersoll, 2003).

An examination of new teacher sensemaking might add to existing research about the development of structures to support entry-level educators. This chapter includes a description of the qualitative design that was employed, the data sources and context (including the rationale for selection and pertinent demographics for the participants and school districts involved in the study), methods used for data collection, and the method of data analysis.

Methods

The Qualitative Case Study

This study approaches sensemaking activities among novice teachers using a qualitative case study methodology (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative inquiry was selected for several reasons. First, qualitative research provides a different perspective from

quantitative research. The qualitative study clarifies meanings and expands the readers' experiences in ways that the "tightly controlled conditions" of quantitative research do not (Merriam, 1998). For example, this study revealed subtle differences between official mentors and "unofficial" mentors or insiders. Such subtle differences might not have been revealed through a survey or questionnaire asking about the importance of peer support.

Second, this study involves a social and sometimes emotional process experienced by new teachers as they adjust to a new culture. The primary premise behind qualitative research is that individuals interact with their social world in order to construct reality (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative methods are especially suited for studies where the intent is to examine feelings, emotions, thought processes and details about phenomena that conventional methods fail to reveal (Corbin & Strauss, 1998).

Also, the study examines the perspectives of individual novice teachers about entry-level teaching, with the goal of finding commonalities among their experiences. The structure of qualitative research allows the researcher to view social phenomena from the perspective of the individuals involved (Glesne, 2006).

The data were gathered in the context of a collective case study, an approach selected for several reasons. First, case study is defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as an in-depth examination of an individual or unique situation. In keeping with this definition, Creswell (2003) recommends case study when the researcher's goal is to collect detailed information about individuals and processes using a variety of collection procedures over a sustained period of time. This research centered on the unique

experiences of twelve beginning teachers. It involved collecting detailed information through interviews, observations and document review, and it was conducted over the course of a school year.

Second, case study was utilized because the parameters of this study parallel what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) identify as hallmarks of case study. For example, since the intent of the research was to document the experience of entry-level teachers, case study was selected for its potential to provide rich, thick description of those experiences. Also, the nature of the study was analytic rather than statistical, and the research focused on the *perceptions* of individuals, another characteristic of case study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

In addition, this study examined the behaviors of the new teachers and the reasons behind their behaviors during the process of sensemaking. Merriam (1998) finds case studies to be most helpful in studies meant to examine the “how” and “why” of an experience. She explains, “Case study is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process . . . and for what it can reveal about a phenomena, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to” (p. 33). This research explores the process of new teacher sensemaking.

Finally, case study allows the researcher to explain and examine cause-effect relationships in social situations that are too complex for surveys or other quantitative strategies (Yin, 2003). This research was intended to discern connections between sensemaking and the decision of new teachers about remaining in the profession.

The individuals studied represented a bounded system. Bounded system refers to the ability to narrow the individuals studied to a group fitting specific parameters or boundaries (Cresell, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002). This study involved in-depth interviews with new teachers from three selected urban school districts. Each of the teachers volunteered to participate in the study. These parameters formed the boundaries of the study.

This study was also contextual in nature, because the researcher went to each individual campus to conduct interviews with the participants and to observe the teachers interacting with peers and with students. Both Yin (2003) and Merriam & Associates (2002) emphasize the contextual nature of case studies.

Significance of the Study

While significant quantitative research has been conducted on teacher recruitment and retention (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006), no studies have been conducted which examine the sensemaking strategies of novice public school teachers through a qualitative case study methodology. This study adds to the existing literature about new teacher retention by examining the perceptions of twelve beginning educators as they make sense of the frustrations and conflicts of entry-level teaching.

Data Sources

Context

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007), the typical “teacher leaver” is a white female, employed in an urban district in a southern or western state, and teaching at the secondary level (middle

school or high school). These descriptors served as initial parameters for the target population.

The study involved in-depth interviews with twelve teachers in their first, second or third year of teaching. Each of the individuals interviewed was teaching at the secondary level (grades eight through twelve) during the 2007-2008 school year. Participants were selected from urban school districts in Texas, Louisiana and Arizona. For the purposes of this study, urban school is defined as the largest district in counties with populations of 650,000 or more, whose student population includes at least 35% from poverty (Texas Education Agency, 2007).

Louisiana, Arizona and Texas were selected as the context for the interviews. The selection of these states was a purposeful sampling. In qualitative research, participants and sites may be intentionally selected because they represent typicality or specific characteristics around which the study is built (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2003). Purposeful sampling, therefore, helps to center the study on “information rich” participants and sites (Creswell, 2008).

In this study, each of the states selected is located in the southern and western parts of the United States, where teacher attrition is highest. All of the states involved are dealing with high teacher shortages. While Texas and Arizona are growing in population, the departments of education in each of these states reports teacher attrition as a more significant cause of teacher shortages than the growth of student population (Arizona Department of Education, 2004; Strayhorn, 2004). For example, Texas teacher preparation programs are not producing enough new teachers to offset attrition

(Strayhorn, 2004). In 2003, there were only 19,000 teachers available for nearly 37,000 openings.

Teacher shortages related to attrition follow similar patterns in Arizona and Louisiana (Arizona Department of Education, 2004; Louisiana Department of Education, 2008). According to a 2004 report from the Arizona Department of Education, many low-income urban schools in Arizona are unable to fill positions, and the Louisiana Department of Education (2008) reports a rate of attrition among new teachers of between 11 and 15 percent, a figure much higher than the national average of 8% for the first year.

Texas, Arizona and Louisiana are diverse in size and population, are located within the southern or western portions of the country, and have criterion referenced tests aligned to state standards, making it easier to locate schools with students who struggle academically. This is significant, because teacher attrition is greatest in schools with low student academic achievement (Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley, 2006). The selection of these states also involved researcher proximity.

Although low salary is not identified in most studies as the primary reason for teacher attrition, it is certainly a contributing factor in the decision to leave teaching (Johnson, 2004; Leukens, 2004). Salaries are low in each of the states included in this study. Bureau of Labor statistics from May 2006 indicate that Texas ranks 30th out of 50 states in beginning teacher salaries, Louisiana ranks 41st, and Arizona 47th (Schmidt, 2007).

District and School Profiles

Once the decision was made to include teachers from Texas, Arizona, and Louisiana, specific districts and campuses were chosen within each state based on the characteristics of schools that typically experience high levels of teacher attrition. Teachers are most likely to leave urban schools that are demographically diverse, with high populations of African American and Hispanic students (Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley, 2006). The urban schools selected from Louisiana have high populations of African-American students. Those selected from Arizona have high populations of Hispanic students, and those selected from Texas have high representations of both African American and Hispanic populations.

Table 1 displays the demographics of the districts from which new teachers were invited to participate. Table 2 displays the demographics of each school from which new teachers were selected. Through the use of multiple districts across the three states, the researcher was able to collect data from teachers representing diverse populations from schools that typically experience high teacher turnover. These included campuses where students struggled academically and whose student populations were primarily from impoverished neighborhoods.

District A is located in a county with a population nearing four million people. This places the district in the “urban” category. The campus home for participants from District A is small (less than 400 students in 2008), and the student body is almost totally comprised of economically disadvantaged students. Academic achievement is extremely low, with less than 40% of the students passing the state assessment. The student population is 87% minority, with a high population of Hispanic youths.

District B is located in a greater metropolitan area of nearly 800,000 people, designating it as a urban district. Participants were selected from two schools in District B, each with a student body of over 800 students. Each has a population of economically disadvantaged students that exceeds 85%, and the percent of students meeting the minimum requirements on the state assessment is below 35%. The student population for each school is predominantly African American.

In District C, the county population exceeds two million people. It therefore qualifies as an urban school. Participants were selected from two large schools. One has a student population that is 91% economically disadvantaged and 98% minority. While it is predominantly Hispanic (62%), it has a significant number of African-American students as well. The second school is 91% African-American, with an economically disadvantaged population of 83%. The academic achievement for the individual schools in District C is higher than that for the other districts in the study, but particularly in the areas of math and science, the passing rate is at or near 50%.

Table 1 provides an overview of the district demographics, including county population, student population, scores on standardized state assessments, and percents of economically disadvantaged, LEP, African American, and Hispanic students. Table 2 provides similar data for each school from which participants were drawn.

TABLE 1. District Demographics

	County Population	Student Population	% Eco. Disadv.	% LEP	% African-American	% Hispanic	% Meeting minimum expectations on state assessment
District A	3,768,123	25,322	72	19	9.8	77.1	R – 41; W – 52; M – 33;
District B	790,000 (greater metro)	49,945	77	3	79	1.7	ELA – 46; M – 38 SS – 39; Sci - 32
District C	2,345,815	158,814	83.9	31.2	29.6	64.2	ELA – 86; M – 53 SS – 93; Sci – 69

TABLE 2. School Demographics

	County Population	Student Population	% Eco. Disadv.	% LEP	% African-American	% Hispanic	% Meeting minimum expectations on state assessment
School 1 District A	3,768,123	367	72	1	5.6	86.4	R – 29; W – 39; M - 17
School 2 District B	790,000 (greater metro)	812	93	-	99	-	ELA – 25; M – 24 SS – 21; Sci - 16
School 3 District B	790,000 (greater metro)	923	87	-	89	4	ELA – 34; M – 29 SS – 24; Sci - 18
School 4 District C	2,345,815	943	91.3	21.4	36.1	62.1	R – 76; W – 81; M – 38 SS – 72; Sci – 49
School 5 District C	2,345,815	1150	83	3.9	86.1	13.0	ELA – 88; M-53 SS – 93; Sci - 50

Sources for Tables 1 and 2: Arizona Department of Education AIMS Results. Accessed on 6/20/2008 from <http://www.ade.az.gov/profile/publicview/>; Arizona Department of Education District Report Card 2006-2007. Accessed 6/20/2008 from www.ade.az.gov/azlearns/; Louisiana Department of Education LEAP School Achievement Level Summary Report. Accessed on 6/20/2008 from <http://www.doe.state.la.us/Lde/saa/2273.html>; Public School Review. Accessed on 6/20/2008 from www.publicschoolreview.com; Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System. Accessed on 6/20/2008 from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/>; United States Census Bureau. Accessed on 10/03/2007 from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/04/04013.html/>. Individual district websites.

Districts were contacted for permission to gather data from new teachers. Among the districts choosing to approve the project, two provided information about the research effort to the novice (first-, second-, and third-year) secondary (grades 8-12) teachers through in-district communication. Because teacher attrition is highest among schools with high populations of economically disadvantaged students and large populations of African-American or Hispanic students (Gordon, 2000; Ingersoll, 2004), the researcher requested that the introductory material be sent to teachers at schools fitting these parameters. The third district provided the researcher with a list of their new teachers, asking her to contact them directly rather than through district communication.

Participants

The researcher established several goals for assembling a group of participants. One goal was to include teachers representing those most likely to leave the profession. Research suggests that the typical teacher-leaver is a white female under the age of thirty who is teaching in an urban secondary school in a southern or western state (Johnson, 2004; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek & Morton, 2007). The district and school demographics were determined first. Then, the intent was to include white females under the age of thirty from the participating schools.

However, in addition to white females, two other groups were of concern. While the percent of teachers of color who leave the profession within the first few years is only slightly higher than the percent of white teacher leavers, teachers of color are significantly underrepresented compared to student population demographics (Gurarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). Increasing the

percent of teachers of color in the teaching profession could have a significant impact on academic achievement for students of color (Gordon, 2000). Attrition among teachers of color is therefore a critical issue facing schools (Guarino et al., 2006; Lewis, 2006; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004; Murnane & Steele, 2007). For this reason, one goal for participant selection was to enlist teachers of color if possible.

Similarly, the percent of male teachers leaving the profession is slightly lower than that for females (Guarino et al, 2006). However, males are underrepresented in numbers entering the profession compared to student demographics (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). Therefore, a goal of the researcher was to include male teachers among the participant group if possible.

Because teacher attrition is highest during the first three years, the focus of the study was on novice teachers only. Two districts provided their first-, second-, and third-year teachers with an introductory letter, asking them to contact the researcher either via e-mail, phone, or direct mail if they were willing to participate in the research effort. The third district provided the researcher with names and contact information for their novice teachers, asking her to contact the teachers directly. A letter was sent to each potential candidate, inviting participation. All of the respondents from the three districts were assured anonymity, and participation was voluntary.

Twelve teachers consented to participate in the study, representing five different urban, secondary schools. The participant group included six first-year teachers, three second-year teachers, and three third-year teachers.

Four of the twelve participants were male. The group included seven teachers of color, including two Hispanic teachers and five African-American teachers. All were teaching at grade levels 8 or above during the 2007-2008 school year (see Table 3.)

TABLE 3. Participant Demographics

	Grade Level Taught	District/School	Yrs as Tchr	Gender	Ethnicity	Subj.	Age	Cert. (Trad. & Alt.)	Status (Stayer, Un-decided, Leaver)
Adele	8	B/2	1	F	African-American	P.E.	40	T	U
Brad	11	A/1	1	M	White	SS	25	T	S
Colleen	8	C/4	1	F	African-American	Rdg	25	A	U
Delia	8	B/3	2	F	African-American	Math	28	H/H	S
Ellen	10-11	A/1	2	F	White	Sci	23	T	S
Fran	8	B/3	1	F	African-American	Sci	30	A	S
Glenn	9	B/3	3	M	White	Math	27	T for A	L
Helena	8	C/4	1	F	Hispanic	Bi-ELA	24	T	L
Iris	10-11	C/5	3	F	White	ELA	27	T	L
Jerome	9-12	C/5	1	M	African-American	Sp.	58	A	S
Katrina	8	C/4	3	F	Hispanic	ELA	30	T	U
Lester	8	B/3	2	Male	White	Sci	40	A	S

Participant Profiles

Participants in the study represent a cross-section of ages, ethnicities, genders, and certification programs. Pseudonyms were assigned (from A to L) to ensure anonymity (see *Table 3*). Following is a brief description of each participant:

Adele

Adele is a tall, slender African-American woman. She has a relaxed demeanor and a warm smile. A former athlete herself, she teaches physical education and health for eighth graders. The gym floors show wear, and one section of the bleachers appears to be stuck half-open. Her office is cluttered with an array of uniforms, clipboards, and athletic equipment, and above her desk are photographs of her daughters. Adele says she always loved children and considered teaching when she was in her 20s, but she “wasn’t ready for it yet.” Instead, she worked in a variety of fields while her children were small, pursuing a teaching certificate through the state university in her late 30’s. At the age of 40, she is a first-year teacher. Her school operates on a block schedule, so she has three ninety-minute classes daily, each with 25 to 33 students.

Brad

Brad, a 25-year-old white male teaching junior-level history, says that because of his “small stature” and “long hair”, he anticipated that teaching at a school housing the district’s alternative program for discipline problems might be difficult. He worried that the students, 87% of whom are students of color, might find it difficult to relate to him. However, “that has not been the case,” and he feels he is exactly where he should be.

Security is noticeable at his school, with uniformed officers at both the front gate of the fenced campus and at the main doors by the office. Even after classes have ended for the day, students continue to come by his room or look in his doorway to say hello.

Brad says his love of history and his desire to share his passion with others led him to consider teaching. After pursuing a teaching certificate through a university program and student teaching at the school where he is currently employed, he was encouraged by both the administration and his cooperating teacher to stay. His classes are small, usually around 15-20 students, and he teaches a 2 ½ -hour class in the morning and a 2 ½ -hour class each afternoon, in a modified block schedule.

Colleen

A first-year teacher with five classes of eighth grade reading each day, Colleen is a petite 25-year-old African-American woman. While she describes some of her classes as quite large, most have been in the 25-student range. The building is old and in need of repair. In her classroom, a broken overhead projector is precariously positioned atop a stack of tattered dictionaries, and books are strewn about the floor. Surrounded by posters promoting adolescent fiction and displays of literary terminology, she explains that she is currently participating in a district-driven alternative certification program. This is difficult, she says, since it means that when she leaves work each day, she still has classes to attend in the evening, which she describes as exhausting. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she works with the dance team, monitors Saturday school, and conducts after-school tutoring on a regular basis.

Delia

Delia, a second-year teacher who acquired her certification through a state university program, originally planned to teach pre-school but later decided she was better suited for older students. An energetic and articulate African-American in her late 20s, she says she comes from an entire family of educators, including several aunts who teach at her current school. Teaching six classes of 8th grade math each day, she started the year with close to 100 students, but her class load dropped into the 60s as the year progressed, mostly because of “a high rate of referrals, suspensions, and expulsions”. Sitting in a large, open library on a newly-built campus, she says she started as a long-term substitute, and that experience led her to believe she belonged with 8th graders. She says, “Middle school is kind of black or white. You either hate it or love it. I love it.”

Ellen

Ellen is a 23-year-old white woman with short curly hair and a broad smile. A second-year high school science teacher who earned her teaching certificate through a university program, her enthusiasm for physics is evident. White boards on three walls display formulas and assignment checklists. Baskets of calculators, magnifying glasses, and goggles line lab-table countertops. Ellen describes her classes as small, with a morning and an afternoon “block”, each lasting two and a half hours. She typically has 15 to 20 students in each class, and the majority of her students are struggling learners.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Ellen is unit chair for a district-wide teachers' association, and she admits that requires a lot of time. She originally hoped to teach at the school where she completed her student teaching. However, no positions were available. When the district offered her the current physics assignment, she accepted it tentatively, because the school had a reputation for behavior problems. She feels good about the assignment now, however, and has not applied to transfer to the school she originally requested.

Fran

A 30-year-old African American anthropologist, Fran did not originally plan to be a teacher. However, when a close friend decided to leave his business career and begin teaching in order to “make a difference” in the lives of young people, he encouraged her to do the same, and she feels she made the right decision. A first-year teacher, she is currently in a district-directed alternative certification program. She teaches three 90-minute classes of eighth grade science in a block schedule format each day, with a student load of approximately 120 students. She describes teaching as an enigma – at once both “challenging” and “gratifying.”

Glenn

Glenn entered teaching through the *Teach for America* program three years ago. A 27-year-old white male, he taught five classes of ninth grade math this year, with slightly more than 100 students. In addition to his math assignment, he also taught one class of speech and drama, but he explains he was given that assignment because of “willingness,” not “expertise.” Making the decision to leave teaching at the end of this

year, he openly admits that he entered the *Teach for America* program suspecting he probably would not remain in teaching. He hoped the experience would provide a springboard for moving on into other fields. In addition, he wanted to know “how schools work” and what might be done differently to rescue failing schools. He says the experience was, in some ways, his “own education about education in America.”

Helena

Helena is a slight, shy, soft-spoken Hispanic woman in her early 20s who moved to the United States near the beginning of the school year from Puerto Rico. Despite its location in a building that might best be described as dilapidated, her classroom is immaculate, with neat rows of desks, carefully lettered classroom rules, colorful folders in bright containers, and plants on the windowsill. While she earned her teaching certificate in Puerto Rico, she never taught there.

When Helena arrived in the United States, she wanted to pursue teaching. However, she discovered that she was required to pass the state examination in order to do so. The district where she is currently employed agreed to hire her if she would attend their district-administered alternative certification program, and they gave her a year to pass the certification examination. That has proven to be extremely difficult for her. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she has classes each evening, which she describes as not only time-consuming but also stressful. Also, language differences have added to the difficulty of passing the certification exam, and her first attempts have been unsuccessful. Her class load this year included six classes of bilingual language arts.

Most of her classes have 15 to 20 students. She also tutors students who are gifted in language arts.

Iris

Iris is a 27-year-old white female who went from high school into the military for several years before completing a degree in education from a private university. She has completed her third year as a teacher in a large high school, where she taught five 45-minute classes of English III and one class of Honors English for juniors. Most of her classes were large, nearing 40 students. Over coffee in a Starbucks, she described the past year as hectic, in part because a traveling teacher used her classroom during her planning period, so she was unable to work in her room as much as she needed to. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she also held after-school tutoring sessions, sponsored an organization on campus, and coached UIL speech and drama.

Jerome

A first-year teacher at a newly renovated high school, Jerome teaches Spanish I, II, and III. Sitting at one of several long tables in his classroom, the neatly dressed 58-year-old African-American describes a teaching load that is “six classes, back to back, straight through, with a 20-minute lunch break”. Most of his classes are large, averaging 37 students, and he admits that the large class sizes “reduce the options of things you can do.”

A little over a year ago, Jerome retired from a career as the director of a government office. He took some classes at a community college to “expand his horizons,” and one of the teachers there suggested he would make a great teacher. He

completed the alternative certification program offered by the district, and at his own expense, he is registered to attend exchange classes in Mexico this summer to increase his expertise with conversational Spanish. In addition to his teaching responsibilities this year, he directed the activities associated with Hispanic heritage month and Cinco de Mayo, as well as conducting regular tutoring sessions. He has been told he may have some additional responsibilities during the next school year, including the possibility of becoming a department chair.

Katrina

A thirty-year-old Hispanic female in her third year of teaching, Katrina teaches six classes of language arts, reading, and reading electives. This is her second year in working with eighth graders. Prior to this, she taught fourth and fifth graders in another district. She likes the 45-minute classes as opposed to the self-contained arrangement she had in the previous district. She completed an all-level university certification program, although her student teaching experience was at the elementary grades. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she tutors on Saturdays from 9:00 to 1:00, and she is responsible for morning duty at the school entrance on a rotating basis. She says the fact that she is bilingual has been a plus in her current assignment, since over 20% of the students at her school have limited proficiency in English (LEP).

Lester

Lester is a white male in his early 40s. He came into teaching from a career in public relations, which he describes as “highly successful” and “good money” but not personally or spiritually fulfilling. Sharply dressed, he is enthusiastic and energetic.

Coming from an “entire family of scientists,” he decided to pursue teaching through a district-directed alternative certification program. This is his second year in teaching. His class load includes six 90-minute classes of eighth grade earth science. His average class size is 20. In addition to his teaching assignments, he sponsors an extracurricular group of students who are gifted in mathematics, and he provides data analysis and professional development for his school. Last year he chaired a group charged with establishing and implementing a school-wide program for reading in the content areas, along with serving as a mentor for new teachers.

Classification of Participants as Stayers, Leavers, or Undecided

The U. S. Department of Education (1997) and subsequent studies by Johnson (2004) use the term *stayers* to refer to teachers who are satisfied with teaching and have made a decision to continue in the profession. Among the group of twelve teachers who participated in the study (*see Table 3*), six teachers were highly satisfied with teaching at the time of data collection, including Brad, Delia, Ellen, Fran, Jerome and Lester . When asked about their experiences in teaching, they used expressions like “committed,” “making a difference,” and “rewarding.” Each feels the decision to become a teacher was the right one. In terms of sensemaking, each of them appears to have reached the *adaptation* stage identified by Louis (1980), because they feel a sense of efficacy, they are viewed by others as insiders, and they are committed to remain in teaching.

Each of these teachers expects to continue in teaching. While it is not possible to know where they will be five years from now, the level of satisfaction they have reached

as teachers makes it seem likely they will remain in the profession. This group includes three males and three females and consists of three white teachers and three teachers of color. For the purpose of this study, the teachers meeting the criteria described above were referred to as *stayers*.

The term *leavers* is used by the U. S. Department of Education (1997) and subsequent studies by Johnson (2004) to refer to teachers who are dissatisfied with teaching and who have made a decision to leave the profession. Three of the teachers who participated in the study exhibited high levels of dissatisfaction with teaching, including Glenn, Helena, and Iris. Two of these three left the profession shortly after the data were collected for the study, and the third would do so if it were financially feasible.

During the *anticipatory socialization* stage identified by Louis (1980), these teachers exhibited a different set of prior assumptions about teaching than was evident among the stayers. In addition, their sensemaking about surprises in the teaching environment during the *encounter* stage was different from the sensemaking of stayers.

The teachers in this group used expressions like “frustrating,” “horrible,” “worthless,” and “battles in the classroom” to describe their experiences. Two *leavers* felt regret about entering the profession. This group includes two females and one male and consists of one white teacher and two teachers of color. For the purpose of this study, the three teachers in the study who met the criteria above and who have left or who are seriously considering leaving were referred to as *leavers*.

A third group, referred to as *undecided*, was evident among the participants. These teachers fit neither of the labels used in the U. S. Department of Education (1997) studies. The teachers in this group (Adele, Colleen, and Katrina) appear to have met many of the same frustrations in teaching experienced by the *leavers*, but they have also had enough success that they are more hopeful things will improve. They are still undecided about their futures.

At times, the teachers in this group demonstrated characteristics similar to those of *stayers*. At other times, they were more like *leavers* in the way they viewed entry-level experiences. The group consists of three teachers of color. All indicated they are waiting to see “if things get better,” and they spoke both of frustrations about the current year and hopes for improvement in the future. For the purposes of this study, these teachers are referred to as *undecided*.

Data Collection

Interviews

The interview is one of the most important sources of case study information (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2003). Seidman (1998) contends that when a researcher is attempting to investigate an organization or processes within an organization, interviewing is the most essential tool. For the purposes of this study, the interview was selected as the primary means of data collection for this study. Two sets of interviews were conducted.

Seidman (1998) describes the first interview in qualitative research as helping to put the subject’s experience in context, within light of the topic. *Why* and *how* questions

help the interviewer build a foundation of understanding about the subject's experience (Seidman, 1998). Included here were questions like "How do you know where to get help?" and "What has been frustrating about teaching, if anything?" (see Appendix A).

Most of the initial interviews took place in the teachers' classrooms. However, two teachers elected to meet with the researcher in the school library, and one met the researcher at a Starbuck's over coffee. The interviews were audiotaped, with permission from the participants. Most of the interviews were sixty to seventy-five minutes in length.

The initial interviews were conducted using a set of pre-established questions as a springboard (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). These questions centered around factors frequently associated with teacher attrition, including the teacher's expectations about teaching along with perceptions of support provided by administrators, the level and type of support provided by peers, student behavior and academic achievement, self-efficacy, autonomy, and opportunities for advancement (Certo & Fox, 2002) (see Appendix A). A preliminary set of questions was piloted in a different district during the fall of 2006. These questions were refined based on the data collected, and additional questions were designed (see Appendix A).

During each initial interview, some new questions were added and others were deleted or revised as participant comments drove the discussion. A semi-structured approach to interviewing allowed the researcher to gather some similar, specific information from all participants but also to explore the data, moving in different directions, based on the interviewee's responses (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). This

approach to interviewing works well when the researcher is attempting to uncover details about perceptions, feelings, and thought processes among teachers, administrators, or students (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

However, single interviews may fail to allow the researcher to validate key ideas or to reach in-depth understandings of processes (Seidman, 1998). For this reason, after the initial interview, subsequent interviews were conducted face-to-face or via e-mail. Some of the second interviews served to clarify points or extend understanding. Seidman (1998) contends that subsequent interviews are used in qualitative research to formalize the details and reconstruct the subject's experiences within the context of the themes evident from initial interviews. Secondary interviews are based on the foundation established in the initial interviews (Seidman, 1998).

While a pre-established set of questions was used for all initial interviews in this study, questions for subsequent interviews were based on the need to clarify and extend points made in the initial interviews. The questions varied from one participant to another, depending on statements that required explanation or points that needed additional extension or clarification.

For example, two of the first teachers interviewed (Adele and Colleen) alluded to the importance of help from peers. Initially, the researcher assumed they were referring to mentors. However, after interviewing several other teachers, it became clear that mentors were not the primary source of peer support for most of the participants. The second interview with Adele and Colleen gave the researcher an opportunity to clarify

what they meant by peer support and to extend the researcher's understanding of their initial statements.

The second interviews also allowed the researcher to gather additional new data about a specific point. For example, none of the initial interview questions specifically addressed technology or equipment. In the first set of interviews, almost half of the participants talked about problems with equipment and technology as being highly frustrating. However, others did not. The second interview allowed the researcher to ask teachers who had not discussed equipment or technology about their experiences in this area.

Interviews were scheduled and conducted at the individual teacher's building when possible, since "context sampling" is an important part of data collection in studies where the context or setting may have a significant impact on the phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis, 1998). Such interviews allow the researcher to understand the "interpersonal, social and cultural aspects of the environment" that might not be revealed through surveys or documents (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993).

Document Review

Merriam (2002) says that in addition to interviews, documents are informative sources for case studies. In this study, additional data were collected through a document review of standardized test scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP), and Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS). Examining these documents

allowed the researcher to view the academic achievement level of students within each of the selected schools.

Across the study, the participants represented schools where math, science, and English language arts achievement were significantly below state and national standards. This is significant, because teachers are more apt to leave schools with poor academic achievement (Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley, 2006).

A second type of document review included district and campus demographics. Sources for these included the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the Louisiana Department of Education, and the Arizona Department of Education. These sources assisted the researcher in identifying districts and schools that fit the research parameters.

Additional document review involved school web pages and publications, which helped the researcher develop an understanding of the culture and values of the school administration. These sources provided vision and mission statements, photographs of the schools, recent press releases, communication from administrators to teachers, and in some cases, profiles of the teachers participating in the study. While the primary information revealed by these sources was demographic, in some cases it was helpful in understanding the relationship between teachers and administrators or the values placed on student achievement versus athletics and extracurricular activities at the district and school level.

For example, one teacher was particularly critical of her administration. During the second interview with her, she provided the researcher with a letter sent out to all

teachers from the campus principal. The dictatorial tone of the letter served to reinforce for the researcher the points made by the teacher in terms of administrator concern and support.

Observations

Another informative source for case studies is the observation (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In the observation, the researcher sits back and watches events, interactions, and conversations in order to verify and extend conclusions drawn from other sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). While the teachers in the study were not formally observed during instructional time, many invited the researcher into their classrooms. There, the researcher was able to observe six of the twelve teachers interacting with students and five of them interacting with other teachers.

The observations of student interaction took place in tutoring or non-instructional settings. For example, one involved a group of students who needed clarification about an after-school event the teacher was directing. In another, four students came in to finish a science experiment they had not been able to complete during class time. In one instance, the teacher being interviewed had to break up a fight between two students in the gym. In each case, the observation allowed the researcher to note aspects of teacher behavior such as smiling and laughing with students, demonstrating dominance through tone of voice and stance, or exhibiting irritation.

The interaction between the teachers and students was highly revealing. For example, the first interview with Brad (a *stayer*) occurred just after school was out for

the day. His students took the researcher's presence to mean he was in trouble in some way or perhaps being evaluated. At least ten students came by the doorway to assure the researcher that he was their favorite teacher or that he was doing a really great job or that "he really understands us and helps us!" They were obviously worried about his welfare.

On the other hand, during the interview with Katrina, several students came into her room to retrieve materials. Although their behavior did not seem inappropriate or disruptive to the researcher, Katrina's remarks to them were abrupt and demeaning, and her irritation with them was obvious. At one point, she shouted, "Just get your stuff and get out!" When she later spoke about their lack of respect for her, the glimpse of her treatment of them added to the researcher's insight.

The observations of teacher interaction involved conversations about car-pooling to an athletic event, clarification about lesson plans, a question about textbook fees, and two discussions about shared materials. In one instance, one of the teachers being interviewed shared a classroom with a co-worker. When the other teacher came by to ask about some plans for the next day, their conversation revealed a sense of collaboration and collegiality that might not have been evident from the interview statements alone.

In all of the interviews with stayers, they became animated and emotional when they spoke about the support they had received from an "insider". This was typical of the type of information revealed through observations and interviews in the study. All observations of interaction with students or peers were non-participatory, in that the

researcher watched the interaction but did not engage in conversations with the students or the teachers at that time (Creswell, 2008).

In addition, by visiting nine classrooms, the researcher was able to observe the classroom climate established by the teacher as well as the facilities and equipment they were provided. Seeing their surroundings firsthand allowed the researcher better insight into statements teachers made about “poor working conditions” or “inadequate resources.” Of the five schools involved, three were in great need of repair. In three of the schools, broken equipment, dilapidated student and teacher desks, peeling and stained walls, and cluttered, dusty classrooms were the norm.

On three of the campuses, security procedures were almost intimidating. For example, at one school, a uniformed guard met the researcher at a locked gate and radioed to the office for confirmation before unlocking the gate to allow the researcher access to the campus. At another, all students and visitors passed through both a metal detection area and a door that had to be unlocked by school personnel. Once again, the opportunity to observe the climate of the school was revealing to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Constant Comparison Method of Data Analysis

Participant interviews served as the unit of analysis. After each interview, the transcripts were examined for broad themes emerging from the teachers’ descriptions of their experiences. Codes were established based on the factors most commonly associated with the sources of input identified by Louis (1980) as driving the

sensemaking of new employees. These included past experiences, local interpretations, perceptions of self, perceptions of others, cultural biases, and insider input.

For example, if a participant discussed the level of assistance he received from peers, a specific notation (coded as “insider information”) was made in the margin. In this way, the various comments about peer support taken from across all interviews could be brought together and read as a whole. This revealed patterns or themes in how participants felt about or dealt with peer support/insider input.

Some sections of the transcripts were given only one code while other sections had multiple codes. In the constant-comparison approach to analyzing qualitative data, “field notes, observations, interviews, and the like are coded inductively, and then each segment of the data is taken in turn and (a) compared to one or more categories to determine its relevance and (b) compared with other segments of data similarly categorized” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 30).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) describe the constant comparative analysis as one in which a theory is initially generated from the data, but it is then modified and extended or altered as more data are gathered, resulting in a “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 158). A qualitative thematic strategy was utilized to categorize the data and interpret the findings, identifying commonalities or themes in the way teachers approach surprises in the environment and to what factors they attribute these experiences.

Use of the Prior Research Driven Approach

This study has its foundation in the data about teacher attrition, including problems associated with attrition that school districts currently face. These include the difficulty of staffing schools (particularly in urban settings) with highly-qualified teachers, the high financial expense incurred in recruiting and training new staff members, and the negative impact on student achievement related to the “revolving door” of new teacher entry and exit (Ingersoll, 2004). It builds upon a previously established theory, the theory of surprise and sensemaking developed by Meryl Reis Louis (1980). Therefore, the study was both prior research driven and theory driven (Boyatzis, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Using these approaches, the researcher builds upon or extends assumptions and theories previously espoused by another researcher (Boyatzis, 1998). When prior theories are being applied in new situations, the researcher begins with data (Schwandt, 2001). Insights, hypotheses, questions, and concepts are generated from the original data, which lead to the collection of additional data in order to verify the newly constructed concepts (Schwandt, 2001). A constant comparison method is then utilized to search for patterns, similarities, and uniformities as more and more information is gathered (Schwandt, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to explore the application of Louis’s (1980) theory of sensemaking in the realm of the novice teacher. The goal is to reveal patterns in how teachers make sense of the newcomer experience and how their sensemaking impacts decisions about teaching. These patterns might be instrumental in offering insight to districts as they design policies to support new teachers.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Merriam (1998) says observation over time, triangulation of data, member checks, peer review, participatory research methods, and researcher reflection are modes of establishing trustworthiness and reliability. The data for this study were collected over a period of eleven months, from November of 2007 through September of 2008. While all of the interviews were conducted prior to the end of the regular school year in June, 2008, contact with some participants was maintained through phone calls or e-mail into the fall of 2008. Therefore, trustworthiness was in part established through the collection of data over time. In addition, trustworthiness was established through saturation of data, including over 250 pages of transcribed interviews along with documents and field notes.

Triangulation of data was another means of establishing both reliability and trustworthiness. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) define triangulation as the use of multiple perceptions to reveal meaning and to verify the reliability of researcher interpretation. One way of establishing triangulation is through the use of multiple data sources (Merriam & Associates, 2002). For this study, the multiple data sources included interviews with each of the twelve teachers, review of documents for each teacher and school (including district and campus demographics and student achievement records), and field notes from observations within the classrooms of nine teachers.

Triangulation may also be established through the use of reviewer reflection (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In qualitative research, the personal views and interpretations of the researcher can never be kept totally separate from the meaning of

the data (Creswell, 2008). When researchers draw on their own experiences, they gain additional insight into what their subjects are describing (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In this study, the researcher regularly reflected about her own experiences as a career public school teacher, and this practice guided her thinking about statements made by participants.

For example, when several teachers discussed their reliance on “insiders” for support, she reflected about her own entry-level experiences with veteran teachers and mentoring relationships. One “insider” had been especially influential in her growth as a new teacher. On the other hand, while many of the teachers in the study seemed frustrated by the lack of administrative support, the researcher’s own experience did not mirror theirs. She reflected about why this might have occurred and wondered if she had misunderstood the intent of their statements.

During second interviews, the researcher then shared her conclusions with the participants and verified that she had interpreted their statements accurately. Discussing key points related to the themes with participants was invaluable in helping the researcher refine her understanding of prior perceptions about teaching, the role of insider support, relationships with administrators, and commitment to the teaching profession.

Finally, triangulation may be established through the use of peer review (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Creswell (2008) stresses the importance of sharing research with professionals outside the project who can identify strengths and weaknesses, question conclusions, and extend the thinking of the researcher. In addition

to regularly reflecting about the data herself, the researcher shared and discussed her conclusions with six other professionals in the field of education, including four of her own professors and two educational administrators who worked extensively with teachers in public school settings. Interaction with these individuals led to multiple revisions, often caused her to revisit and rethink the data, and provided insight that would not have been possible without their input.

Reliability and trustworthiness were also addressed through the use of an explicit code, through fidelity to the themes appearing in the data, and through consistency in the methods used to interpret the data (Merriam, 1998). A constant-comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 1998) was used to view each interview in relation to the others as well as to view the findings against the existing research about socialization and sensemaking.

Limitations of the Study

A number of factors limited the study. In the first place, the study examines data gathered from novice teachers currently in the profession, rather than from teachers who had already left the profession. While participants were assured anonymity, some mistrust of the researcher may have been present, and some participants may have been reluctant to be totally open about administrators or district policies, fearing that their words might be revealed to supervisors at the district level. Since the data were collected from interviews conducted by an outsider, participants may have provided answers they felt the interviewer wanted to hear.

Second, while all novice teachers from the selected schools were invited to participate, not all teachers volunteered. It is possible the volunteers did so because their experience was unique in some way. Moreover, the study is structured around the viewpoints of twelve secondary-level public school teachers from urban districts in Texas, Louisiana, and Arizona only, possibly limiting the application of data in other contexts. Teachers in other parts of the country, teachers employed in different types of schools, or teachers at the elementary level might demonstrate a different approach to sensemaking than is evident among the participant group in this study.

A third limitation involves the fact that the study was conducted from both an “insider” and an “outsider” perspective. The researcher is a white female educator who began her 25-year teaching career as a secondary teacher in an urban district in a southern state. Because she shares some of the same characteristics as the participant pool, she may have the biases of an insider.

A more significant limitation for the researcher, however, involves the fact that she is a white middle-class female gathering data from teachers of color. Some researchers believe that “only minority scholars can produce knowledge about racial-ethnic groups” (Anderson, 1993, p. 43). White researchers may have difficulty understanding the issues of persons of color and the experiences of racial minorities (Anderson, 1993).

Anderson contends that in this situation, the researcher must recognize that she is not the “authority” on the lives or experiences of the participants. However, Anderson (1993) also purports that white researchers may be able to generate research with people

of color as research subjects if the researchers “work in ways that acknowledge and challenge white privilege and question how such privilege may shape research experiences” (p. 51). In other words, the researcher must be self-reflective and self-aware, regularly reviewing her own assumptions about the data for prejudicial interpretation (Anderson, 1993).

Andersen (1993) also contends that biases may be offset when the researcher and the subjects are able to form a bond or “social relationship.” However, despite self-reflection and establishing a relationship with participants, interpretations made by a white researcher working with teachers of color will not have “scientific neutrality” (Andersen, 1993, p. 51).

An additional limitation involves the nature of case studies. Merriam (1998) says case studies are limited in several ways. Readers may misinterpret case studies as being representative of the whole, rather than as an examination of some part of the whole (Merriam, 1998). Also, since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and data analysis, much is dependent on the instincts and abilities of the researcher (Merriam, 1998), and this may lead to unethical, unreliable, or invalid data. In this study, the triangulation of data from a combination of extensive interviews, document review, peer review and researcher reflection are intended to offset these potential problems.

As in all qualitative research, the data are presented as perceived by the researcher. Merriam (1998) says qualitative research is limited in that it is filtered through the worldview and values of an individual human being. Thus there may be

multiple interpretations in the construction of reality within the specific research context (Merriam, 1998).

Research Questions

The following questions served as the basis for the study:

1. In what way is the entry-level experience of new teachers impacted by their prior perceptions about teaching?
2. How do new teachers make sense of or explain conflicts and frustrations they encounter in their first years in the profession?
3. In what way are novice teachers' decisions to leave teaching or remain in the profession impacted by their reaction to conflicts and frustrations?

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the study about new teacher sensemaking, based on data collected from twelve novice teachers employed in urban districts during the fall of 2007 through the spring of 2008. The teachers in the study were classified by the researcher as “stayers” or “leavers,” depending on their plans to continue in teaching or leave the profession. Within each of these categories, the teachers’ experiences are presented in a series of patterns or themes. The themes are based on their prior expectations about teaching, the aspects of teaching they found most surprising and frustrating, the approaches through which they rationalized and dealt with those frustrations, the way they changed (or failed to change) in response to their experiences, and the result of those changes.

The entry-level experiences of the teachers in the study were connected to two factors: (a) the images they had of themselves as teachers and (b) their relationship with others. When people join new organizations, they first try to maintain their own “identity” or image – the preconceived belief of how they will function within the organization (Weick, 1995). All of teachers in the study developed prior expectations about what they would accomplish as teachers, characteristic of the *anticipatory socialization* stage described by Louis (1980) (see Figure 1).

However, as their first year progressed, they encountered discrepancies or conflicts between the images they had of themselves as teachers and what was actually expected of them. This type of conflict is typical of what novices experience during the *encounter* stage (Louis, 1980).

Faced with contrasts between their prior expectations and actual experience, the teachers tried to understand why these conflicts occurred. Research indicates that when people are unable to be successful and also maintain their prior self-image, they attempt to rationalize or make sense of what they are experiencing (Weick, 1995). Their sensemaking then drives their future actions and decisions (Weick, 1995).

The teachers in the study made sense of frustrations they encountered in different ways. Some blamed administrators. Others blamed the students. Some felt the students' culture was the source of problems they experienced. Others relied heavily on the information provided by an "insider," an established member of the existing school culture.

Cultural assumptions and insider support are both common sources drawn on in the process of sensemaking (see Figure 2) (Louis, 1980). However, only when sensemaking results in behavioral change does the newcomer move into the *adaptation* stage identified by Louis (1980). The *stayers* perceived that changes in their own behaviors might resolve some of the conflicts. They changed, and in doing so, reached the *adaptation* stage (Louis, 1980). The *leavers* failed to change in response to sensemaking.

Louis (1980) proposes that a better understanding of how individuals assign meaning to or make sense of the conflicts they encounter, and the relationship between this sensemaking and their decision to remain in the profession, could be used in designing better support systems for new hires. New teacher attrition has a significant impact on school stability and quality, especially among schools serving economically disadvantaged students and schools with low academic achievement levels (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Understanding why some teachers in this study decided to leave should be of interest to many urban school administrators.

Classification of Participants as Stayers or Leavers

Louis (1980) contends that job commitment and intent to stay are related to a process referred to as sensemaking. Sensemaking is the way an individual explains or rationalizes the unexpected experiences and surprises encountered during the entry-level experience (Louis, 1980). If a new teacher is able to make sense of frustration in a way that culminates in a sense of efficacy and empowerment, the teacher is more likely to be satisfied with teaching as a profession and is more likely to stay (Louis, 1980).

Based on Louis's (1980) theory, this study focuses on the sensemaking of a group of twelve novice teachers. The study has the potential to provide school administrators with ideas about how to support the teachers most likely to leave the profession, in hopes that retention rates among new teachers will increase. Therefore, the study targets the typical teacher leaver.

The typical “teacher leaver” has been defined by the NCES as a white female under 30 years of age who is teaching at the secondary level and who is employed in an urban district in a southern or western state (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). These descriptors served as criteria for selecting participants for the study. However, because males and teachers of color are underrepresented in the teaching population as compared to the student population, the study targets these groups as well (Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2007; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006).

The study involved in-depth interviews with twelve teachers in their first, second or third year of teaching (see Table 3). Each of the teachers interviewed was teaching at the secondary level in an urban school (grades eight through twelve) during the 2007-2008 school year. The schools involved were selected because the student populations in their urban districts mirrored those of schools with high teacher attrition levels. For the purposes of this study, urban school is defined as the largest district in counties with populations of 650,000 or more, whose student population includes at least 35% from poverty (Texas Education Agency, 2007). Categories of participants include *stayers*, *leavers*, and *undecided*, based on their intent to stay in teaching or leave the profession (see Table 3).

Among the twelve participants, the six *stayers* were highly satisfied with the teaching experience and planned to continue as teachers. Three teachers were *undecided* about their futures in teaching. While they had been frustrated by the teaching

experience, they were optimistic that things would improve over another year. The remaining three *leavers* were extremely dissatisfied with teaching. Two of these left the profession at the end of the school year, and the third would have left if it were financially feasible.

Methodology Summary

The data were gathered through interviews and document review. A constant-comparative method allowed the researcher to see patterns across the data. These revealed how the *stayers*, *leavers*, or those in the *undecided* group made sense of and responded to entry-level teaching experiences.

The stages of sensemaking identified by Louis (1980) served as the theoretical framework for the coding process. These stages include (1) *anticipatory socialization* (when the novice establishes expectations about what teaching will involve), (2) *encounter* (when the newcomer is surprised by unmet expectations or unexpected experiences in the new environment and attempts to assign causes for or make sense of these experiences), and (3) *adaptation* (when the individual begins to feel a sense of belonging and efficacy) (Louis, 1980) (see Figures 1 & 2).

The data generated several themes and subthemes in the areas of (1) prior expectations, (2) responses to conflicts caused by dissonance between prior expectations and actual experience, and (3) the impact of those responses in terms of change, empowerment, and efficacy. Table 4 provides a list of themes and subthemes around which the results are organized.

TABLE 4. Themes and Sub-Themes Identified in the Data

<p>Theme 1: ANTICIPATORY SOCIALIZATION: The Nature of Prior Expectations and Their Influence on Teacher Decision-Making</p> <p><i>Subthemes:</i></p> <p>Practical Knowledge vs. Idealistic and Transmissive Teacher Thinking Perceptions of Being Prepared</p>
<p>Theme 2: ENCOUNTER: Conflicts, Surprises and Sensemaking</p> <p><i>Subthemes:</i></p> <p>Responses to Conflicts in the New Culture</p> <p>Making Sense of Organizational Systems Making Sense of Student Concerns</p> <p>Reliance on Mentors and Insiders in Sensemaking</p> <p>Mentors Insiders</p>
<p>Theme 3: ADAPTATION Change, Empowerment, and Efficacy</p> <p><i>Subthemes:</i></p> <p>Adapting within the New Culture Achieving a Sense of Accomplishment</p>

Theme 1 - Anticipatory Socialization: The Nature of Prior Expectations and Their Influence on Teacher Decision-Making

Teachers enter the profession for a variety of reasons, and they bring with them expectations about what will be involved. Once there, they are sometimes surprised at what they find. Their pre-conceived ideas serve as the “foundation” for sensemaking. Louis (1980) says these expectations may be based on prior experiences, information provided during the hiring process, or by talking with other people in the field (See Figure 1).

During the stage referred to by Louis (1980) as *anticipatory socialization*, the teachers in the study developed images of themselves as teachers. Some imagined themselves in instructional activities (grading, lesson planning, facilitating small groups, creating activities and materials). Others imagined themselves building relationships with students.

One subtheme within the *anticipatory socialization* stage involves the difference in prior expectations between those who thought about teaching from a practical knowledge or instructional standpoint and those who imagined themselves as teachers from an idealistic standpoint (Subtheme A). The second subtheme involves the factors that affected their perceptions of themselves as teachers (Subtheme B).

It is important to note that the differences within each theme were most apparent between the *stayers* and the *leavers*. The teachers characterized as *undecided* were sometimes like the *stayers* in how they thought about and reacted to conflicts and unexpected experiences. At other times they were more like the *leavers*. Therefore, for purposes of clarity within each subtheme, the *undecided* teachers were combined with the *stayers* or *leavers*, depending on the group they most closely resembled.

Subtheme A: Practical Knowledge vs. Idealistic Teacher Thinking

Among the participants, the perceptions they had of themselves as teachers fell into two categories. First, the *stayers* displayed a high level of practical knowledge about teaching. They imagined themselves doing the “work” of teaching, such as grading papers or facilitating instruction. They planned ahead in an attempt to circumvent problems they might have with students.

Leavers, on the other hand, thought about teaching in idealistic terms. They imagined themselves as role models and mentors, building camaraderie with students. Also, they expected to transmit information, with students as passive learners. These idealistic perceptions of teaching became a source of conflict and frustration.

Stayers: Practical Knowledge

The *stayers* expected teaching to be labor intensive. They believed it would require more time than a typical 40-hour work week, because they had heard veteran teachers speak of tutoring, grading, activity sponsorship, professional development,

meetings, and other activities requiring extra time. They expected that their time would be spent in lesson planning, grading papers, monitoring hallways, attending athletic events, preparing materials, and attending meetings. Typical of the *stayers*, Brad realized that some aspects of teaching would be mundane:

I think conceptually I knew there would be paperwork and things I wouldn't enjoy. They did a really good job with that in the teacher preparation program. I mean, there's no doubt that it's not a piece of cake. So I don't know if I was surprised. When it seemed like there was a lot of paperwork or that it took lots of extra time to do everything expected of me, I thought, 'Well, I knew that I would have to do this.'

The work-centered perceptions of teaching among the *stayers* seemed to ease their transition into the *encounter* stage later on.

In addition to anticipating a heavy and sometimes tedious workload, the *stayers* were concerned about their relationships with students. Typical of first year teachers, the *stayers* worried that students would view them as rookies, leading their students to be disrespectful, aggressive, or uncooperative. They also expected challenges in working with students from diverse backgrounds.

The three white teachers in the *stayer* group expressed concern that they would not be accepted by students of color or might not know how to work effectively with students from poverty. They felt that if they had difficulty relating to students from backgrounds different from their own, they might face discipline problems or instructional issues. For example, Brad said:

I knew I wanted to teach, but I didn't know how effective I would be. I was just totally nervous about that – just because of my personality, my stature (I'm small), I have long hair – that kind of thing. This school has almost no white students. I thought that it would be very difficult for me.

Faced with concerns about student discipline and relationships, the *stayers* said they were determined to appear in control and confident. They approached the problem from a practical standpoint. They enlisted the help of experienced teachers in establishing rules, group guidelines, seating arrangements, and other aspects of classroom management that had proven successful in the past. In addition, they researched approaches to working with students from poverty. The *stayers* seemed to recognize the importance of planning for classrooms that were conducive to cooperative and effective instructional environments for all students.

The significance of this kind of “practical” thinking prior to the first day at school is that the *stayers* came into teaching expecting to teach – with all the “other duties as assigned” that accompanied that goal. They also conducted research and planned strategies in order to circumvent potential student problems. Because of these factors, they experienced fewer surprises and conflicts during the *encounter* stage than the other teachers.

Leavers: Idealistic Thinking

In contrast to the practical perceptions of teaching demonstrated by *stayers*, *leavers* described idealistic prior perceptions about teaching. They said they had not thought at length about the “work” of teaching, such as grading or planning. When asked what they expected teaching to be like, the *leavers* were more apt to describe the relationships they hoped to form with students rather than the mechanics of teaching.

The *leavers* viewed teaching as noble, and they said they wanted their students to succeed. They said they felt they would be able to “help kids,” “build relationships with

students,” and “find out how to help failing schools.” However, they admitted they had developed few specific expectations about the work itself, such as lesson planning, grading, extracurricular activities, or materials preparation. This was a marked difference between the *stayers* and the *leavers*.

The *leavers* were idealistic about teaching in other ways as well. In keeping with research about common misconceptions among novice teachers, the *leavers* perceived teaching as a transmissive act (Torff, 2003; Wilke & Losh, 2008). They envisioned themselves lecturing or presenting. They expected to “deliver” instruction, and they anticipated that their students would be attentive and would see them as the expert in the classroom. This, they felt, would allow them to guide students and relate to them.

The desire among the *leavers* to build relationships with students may have led to problems. Research about management styles indicates that beginners who do not understand the teacher/student relationship are often unable to establish an appropriate “social distance” from students (Brock & Grady, 2007). Their desire to be liked interferes with the ability to establish control of their classrooms (Brock & Grady, 2007).

The idealistic expectations held by the *leavers* were problematic, based on Louis’s (1980) theories. In many ways, the *leavers* exhibited inaccurate or inadequate views of what teaching really involves. Inaccurate or inadequate beliefs are sources of conflict that lead to frustration during the *encounter* stage (Louis, 1980).

The *leavers* in the study said that within the first few days of school, they began to realize that their perceptions of teaching were inaccurate. They had anticipated

students eager to learn. Instead, they found students who were difficult to motivate.

Helena's experience was typical of the *leavers*:

At the beginning of school, I was like 'I don't want to do this anymore,' and I was very disappointed that the kids didn't want to learn. You know, in the beginning, I had a vision of how it would be. I wanted to work where the kids are excited to learn and they want to learn and they ask questions.

Like the other *leavers*, Helena found that she was unable to establish the kind of relationships with students she had envisioned:

The kids here are very disrespectful. They think you are always out to get them or that you are racist. They don't want to establish no relationship with you, you know. They don't trust you.

The idealistic and transmissive ways of thinking exhibited by the *leavers* seem even more significant when viewed against characteristics of "expert" teachers identified by Artiles (1996). In a meta-analysis of studies about the thinking processes of expert teachers, Artiles (1996) found that expert teachers spend time thinking about the "work systems" of the typical classroom, including lesson planning, instructional delivery, assessment, student interaction, management and organization. Among the participants in this study, *stayers* exhibited this kind of thinking, while *leavers* did not.

The *leavers'* assumptions about what they would experience as teachers were inaccurate. Louis (1980) says that when expectations are erroneous or inadequate, job satisfaction is negatively impacted. By the end of the school year, each of the *leavers* was unhappy with teaching and was considering leaving the profession.

Subtheme B: Perceptions of Being Prepared

The *stayers* came into teaching with highly practical perceptions about what they would experience. The *leavers* were more idealistic. In all cases, a number of

influences shaped their perceptions of themselves as educators. The primary influences they identified included teacher preparation programs, prior career experiences, and input from teachers in the field.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Most teachers develop perceptions about teaching during their educator preparation programs. Among the teachers in the study, six completed traditional university-based programs. The other six received their training through an alternative certification program (see Table 3). Each approach (university-based and alternative) was represented among both *stayers* and *leavers*. Regardless of the program type, the *stayers* were more likely than *leavers* to describe their preparation programs as highly representative of the actual teaching experience. The *leavers* regarded their preparation programs as “far-removed” from what they actually encountered as teachers.

Stayers. Several *stayers* described field experiences such as classroom observations and student teaching as the most beneficial aspects of their educator preparation programs. Typical of the *stayers*, Brad reported student teaching as a source of highly practical information:

Student teaching here helped me so much – in a lot of ways. I would say it helped logistically in dealing with grading and papers and the business stuff – all the technical stuff you have to do. But it also helped me know how to deal with the kids at this school. It helped me know the ropes and deal with certain situations that arose in the classroom. They just can’t teach you that in college, because it’s too individual.

I think the reason I knew so much of the practical stuff was that I had been at this school as a student teacher. Some of the other new teachers here on campus – that’s something they want addressed. They feel like they weren’t prepared for the kinds of situations here – or grading, how to submit grades, etc.

Since Louis (1980) draws a strong correlation between accurate expectations and job satisfaction, this suggests the possibility that placing student teachers in the schools where they are most likely to be hired might increase retention. Among the teachers in the study who completed traditional university-based programs, all had requested to stay at the campuses where they completed student teaching.

Leavers. In contrast to the *stayers*, the *leavers* were critical of how their preparation programs were designed and delivered. Colleen was representative of the teachers in this group. She felt her field experience as an intern in an alternative certification program was ineffective, because the focus was on the state assessment, and the classes she observed were very different from the school to which she was assigned. The image of teaching she generated from her teacher education program was not an accurate picture of what she experienced later:

My training was in the summer. We started in June with the training. It was mostly about how the state assessment system worked, and then they trained us on how to write lesson plans for the district. It was beneficial in that one way, because we knew exactly what the district wanted in terms of planning. But as far as knowing how to handle discipline or how to manage problems in your classroom – no. They sent us out for two weeks to observe in the summer school. Okay, a one to twelve ratio? It was totally unrealistic – not realistic to what I ended up doing. Not at all!

She said she was not been prepared for large classes, students with ADHD, students with emotional or behavioral problems, or rampant apathy – all aspects of teaching that were omitted from her teacher education program. Like other *leavers*, she felt that more opportunities to observe master teachers in classrooms with diverse student populations would have given her the strategies she needed to handle her actual assignment.

Similarly, Iris felt her teacher preparation had not provided her with an accurate image of teaching. She completed a traditional program, which she described as adequate. However, because of a teacher shortage, she was allowed to begin teaching on an emergency certificate prior to student teaching. Because she did not have a field experience, she said that there was no exposure to the “real world” of the classroom in her teacher education program:

I wish now that I had gotten some classroom experience before being thrown in here, but that wasn't the focus. I mean, I got the pedagogy. That was included. But I just needed the classroom practice to go with it. You can't learn to do something without practice.

In a situation like the one Iris experienced, it is difficult to say if the frustrations she encountered as a teacher would have been alleviated by more extensive field experiences. However, the data suggest that both university-based teacher preparation programs and alternative certification programs must do more than direct newcomers in how to create lesson plans or how to use curriculum guides. These programs must be geared toward helping teachers develop realistic images of teaching, including dealing with culturally diverse students, at risk learners, and classroom discipline. The experiences of the teachers in the study reinforce the importance of authentic field experiences and student teaching that provide opportunities to observe “real world” classroom experiences, not model classrooms.

Prior Career Experiences

In addition to the field experience associated with teacher preparation, some of the teachers in the study based their prior perceptions about teaching on experiences in other careers. Especially in terms of time management and organization, these

experiences were very valuable for the teachers in the study. Three of the six *stayers* had experience in other fields prior to entering the teaching profession. These included Jerome, Fran, and Lester. Each felt these prior experiences helped them develop realistic expectations about how to organize information clearly and about how to manage student behavior.

In contrast to the stayers, none of the *leavers* came into teaching from previous careers. Several had held part-time jobs, and one had been in the military until an injury forced her to resign. However, none had the kinds of career experiences exhibited by the *stayers*. At least for the participants in this study, prior career experience seemed to have a positive correlation to the abilities to work collaboratively and to use time effectively, characteristics exhibited by the *stayers*.

Stayers. The fact that half of the *stayers* had prior experiences involving training or planning for group activities might suggest second career teachers (at least those with administrative level experience) are more satisfied with teaching than those entering teaching immediately out of college. This seems to support Johnson's (2004) findings that second-career teachers often have more insight into the way organizations work as well as parental experience that aids in understanding children's development, a clear advantage over teachers just out of college. Therefore, they might be better equipped for many of teaching's demands.

For example, Jerome (the only participant over the age of 50) came into teaching after a career in business. Although he did not realize it at the time, he says he enjoyed

doing “teacher-related” activities in his role as a business administrator, such as designing and delivering training for his staff and researching new technologies:

In my previous job, when we had certain in-house training, you know, I was always one of the ones who would volunteer to do the training or facilitate the courses or whatever. So I guess I was heading in the direction of teaching and didn't even realize it.

While he said this had not helped to prepare him for all aspects of teaching, he felt the experience helped him develop realistic expectations about the time involved in planning and delivering instruction. For example, he knew it took many hours to plan a one-day workshop for his employees, so he anticipated that it would take many hours to research a topic and plan activities for a unit of instruction. This was a significant factor, because several of the *leavers* indicated they had not anticipated the time commitment they encountered as teachers.

Similarly, Lester cited both experience in business and experience as a scout leader as helpful in formulating an image of himself as a teacher. Scouting helped him know what to expect in terms of student discipline, motivation, and hands-on teaching strategies. During his career in advertising and public relations, he was a member of a training team. He felt that assisted him in knowing what it would be like to plan classroom activities that were collaborative in nature:

In the job I came out of, collaboration was the key word that made us successful. I worked on a team. We wrote grants together, designed ads together, did surveys together. We did everything together. I carried that approach with me into teaching.

Like Lester, Fran came into teaching after working in public relations. She said she was used to spending time on the weekends preparing for presentations in her

previous career. She said it never occurred to her that she would not have to work on the weekends as a teacher.

One study examining the characteristics of teachers entering the field after careers in other areas suggests that second-career teachers have higher levels of mission, commitment, organization, and problem-solving ability than first-career teachers (Tigchelaar, Brouwer, & Korthagen, 2008). Whether these characteristics lead to higher retention levels is an area that might bear further study.

The three *stayers* with prior career experiences were also among the oldest teachers in the study, so age may have been a factor in how they developed images of teaching. Of the three groups, the *stayers* had a mean age of 34, while those in the *undecided* group and the *leaver* group had mean ages of 31 and 26 respectively. This might indicate maturity as a factor in job satisfaction, and this seems to be supported by the fact that the typical teacher-leaver is under 30 years of age (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). However, the number of participants in this study is not significant enough for a conclusion in this area.

Input from other teachers

Educator preparation programs and prior career experiences shaped the perceptions of teaching held by many of the teachers in the study. However, several also relied on input from teachers in the field for ideas about what to expect.

Stayers. In addition to teacher preparation programs and prior career experiences, several *stayers* formed perceptions of teaching based on observing teachers and talking with them. Delia's experience was typical of the stayers:

I have several aunts who are teachers. They would tell stories about their kids, and I would see them take home papers to grade and other work to do in the evening, so before I got here, I knew what the job entailed.

Two of the *stayers* said they knew what to expect because their parents had been teachers. Others sought out family friends or relatives who had teaching experience, and in each case, they felt the information shared by veteran teachers had been invaluable in helping them formulate an image of themselves as teachers. This gesture of reaching out to other teachers for assistance may have seemed insignificant to the teachers in the study prior to teaching, but it was a step toward a needed alliance that would become more and more evident later on.

Theme 2 – Encounter:

Conflicts, Surprises and Sensemaking

During the *encounter* stage, the feeling of surprise or confusion that comes with unexpected experiences is followed by an attempt to find the reason for the conflict (Louis, 1980). Once a reason has been identified, the individual forms new expectations and may change his behavior in hopes of eliminating the conflict or dissonance he is experiencing (see Figure 1). This is the process of sensemaking (Louis, 1980).

The teachers in the study entered the profession with images of themselves as teachers. For some, these images were practical in nature. For others, they were more idealistic. Once in their classrooms, they began to discover conflicts between the preconceived images and what they actually experienced. This aligns with what happens to most newcomers during the *encounter* stage (Louis, 1980).

All of the teachers in the study experienced conflicts between their preconceived images and actual experience. However, two subthemes were evident in how they responded to these conflicts during the *encounter* stage. First, they exhibited differences in how they justified, explained, or made sense of the conflicts (Subtheme A). Second, they differed in their reliance on peers (mentors and other established members of the existing school culture) in adjusting to the conflicts (Subtheme B).

Subtheme A: Responses to Conflicts in the Encounter Stage

While the individuals in the study had many unique experiences, they identified several common sources of conflict during the *encounter* stage. Chief among these were (1) how they made sense of organizational systems, including administrator support and resources; and (2) how they made sense of student factors, including discipline and academic achievement. This section examines the differences between the *stayers* and *leavers* in each of these areas.

Making Sense of Organizational Systems

In the process of socialization, the communication, leadership, and resources made available to the newcomer are essential in facilitating adaptation into the new culture (Weick, 1995). Among the teachers in the study, the conflicts encountered regarding organizational support fell primarily into two categories, (a) administrative support and (b) resources.

Sensemaking about administrative support. Lack of support from administrators is one of the primary organizational factors impacting new teacher attrition (Behrstock & Clifford, 2009; Certo & Fox, 2002). Across all groups in this study, the teachers

identified lack of administrative support as a significant source of conflict during the *encounter* stage. While each group described similar experiences with administrators, the *stayers* explained or justified the behaviors of administrators in ways that were different from the *leavers*.

Stayers. Most *stayers* described administrators as personable, dedicated, and willing to listen. This was in keeping with their preconceived expectations about what they would find in the way of administrative support. However, they also described administrators as “very busy” and sometimes inaccessible. Typical of the *stayers*, Ellen described her interaction with administrators in this way:

They do their best to help us if they can, but they are stretched pretty thin. They are always willing to listen and willing to talk – that type of thing. [The principal’s] door is usually open unless he has a meeting and you need more than five minutes of his time. But he is so busy that I usually try to get with my unit chair instead of the administrator if I need assistance.

In one area, however, the *stayers* found a significant difference between their prior expectations and what they actually encountered. Contrary to what they expected, they found that administrators were not supportive of teachers in enforcing school rules and assigning consequences. They felt they were on their own in dealing with all but the most severe behaviors, because it was apparent that students did not view administrative referrals seriously. This statement from Jerome typifies the experiences of the *stayers*:

First semester, I stopped writing referrals. Why bother? Because they – you know, you write a referral and the kid comes in the next day and he is laughing. He says, ‘I could care less about a referral.’ And you put that in another referral, and it still won’t make a difference, because there is no consequence. So I mean, I learned to deal with the behavior stuff. The practical reality for me is that I am just not going to take the time to write referrals. I mean, you try to do a decent job so that for whoever is reading it, it is well-documented and he

understands what occurred in the classroom, and you have reasons and causes. You go through all that, and nothing occurs. It doesn't take long for teachers to say, 'I'm not bothering with referrals.' That's for sure.

In response to what they encountered in their interactions with administrators, *stayers* looked for reasons or causes that might explain or make sense of the lack of support provided. They began to observe the variety of responsibilities assigned to administrators and they noted the roles administrators played within the structure of the school. They concluded that administrators were caught in difficult situations themselves, with heavy workloads, inadequate budgets, small staffs, and large student populations.

The *stayers* described administrators as pulled in many directions and overloaded with district responsibilities, including meetings with parents, finances, long-range planning, teacher shortages, meetings, publicity, and accountability procedures. They admitted that a greater amount of support with discipline would be better, but they rationalized that administrators “do the best they can” and “are extremely busy.”

Based on this analysis, the *stayers* said they learned ways to deal with behavior problems independently instead of relying on administrators. They accomplished this partly through their own system of consequences, such as after-school detention or parent conferences. They also formed alliances with other teachers for their own “detention” systems, and they worked hard at establishing systems of rewards and consequences that led to more cooperative classrooms. This, in turn, diminished their need for administrative support in terms of student discipline.

Leavers. The *leavers* began their careers with more idealistic views about teaching than the *stayers*. When asked what they found difficult about teaching, they described a higher level of frustration in the area of administrative support. Their frustrations centered on four specific areas.

First, *leavers* felt that administrators were often out of compliance in the ways they implemented school procedures and policies. They cited instances where information provided by the district (teacher handbooks, new teacher orientation meetings) was not representative of what actually occurred at the school level. For example, Katrina said the district handbook explicitly stated that students who were involved in fights would be suspended. She said student fights occurred regularly at her school, and the students were almost always back in class before the end of the day.

Despite non-discrimination policies printed in handbooks and on the district websites, *leavers* said the administrators had “pets” among students, allowing some to get away with more than others. They felt that for some students, administrators looked the other way or took the student’s side in a conflict with a teacher. One *leaver* said her principal, an African American, showed favoritism toward African American students, and she felt he had given her “tough” duty assignments because she was Hispanic.

In addition, *leavers* believed administrators showed favoritism (including preferential treatment based on ethnicity) in the distribution of funds or materials.

Glenn’s statement is typical of the *leavers*:

Certainly it seems that there were teachers who were given opportunities that other teachers were not. Say we have a new – whatever – new manipulatives. They would completely go to one teacher and not another, without really an

explanation. I guess it was kind of playing favorites. But there was nothing I could do about it.

Second, the *leavers* felt administrators communicated poorly in terms of expectations for teachers. They believed administrators wanted them to be more successful as teachers, but they were not certain whether that meant higher student achievement on state assessments, fewer discipline referrals, limited complaints from parents, or a combination of factors. They had been informed in faculty meetings or through faculty bulletins that they should maintain better control of student behavior, but the teachers did not feel they had administrative support for office referrals and they had not been given any alternative suggestions for controlling behavior. To some, it seemed that the expectations for student achievement or discipline changed frequently without notice to the teachers. Like Adele, they found this frustrating:

What do they expect? That's a good question. You think you know, but then you just read it in the paper or something. Every time I find out something, it's because I read it in the paper. They change things on you so much, that once you get set doing something, they want something different the next semester. So I can't actually even answer that question. What do they expect? I guess they expect us to teach. When I came here, they told me that they expected us to keep suspensions down – deal with discipline, but keep suspensions down. That's kind of hard when you have the same kid disrupting every day.

The *leavers* knew their administrators expected them to raise student scores on the state assessment, but they were never quite certain how student scores would be used in teacher evaluations. Glenn's frustration was typical among the *leavers*:

Two years later, and I'm still not sure. The standards were never laid out. No one ever said, 'Hey, you will have been successful when you get this number of students or this percent of your students passing.' So I guess the round-about answer is, 'What expectations?'

They felt they were not given enough guidance about how to interpret or implement the district curriculum. None felt they had a good understanding of what was expected in terms of planning and instruction. Like other *leavers*, Katrina felt frustrated:

It was like – shut your door and do whatever you want. No one is going to check on you. No one is going to help. You're just flying by the seat of your pants. It's sink or swim. That's all it is. You are on your own in this building, so good luck.

A third problem identified by *leavers* involved the attitude of administrators toward teachers. They said administrators were oppositional and judgmental, rather than demonstrating a willingness to help. Like other *leavers*, Helena said she had little interaction with administrators other than negative feedback:

I don't feel any support, and my administrators? They never come into my classroom. I think since the beginning of the year, they came in like three times. They did an evaluation, and the criticism wasn't good. I said, 'Okay, like you are saying that I didn't do this well. Teach me how to do it!' Because even though I am a teacher, that doesn't mean I know everything. After that, they never came again. I don't feel like if I have a problem, I can go to the administrators about it. I feel like they are going to say, 'It's your fault.'

At times, the *leavers* felt administrators were looking for ways to criticize them. For example, Katrina described a memo she received from her principal “dictating” that she be more visible in the hallway. She explained why she felt this was unreasonable:

They threw markers at me on the first day in the hall. Getting pegged with markers in the head is not fun. So then I just stood next to the wall, but I was reprimanded by the assistant principal. She said, 'You have to stand in the middle of the hall.' And I asked, 'Even when they throw things at me?' She said yes. Then I got this memo from the principal demanding that I stand in the hallways. There is a disconnect between the teachers and the administration.

The fourth problem area associated with administrators involved student discipline. Like the *stayers*, the *leavers* perceived a lack of administrative support in

terms of student behavior. They felt consequences were not enforced consistently – and sometimes not enforced at all. The *leavers* said administrators often took the student’s side in conflicts with teachers, and students had no fear of being sent to the office.

Colleen’s description of the situation in her school was typical of the *leavers*:

It’s terrible. Just terrible. If you ask anybody on this floor about the support with discipline, they will tell you it is horrible. We just got no support this year. There was one student who [cussed out] the teacher across the hall, and she wrote him up and sent him to the administrator. He was sent right back to class. It makes it so frustrating, because you are trying to teach, and you have kids cussing. How do you handle this as a new teacher? You try everything, and like nothing is working. You ask the veteran teachers, and the same thing is going on. We need an administrator to support us, and we need consequences. But there aren’t any.

In response to what they encountered in their interactions with administrators, *leavers* looked for reasons or causes that might explain the lack of support they received. However, they were at a loss to explain why administrators were “unwilling” to support them. Rather than viewing administrative behavior as the result of circumstances, as the *stayers* had done, the *leavers* attributed the conflicts they experienced to character flaws (such as bias or lack of motivation) exhibited by administrators.

Some *leavers* felt their administrators were not knowledgeable in management skills. For example, Glenn said he felt his administrator was “poorly trained” in how to drive and motivate teachers to be engaged in educating students. Another *leaver*, Katrina, labeled her current administrator as “useless,” always siding with students and parents, rather than with teachers. Similarly, Iris felt the administrators in her school were “politically motivated,” rather than interested in the welfare of students:

They are stuck up each other's butts so far that, you know – they think you should suck up to them. But no amount of sucking up is going to do it for you if you are not in the 'in' group. You have to tread lightly.

Leavers felt administrators could provide more support but were unwilling to do so. They felt it was a choice, not a circumstance determined by external factors such as large student populations or limited district funding. Because they felt administrators were choosing to be non-supportive, *leavers* exhibited a kind of determination to “force” administrators to support them.

For example, all *leavers* said they were not supported by administrators when they sent students to the office. However, throughout the year they continued to write referrals and then to complain that nothing was done. Colleen exhibited a typical attitude among *leavers*:

I mean, given the way things are here, what can I do? I'm just one teacher. I just send them out and hope for the best.

In contrast to the *stayers*, the *leavers* did not believe that a change in their own behaviors would offset the problems caused by the lack of administrative support. They seemed to have a lack of trust in their administrators that was not evident among *stayers*. The National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005) identifies confidence in the principal and other administrators as one of the most important elements in a teacher's decisions about teaching. Since urban schools have greater difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers, it would seem very significant that the *leavers* in this study viewed administrators as intentionally unsupportive.

Sensemaking about resources. Inadequate facilities, poor equipment, and insufficient supplies appeared to be significant factors in job dissatisfaction among new

teachers (Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005). A second difference evident among the teachers in the study involved the way they reacted to and made sense of limited resources for classroom instruction. All the teachers in the study reported a lack of resources as a significant source of surprise and conflict. They were frustrated by inadequate supplies, insufficient numbers of textbooks and curriculum guides, technology in need of repair, and a need for support personnel/aides. However, the *stayers* made sense of and dealt with the conflict in ways that were different from the *leavers*.

Stayers. The *stayers* were surprised by the lack of available classroom resources. They found inadequate technology, a shortage of classroom aides, and limited supplemental materials/manipulatives to be especially frustrating. As pre-service teachers, the *stayers* imagined themselves facilitating webquests, engaging students in virtual field trips, and linking students in their classrooms with students in other cities, states, and countries.

While two of the *stayers* had recently received upgraded equipment and were happy with the number of computers in their classrooms, most *stayers* were not satisfied with the availability of computer access for their students. Like other *stayers*, Jerome found that much of the equipment in the school was not functioning properly. He explained that of the three computers in his classroom, only one had worked for the entire year, making it impossible for his students to conduct research or be “motivated” by opportunities to work with technology:

*We have had three computers in here all year, but only one works. All year!
And the kids have found ways to occupy themselves back there, peeling the letters*

off, and whatever. But, you know, if you only have six or seven computers in a room, you can't really use them anyway.

In addition to inadequate technology, the *stayers* alluded to losing instructional aides due to budget cuts. For some, this made it more difficult to provide individualized or small group instruction for struggling learners. For others, it meant a change in how often they would be able to offer group activities. For example, Ellen said she had recently learned she was losing the aide in her science lab. This meant she would have to come in much earlier in order to set up the equipment and supplies for her labs.

Also, supplemental materials such as graphing calculators, measurement devices, or science lab supplies were limited. Many of the resources listed in the district curriculum guides were not available at the individual school level, making it impossible to follow the plans as they were written. Even textbooks were in short supply for some content areas and grade levels.

In response to what they encountered in terms of limited resources, *stayers* looked for reasons or causes that might explain the lack of materials and technology. As they tried to “make sense” of what they experienced, they thought about the economic circumstances that controlled the availability of resources in schools, such as a limited tax base due to diminishing property values, federal funding tied to student achievement, and few grant opportunities. In turn, they concluded that the school administrators were doing the best they could, given the circumstances. As explained by Jerome, resources like computers would be of benefit to students, but they were simply not available:

Let's face it. These kids are into the fifteen second sound byte, because of technology, so that would be such a great way to engage them – by using technology. But the district just can't afford it, I guess.

Resigned to a new understanding that the availability of resources was not likely to change, the *stayers* then began to think about how to deal with the problem on their own. They approached the problem in a variety of ways, including having computers repaired and purchasing needed supplies, all out of their own pockets. This means they relied on their own resources rather than continuing to expect the school to provide them.

Leavers. Like the *stayers*, the *leavers* were surprised by the lack of resources in their classrooms. Problematic for them were the need to share books, limits on paper consumption, and perceptions that materials were not distributed fairly. However, the main issue they faced was the inadequate technology available to teachers and students. They felt instruction would be much improved if they had access to computers, projectors, and calculators, especially given the learning style of today's learner. They felt instructional opportunities were hampered by shortages in this area. The leavers viewed the lack of resources as specific to their own school. There appeared to be some jealousy about the "rich schools" where supplies were adequate.

In addition, they found the supply of books and paper extremely limited, and they were surprised by a kind of "unwritten expectation" that teachers would provide them. Colleen said that in her school, administrators were "unwilling to provide funds" for books and supplies, instead expecting teachers to "come up with our own money" for things.

At other times, teachers were expected to share materials. Helena's frustration over book shortages was typical of the *leavers*:

We have these curriculum guides, and we would check before teaching a unit to see if we had the books required. Most of the time, we didn't. If we did, the other teacher and I had to share, so we were running back and forth between classrooms with the books. So for a while, we made copies of the books. But then the paper ran out. I heard we weren't supposed to run so many copies. How am I supposed to teach without the books?

Faced with shortages of books, materials, and technology, the *leavers* were unable to make sense of or understand why the district did not provide the resources they needed. They were noticeably resentful at the suggestion of spending their own money for supplies. While they recognized that instruction would be more effective if they had better resources, they felt this was a situation the district should address. They described the situation as out of their control, and they believed the school was responsible for the failure in their classrooms if enough supplies were not provided.

Both the *stayers* and the *leavers* in this study felt they did not have adequate supplies and materials. When asked what they did when needed books or supplies were not available, *leavers* responded that they were able to “make do” with what they had. They felt they could do nothing other than wait for the district to change.

A significant difference, however, is that the *stayers* perceived this as a result of economics and practicality. They did not expect things to change, unless they took the initiative themselves. On the other hand, the *leavers* viewed the lack of resources as an issue that should be addressed in the future at the district level. They felt it was an unjust situation, and they expected things to change at some point.

This difference is significant, because new members of a culture are more apt to change their own behavior if they attribute the surprises in their new environment to stable causes rather than temporary or unstable causes (Louis, 1980). In this study, the

stayers responded to the lack of resources by changing their behaviors and exercising control over the situation. The *leavers* did not. When people “exercise control” over their environment, they feel a greater sense of efficacy and are more apt to persevere (Bandura, 1988).

Making Sense of Student Concerns

Just as organizational concerns were problematic, a second source of surprise and conflict among the teachers in the study involved student concerns. The conflicts they encountered regarding students fell primarily into two categories, (a) student discipline and (b) academic achievement.

Sensemaking about student discipline. Student “misbehavior, disrespect, and disengagement” are regular occurrences that cause teachers to consider leaving the profession (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005, p. 5). Also common in schools are bullying, harassment, physical threat and violence (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). Seventy-one percent of the secondary teachers in the United States witnessed at least one violent incident in 2004 (Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005). The teachers in this study were typical in that they viewed student discipline as particularly frustrating. Problems they identified included defiance or non-compliance, off-task behavior, and lack of respect for the teacher. Also frustrating for them were loud or vulgar language, destruction of supplies or property, and violence. The difference between *stayers* and *leavers* was in the way they explained or rationalized the behavior of students.

Stayers. Despite the fact that they had expected to deal with discipline, all of the *stayers* said they were surprised by the severity of student behaviors they observed during the *encounter* stage. They were surprised by fighting among students, running in the hallways, loud and abusive language toward teachers and other students, and offtask or disruptive behavior in the classroom. Typical of the *stayers*, Jerome said discipline is extremely difficult to deal with:

I think it can be a rude awakening. I mean, you may think you know what it is like to teach at the high school level, but you just wait until you get into that classroom. It's so hard. You've got all of these behavior problems that you didn't even envision, and they are serious problems that can escalate out of control real quick. And the kids know when they can take advantage of weakness. They worked me to the max. Some people are just not prepared for dealing with these kinds of problems every day.

In the beginning, the *stayers* said they relied primarily on administrative referrals to deal with student discipline. However, they discovered that this was often ineffective in changing the behaviors they found problematic. Faced with recurring problems, they began to spend time thinking about why students behaved the way they did.

In this effort to make sense of student behaviors, the *stayers* talked to other teachers, and they tried to observe what was working in other classrooms. In some cases, they asked for advice from their mentors. In addition, the *stayers* looked for patterns in the way students behaved. For example, both Lester and Ellen said they realized that students were more apt to cause problems at the end of class when they had finished their work. They took this as evidence that boredom was one cause for behavior problems in their classrooms. They also thought about which behaviors were

truly problematic, saying they learned to “let go” of small issues such as talking or “popping off.”

Instead, the *stayers* said they discovered the importance of “choosing your battles” when it really mattered. Brad summarized the attitude of the *stayers* in this way:

I put up with a lot. There are certain teachers here that will put up with more than others, but if you get down for every single thing, you are never going to get anything done, and you are going to be writing kids up all day. You have to let some things go.

The *stayers* were reflective about teaching, examining their own attitudes and behaviors. Like other *stayers*, Jerome said he found that his own reactions to problem behaviors could cause them to escalate or to de-escalate.

I have found it so valuable to think about my day, from a number of different perspectives. What did I do that maybe wasn't totally honest, so it was really not the kid's fault? Maybe it was my fault that we got into this tug of war. And maybe I was wrong. So, you know, what do you do about it? The next day you go back and apologize. You grab the kid and say, 'I overreacted yesterday, and I just wanted you to know I'm sorry.' I have done that. I think you have to be willing to do that. It makes all the difference in the world.

Stayers said they felt many student discipline problems were caused by teachers who failed to listen or build positive relationships with students. To them, it seemed that when students felt their teachers cared about them, they were less apt to be disruptive in class. Examining their own behaviors also validated for some *stayers* the relationship between effective teaching and student behavior. They felt it was more important to teach effectively than to manage students. One *stayer* stated that when teachers spend too much time disciplining students, there is simply no time left to teach.

What they discovered, however, was that when they utilized research-based practices like cooperative learning and constructivist approaches, student discipline

improved. They interpreted this as an indication that student discipline problems were often the result of poor teaching practices. Based on this conclusion, they began to look for ways to prevent or redirect off-task or disruptive behavior rather than to “correct” it, a sign they were moving into what Louis (1980) calls the *adaptation* stage.

Leavers. Like the *stayers*, the *leavers* said student discipline was a significant source of surprise and conflict for them during the *encounter* stage. Some of the behaviors they described as problematic were similar to those described by *stayers*. These included students who were defiant, off-task, or disrespectful.

However, the *leavers* also exhibited a high level of concern about student violence. This was not an area of concern addressed by *stayers*, despite the fact that at least one *stayer* taught at each of the *leaver's* schools. The *leavers* appeared to be highly surprised by student violence. The *stayers* did not, possibly because they had spent a good deal more time than *leavers* in talking with teachers in the field prior to beginning their careers.

When asked if they were ever afraid of students, *stayers* typically replied that certainly there was violent behavior exhibited by students at their schools, including fighting, verbal abuse toward teachers and other students, vandalism of school property, bringing weapons to school, and running or jumping in the hallways. However, the *stayers* said most of their students treated teachers respectfully if they were given respect themselves. *Leavers* were at times afraid of their students, describing them as violent, verbally abusive, and unconcerned about any consequences they might face. Katrina's description of her fears was typical among the *leavers*:

They run through the halls and get in fights all the time. It was a real culture shock for me. I mean, I'm sure there were fights in the schools I attended, but I never saw them because I was in class where I belonged. The students here are horrible. And I had no perception about gangs. They tell me about their drive-bys and stuff like that. One of my kids came this week and said, 'Yeah, I got shot this weekend.' On a Sunday morning at 10:00 a.m.? It's scary here.

Katrina said she was also surprised by the amount of gang activity she encountered. In addition, she found that when students were involved in altercations in the community at night, they often brought their battles into the classroom the next day as well. She said she often felt unsafe, even in her classroom.

Similarly, other *leavers* admitted that they sometimes felt afraid of students. They described witnessing incidents where teachers were threatened or attacked, although none reported being a victim of student aggression or violence themselves. One *leaver* said that a teacher in her school had been hit so hard last year that his eardrum had burst, and another said she was told a teacher had been physically attacked by students after school because “they said he was gay.” In other words, *leavers* perceived their schools as “dangerous,” a characteristic of many at-risk schools (National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools, 2005).

In addition to describing violent student behavior as problematic, the *leavers* also reported that their students often spoke to them in ways that were disrespectful or inappropriate. Katrina’s surprise at her students’ openly sexual conversations was typical of the *leavers*:

I was totally shocked by their language. They asked me what kind of condoms I use, and I was shocked they would say something like that. Today, one of them said he dreamed about me being naked with him. I didn't know how to respond. I just said, 'We are doing this work. We are not going to talk about things like that.'

Based on their experiences with violent behavior and other factors, the *leavers* used words like “terrible” and “awful” to describe their students, and they felt the students were clearly out of control much of the time. A statement from Iris is typical of the *leavers*:

The kids are horrible. Certain kids get away with pretty much murder in here, because they are little ‘principal favorites.’ You know, they can do no wrong. These kids are so disrespectful. These kids have no fear of any kind of consequences. They are cussing out teachers. Alternative is not a threat to them. They just don’t care.

The incompatibility with students exhibited by Iris was echoed by other *leavers*. Helena said she felt her frustrations about student discipline were typical of new teachers at her school, including some who left rather than continue to battle problem behavior:

I mean, a lot of teachers in this school have quit. At the beginning of the school year, they just quit. They just walked out of the classroom, because it was just too hard to teach these kids. Even if you are a good teacher and you have good discipline, they just take over you. It’s so hard to work with them.

When asked if they had considered *why* students misbehave, the *leavers* exhibited a pattern quite different from the *stayers*. Rather than identifying causes related to instructional practices, classroom organization, or teacher behaviors, the *leavers* demonstrated a tendency to describe the character of the students themselves in negative ways (disrespectful, awful, horrible). Their attitudes seemed connected to cultural assumptions about ethnicity. Two of the *leavers* were white teachers and one was Hispanic. All three were teaching in schools with predominantly African American student populations. They viewed student behaviors as indicative of student character, as exhibited in this statement from Iris:

The students are so bad. If we could enforce everything we want, we would have maybe 100 kids left in school. The rest would be gone. Why are we forcing these kids to be in class? If they don't want to work, they don't want to work. You know, kicking and screaming and fighting is not working. Let them go drop out at 17 and be a garbage man, and let them see how they like it – what kind of life they can make for themselves.

The attitude of the *leavers* toward their students is significant, because they appear to view discipline as indicative of the character of the students with whom they work, thus impacting their expectations for students to succeed. This fits a pattern of racial bias identified by Ladson-Billings (2006), who says that when teachers fail to understand the cultural contexts of their students and are confronted with what they view as non-compliant behaviors, they begin to label the students as “at-risk, behavior problems, savages – and those constructions become self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 31).

Sensemaking about academic achievement. All of the teachers in the study alluded to academic failure among students as another highly frustrating surprise in the new environment. They often felt inadequate to address such severe discrepancies between ability and performance, and they worried about the impact they were having on student achievement.

Stayers. Most *stayers* said they had been shown how to access state achievement data as part of their teacher training programs. However, most had not spent a great deal of time reviewing the scores. Even when they did, the scores on paper did not prepare them for the severity of reading and writing deficiency among their students. Brad put it this way:

It's one thing to say your students are performing in the 40th percentile in language arts. It's another thing when you are working with a kid – a high

school kid - and you realize he can't read the book or write a complete sentence. You just wonder what you can do, you know, when it's that low.

Similarly, Lester said he was devastated when he realized the enormity of the academic challenges facing his students:

The scores will tell you. I mean, they are not proficient. About half are considered passable, according to the state standards, which are pretty low. About half of them are below basic skills. That means they are not reading competently or proficiently, and they are not able to do even basic mathematics. I was totally shocked by their scores. The hardest part of teaching is watching kids fail, almost certainly – and not being able to figure out how to help them save themselves. It is enormously draining, spiritually damaging. It's horrible. It will break your heart. That's the worst part, and you carry it home with you.

In addition to their frustration about achievement, the *stayers* said they had not considered how difficult it would be to motivate students who had experienced academic failure throughout their years of schooling. They said that in the beginning, they were frustrated when they planned what they felt was “good” instruction, and students put their heads down on their desks and slept or when students refused to participate in group activities. The apathy surprised and frustrated them. They encountered many students whose negative experiences with school had left them reluctant to take risks by participating in a group, interacting with the teacher, or responding to questions in class. This statement from Brad is typical of the *stayers*:

I think, in looking back, that the things that surprised me most were the students I wanted so much to reach but couldn't – not so much because of behavior but because they had already dropped out socially and emotionally even if they hadn't dropped out physically. I keep trying to find the right thing - I guess all teachers do that – and then I go home and agonize over it, saying 'Gee, if I could only do something!' They just stick with you, those faces.

Realizing the discrepancy between where their students should be and where they were, and given the apathy they saw among students, the *stayers* began to look for

reasons or causes to explain the lack of student interest or effort. They tried to make sense of and understand why their students struggled academically.

They were perplexed in the beginning at how few students completed or submitted homework, and they were surprised by how few parents attended school events or communicated with teachers about their children. In their own experiences, parental support and homework were “linked” to academic success. However, in reflecting about the poverty surrounding their schools (a factor they felt they could not change), they justified the lack of parental support as a result of circumstances.

The following statements from Lester and Jerome represent the attitudes about parental support and homework exhibited by *stayers*:

The students don't have a home environment that is conducive to learning, because the parents are in survival mode. They are working their tails off just to keep food on the table and the light bill paid. You know, if you asked any one of them if they value education, of course they would say yes. But they don't have the time or the resources to implement what needs to be done.

They don't do homework, through no fault of their own. I mean, these are children who have, by necessity, after-school jobs or they are taking care of siblings or they have parents who are gone or working. So it's not a reality for them to be able to do those kinds of things. I mean, nothing hurts me more than to see a kid in the classroom sleeping. But maybe it's legitimate, because he worked all night or she worked all night, and this is the only place they can crash.

The *stayers* concluded that poverty and its impact on parental support and homework were factors they could not change. In order to make a difference in the academic achievement of their students, they felt they would have to change what happened at school, rather than worrying about what happened after school.

They then began to consider how they might be able to change the cycle of academic failure they saw among their students. They concluded that by changing their own behaviors, they might have an impact on instructional effectiveness.

In their efforts to make sense of academic problems, they looked in-depth at state achievement data. One point they noticed was the discrepancy in reading levels among sub-populations. In each district, the reading level of white students was higher than the reading level of African American or Hispanic students. Recognizing the link between literacy and achievement in all other subjects, the *stayers* said they knew finding a way to bring the content to students who struggled with reading was important. They remembered the types of materials they had found motivating as students themselves. They searched for reading materials that were alternatives to textbooks, such as websites and magazines.

The *stayers* saw that students' reading levels prevented them from comprehending their textbooks. Therefore, they searched for resources and materials that might increase minority students' reading abilities, such as the READ-180 program from Scholastic. In addition, they talked with other teachers to see what had been successful in their classrooms. As they "made sense" of student failure as a circumstance of low reading ability, they thought of solutions that were within their power to provide.

The *stayers* observed that traditional methods of instructional delivery, such as lecture and note-taking, were unsuccessful. Therefore, they shifted from traditional "lecture-driven" approaches to ones that were more constructivist and active in nature.

They learned to facilitate or direct instruction rather than transmitting information through lectures and note-taking. Like other *stayers*, Jerome said he realized the need to make his lessons more engaging or interesting:

It's a real downer to look out there and see a bunch of dead bodies, and so you say, 'Man, whatever I am doing, I've got to stop doing it, because it isn't working.' How can I teach it so that it is interesting? I've tried everything, but it's a huge challenge. I know there are smart kids here. You just have to figure out how to awaken them.

In response to their search for more effective methods, the *stayers* implemented more project-based learning, small group and individualized instruction, and activities that were tied to real-world experiences. In other words, as they progressed through the *encounter* stage, the *stayers* began to think about changes they could make that might positively impact student achievement.

Leavers. *Leavers* came into teaching with idealistic views about “making a difference” in the lives of their students. Their images of teaching were highly transmissive, viewing teachers as lecturers and deliverers of information, with students as passive receivers of knowledge. What they encountered in the classroom, however, was a different type of student than what they had envisioned.

When they encountered students who struggled with basic reading and math at the secondary level, they were surprised and frustrated. Similar to other *leavers*, Glenn said he had definitely underestimated the difficulty of working with students who struggled academically:

It was different from what I expected. I mean, I became very emotionally attached to my students, and that was great. But this situation is different from the way that I grew up in and am accustomed to. It was a challenge – finding my

students so far behind – and their grade level was way below what I expected or what I had planned for.

In response to finding their students so far behind, the *leavers* tried to understand why things were so different from what they expected. In doing so, they identified lack of parental involvement, refusal to do homework, and poor motivation as significant factors impacting student achievement. Based primarily on their observations of and interaction with their students, they concluded that the students lacked the desire or effort to succeed, and there was little value placed on education within the students' culture.

Rather than viewing student apathy and lack of achievement as concerns that could be addressed with better materials and more motivating approaches (as the *stayers* had done), the *leavers* made sense of low academic achievement by drawing correlations between student achievement and the personalities or "characteristics" of their students, whom they labeled as lazy, disruptive, and unmotivated. Rios (1996) contends that teachers have images of "ideal" and successful students. When they encounter students who are different from that image, they view them as failures. They then "reshape" their teaching practices based on their perceptions of students. The *leavers* were less likely than the *stayers* to view students as victims of circumstance. Instead, they used expressions like "they don't apply themselves," "they don't care," and "they get caught up in peer pressure" to characterize students.

The attitudes exhibited by *leavers* are indicative of deficit thinking – that students fail academically because of internal deficiencies and motivational deficits and because they are identified by the teacher as members of a specific ethnic or

socioeconomic group (Rios, 1996). Thinking patterns like these become self-fulfilling prophecies, because the teachers interpret the words and actions of the students in ways that reinforce their stereotypic beliefs (Rios, 1996). The teachers treat students differently based on characteristics of students, such as race or gender (Rios, 1996).

In addition, when the cultural background of the teacher is different from that of the students, teachers may feel a need to “control” what they view as inappropriate behaviors (Rios, 1996). When the emphasis is on control, academic achievement suffers (Rios, 1996). The *leavers* included two white teachers and one Hispanic teacher, all of whom were teaching in schools with primarily African-American student populations. In discussing their frustrations as teachers, they placed considerably heavier emphasis on student behavior than on student achievement.

Second, the *leavers* made sense of the problems with homework completion and lack of parental support by blaming the culture from which the students came. They exhibited the belief that little value was placed on academic success in the students’ culture. Rios (1996) contends that teacher attitudes about student achievement, especially when working with students from cultures different from their own, are often driven by the teacher’s perception of socioeconomic, family, and community structures (Rios, 1996).

Katrina’s perspective about her students’ culture was typical of the *leavers*:

Why don’t they study harder? It’s like upbringing. A lot of minorities work construction jobs, and they don’t want to go to college. They’ve never heard of college. They just want to get out and get a job, because that’s all they know. It’s a part of the culture in which they are raised.

Similarly, Iris added:

If any of these kids tries to pay attention or do well, the other kids will just put him down in front of everybody. They will put kids down if their families move out of the projects. It's sort of like misery loves company, I guess. They just want to hold each other down.

Rios (1996) contends that when teachers have different values and world-views from their students, they use “deficit” models to explain student failure:

The personal experiences of most teachers (who are typically female, Euro-American, and from middle-class backgrounds) and the professional education they have received (which historically and, in many places, currently focuses on ‘generic’ students with nominal attention to student diversity) may be fundamentally at odds with the experiences their students from diverse backgrounds have had, the context of the urban, multicultural schools they might teach in, and what we know constitutes a culturally relevant curriculum. (p. 15)

The attitude that the educational values in the students’ culture are different from the educational values in the school is problematic, because research about cultural value discontinuity indicates that when teachers believe their students’ educational values are different from their own, they often fail to support and assist the students adequately (Hauser-Cram, et al., 2003). This educational value dissonance is also correlated with decreased self-esteem and increased defiance among students. In blaming the students’ culture for academic failure, the *leavers* may have been accelerating academic and discipline problems rather than diminishing them.

Like the *stayers*, the *leavers* recognized the relationship between motivation and student achievement. However, they viewed lack of motivation as a student-driven problem, not a teacher-driven problem, and they exhibited little empathy or concern for students, as demonstrated in this statement from Iris:

These kids think, ‘I’m going to get out and get a job and have money.’ They are still living with momma, and they don’t know that the whole \$6 an hour you are making won’t pay your rent. They think welfare is something everybody should

get. I have a student who is pregnant, and I asked her how she was going to afford the baby. She said Medicare would pay for it. I told her, 'Medicare comes from my taxes. You don't pay for me to have kids. Why should I pay for you having kids?' I mean, they have no idea. They're not motivated, and they just don't care. It's ridiculous.

In trying to make sense of academic failure, the *leavers* primarily blamed the students and their culture. This aligns with what Louis (1980) says may occur during the *encounter* stage. She contends that individuals may explain or justify conflicts and surprises based on their perceptions of others and on cultural biases (see Figure 2). Weick (1995) says that when this occurs, individuals may not be able to choose an action in response to sensemaking, and failure to choose some type of action will result in frustration. Since the *leavers* blamed students and their culture for academic failure, they were frustrated by what they perceived as a situation beyond their control.

Subtheme B: Reliance on Mentors and "Insiders" in Sensemaking

During the *encounter* stage, the teachers in the study were faced with a number of conflicts and surprises. They tried to explain or make sense of these frustrating factors. In doing so, they sometimes relied on other teachers for guidance or assistance.

Teachers in the study described two different types of peer assistance. First, all were assigned official mentors. Some found the official mentor to be very helpful, while others felt their official mentor was of little assistance. Second, some of the teachers in the study relied on help from a teacher at the school who befriended and supported them in an unofficial capacity. Louis (1980) refers to a person within the culture who provides assistance in sensemaking the "insider."

The data for this section will be examined within the two common sources of input relied on by the teachers. The first is the officially designated mentor, who provided assistance with teaching methods, understanding the district evaluation system, and materials. The second is the insider, who provided social and emotional support as well as instructional support.

Support from Mentors

One of the most widely used approaches for supporting new teachers is mentoring (Norman & Ganser, 2004). Mentoring programs have been used as a way of assisting new teachers since the 1970s, and the number of districts employing mentoring programs has grown exponentially in recent years (Norman & Ganser, 2004). Over 50 percent of teachers within their first three years of teaching have been involved in some way in a mentoring program (Ganser, Marchione, & Fleischmann, 1999). Among the teachers in the study, all had officially designated mentors.

Stayers. For most of the *stayers*, the official mentor was a person assigned by the school to support several new educators. They saw the mentor at new teacher meetings and when the mentor came for scheduled observations, but that was their primary interaction. Therefore, time constraints limited the amount of support they received from their mentors.

Some mentors were housed at a central location and were assigned to work with multiple new teachers across several campuses. This meant they were not available to the novice on a day-to-day basis. Others were housed at the new teacher's building, but because of different interests, family commitments, and illnesses, they were not always

able to provide much support. Official mentors, in almost every case, were responsible for observing in the new teacher's classroom and writing an evaluation, which was then shared with district personnel.

Some of the teachers indicated this evaluative role made it difficult to be completely open with their official mentors. They felt that if they shared too many concerns or posed too many questions, they might appear weak or unprepared. They worried that their mentor might provide a negative evaluation of them to the administrator.

Despite their concerns in the area of evaluation, most of the *stayers* said their mentors were moderately helpful, especially with instructional delivery. They said their mentors were knowledgeable about district resources, and they shared ideas for grouping, classroom management, and activities. Brad's description of the practical assistance his mentor provided was typical of the *stayers*:

My mentor observed me several times. He's more of a – like, 'Hey, your lesson was good, but why don't you try doing it like this – or do more checking for understanding – or change your method?' – that type of stuff. That's his job basically. He helped me tremendously with that kind of stuff.

The *stayers* found the mentors helpful in understanding the various stages of the lesson cycle, such as making the objective clear to students or providing opportunities for guided practice in small groups. However, this was not the type of assistance they felt they needed most. Instead, the *stayers* said they needed someone with whom they could commiserate and share their frustrations openly. They wanted someone who

would not be judgmental, but who had a strong understanding of what they were going through. They wanted someone who would teach them the unwritten rules of the school.

Only Jerome said he relied heavily on his mentor both for instructional support and also in assistance with understanding the school culture and “learning the ropes” at his campus. He said his official mentor also became his best friend and supporter at the school, so she was both his “official” mentor and also an “insider”:

I've been so fortunate, because my mentor has been helpful in every way imaginable. She was helpful in making sure that I go in the right direction and meet the right people. We plan together, and we critique our work together, you know – what went wrong, what we could do better, what didn't work, why it didn't work. Sometimes she even helps out with the reteach. We meet twice a day, so there's plenty of opportunities for us to talk about a range of things without having to rush through things. Many of my peers do not have this kind of mentor interaction, so I feel very, very fortunate.

Like Jerome, all of the *stayers* found a person on whom they relied for emotional and psychological support. The assistance they provided is referred to by Louis (1980) as insider support.

Leavers. While each of the *leavers* was assigned an official mentor, they did not find mentors to be highly valuable in helping them “survive” during their first years. Several factors contributed to this conclusion. Glenn felt his mentor had been “very helpful” with meeting the requirements for the certification program and helping him evaluate his own approaches to instruction. However, he said his mentor was assigned to several teachers, so she visited his classroom only three or four times during the year. Time constraints impacted the amount of support he received. Helena, a first year

teacher, was assigned a second-year teacher as a mentor, a person who was struggling herself. Thus her mentor was unable to provide more than an occasional suggestion. Iris said her mentor observed her briefly and brought her activities printed from the Internet, but she felt these were things she could have found on her own.

Leavers found the mentors somewhat helpful with understanding the district teacher appraisal system. The mentors explained the evaluation system and provided samples of appraisal forms. Most were assigned district-level mentors who worked with several teachers across different schools. This limited the amount of support they could provide, and the *leavers* felt their mentors regarded their relationships as “an assignment” rather than as a personal bond. Typical of the *leavers*, Adele felt the mentor did not have a realistic perception of what she dealt with on a day-to-day basis:

I haven't had too many problems, but I have heard from other teachers that have been here a while, and they say that if she is in your room and you stray from your lesson plans, she writes you up. Not straying from the plan – that's one of her demands. I mean, you never know what's going on that day. She doesn't take into consideration if it's not working, we are going to change things. Like if we planned on playing softball, and then it rained. My lesson plan would say softball, but you can't play that in the gym. I'm not sure she really gets what I do.

Two teachers in this group were in official mentoring relationships with other teachers in their own buildings. One found this helpful in terms of feedback about her teaching methods, but the assistance was limited by the fact they did not teach the same content area or grade level.

In each case, the official mentor was viewed as someone who provided help with materials and the appraisal system, but this was not the type of support the *leavers* felt they needed most. None of the teachers in this group viewed the official mentor as a

friend, a provider of emotional support and advice, an individual with “inside information” about the unwritten rules of the school, or someone they could trust on a personal level.

Support from an Insider

While mentors obviously provided assistance to the teachers in the study in some areas, they did not appear to provide the kind of guidance Louis (1980) refers to as “insider” support. Studies by Brickson and Brewer (2001) and by Louis, Posner, and Powell (1983) indicate that daily interactions with peers, mutual support, and “cooperative contact” between a newcomer and the established “inner group” are essential for job satisfaction. The mentors failed to provide this. However, some teachers in the study found someone who could.

Stayers. Collaboration with other teachers is one of the most significant factors impacting job satisfaction among “Generation Y” teachers (Behrstock & Clifford, 2009). Unfortunately, support from peers is not always accessible. Brock and Grady (1997) found that many veteran teachers view the first year for a novice as a “trial by fire” or a “rite of passage” (p. 22), and new teachers are often afraid to ask for help, fearing they will be perceived as incompetent. This is problematic, because Louis (1980) says that this type of insider information can be a highly significant guide for sensemaking. This proved true for several of the teachers in the study.

All of the *stayers* found a teacher at their school with whom they could collaborate, commiserate, and share experiences, and all indicated the assistance of this “insider” was more critical than the official mentor to their success as a teacher. The

unofficial mentor was a person with whom the teachers felt they could be honest, providing “the stuff they don’t teach you in college.” The insider was a person with whom the teacher formed a personal bond.

Insiders provided several types of support. One included assistance with the practical, day-to-day problems that occurred. For example, insiders assisted novices with finding their way around the building, completing book orders, checking out audio-visual equipment, and completing online report cards.

A second type of support provided by insiders was validation. When new teachers expressed concerns about discipline or frustration with the lack of parental support, for example, the insider confirmed that what they were experiencing was typical of all teachers. The *stayers* said they were relieved to know their problems were not the result of their own failures or an indication that they were “bad” teachers. Often, the insiders said they had experienced the same problems themselves.

A third type of support provided by insiders was emotional. For example, when the new teachers were “at the breaking point” due to frustrations about student discipline or achievement, the insiders listened, sympathized with them, encouraged them to keep trying, and offered to help. Some *stayers* indicated it was simply the ability to “spout off” to the insider that helped them. The insider understood what it was like to be a new teacher.

Another type of insider support involved navigating the culture of the school. *Stayers* said the insiders told them about the unwritten culture of the school, such as why certain procedures were in place, which teacher organizations were viewed positively by

the administration, or which teachers to avoid in the teacher's lounge. Insiders also shared resources when they were in short supply. They also helped the new teachers know which administrators were most likely to assist them and "teamed" with them in confrontations with students and in parent conferences.

Insiders often ate lunch with the new teachers, visited in their rooms during conference periods or between classes, and carpoled to extracurricular activities or professional development. They became "comrades" and "colleagues," descriptors that were not applied by the *stayers* to the officially designated mentors.

The *stayers* often shared their fears, concerns, and doubts with their unofficial mentors – things they were reluctant to tell a district representative who they felt might also be in a position to evaluate them at some point. In every case, the *stayers* said the insider support helped them see that they were "not alone" in the frustrations they faced, but it also helped them see there were ways to improve things if they went about it in the right way. Therefore, the insider support gave them data to use as they tried to make sense of the conflicts they faced. This is the key role of the insider (Louis, 1980).

Typical of the *stayers*, Fran viewed her relationship with the unofficial mentor as highly beneficial:

My official mentor actually provided little help, but I also drew from a teacher who was in my classroom before being promoted to administration. She was a tremendous help in the emotional department. I still go to her from time to time when I need advice on how to handle situations – both with students or colleagues. I couldn't have made it without her.

Like Fran, other *stayers* repeatedly alluded to how valuable the insider had been in helping them survive as new teachers. *Stayers* found the unofficial mentor to be of

such significance that several of them said their strongest recommendation to new teachers would be to find insider support. This statement from Ellen exemplifies that advice:

[My unofficial mentor] was always asking me ‘What do you need?’ or giving me things for my classroom. I borrowed from her, and she borrowed from me, and now we can’t live without each other. We are just down the hall from each other, so we often meet in the hallway. She definitely took me under her wing. If I could give advice to a new teacher, it would be to find someone that you can trust and can talk to. Find someone who knows the ropes, knows how to do everything, knows the minutia of paperwork and all the things you are putting up with. Find someone!

Like the other *stayers*, Brad attributed much of his success in what some teachers might consider a difficult school because of his reliance on peers. When asked to provide advice to other new teachers, he responded in this way:

Find the others. Find the people – and quickly – who you can rely on. That’s what I did when I came here. I found the right people. It doesn’t have to be people with your same philosophy or personality. Just find support.

Each of the *stayers* was asked to describe the person relied on for insider support. No pattern seemed evident in which “types” of teachers were most likely to develop insider relationships with novices. Four of the six were the same gender as the novice teacher with whom they bonded. Three were older and more experienced than the new teachers, and three were “peers” in terms of age group. Three of the pairs were of the same ethnicity, and three were different in terms of ethnicity. Only two of the six found insider support from teachers who taught in the same content area or department.

Leavers. In contrast, none of the *leavers* relied heavily on the information and support from an insider in making sense of the conflicts and surprises in their situations. Two of the *leavers* never developed a relationship with an insider at all. Each of them

said they tried to be friendly and collaborative. However, they said the teachers in their buildings were not interested in interacting with them.

The *leavers* were critical of the veteran teachers in their buildings. For example, Glenn labeled other teachers as “driven by the paycheck” and unwilling to give up their own time to help another teacher. Similarly, Iris said her co-workers were not interested in assisting her:

I mean there is support if you go and ask for it, but it's not friendly support. It's more like, 'Why aren't you doing this right?' or 'Why can't you get this?' or it's like you have to do something really bad to get support or not be succeeding in order to get support. It's hostile. And teambuilding? You've got to be kidding!

Helena's situation was different, because she did form a personal bond with another teacher. In many ways, it was the personal bond between the *stayers* and their “insiders” that was most helpful to them. However, the support the insiders provided for *stayers* was school-focused. The teacher with whom Helena bonded was also a recent immigrant from Puerto Rico, so he was no more cognizant of the culture within the school or with what the district expected in terms of teacher behavior or student academics than she was. She admitted that when they were together, they usually talked about how good things were when they were in Puerto Rico, rather than discussing ways to address their problems at school.

The fact that none of the *leavers* relied heavily on insider support may explain why they had greater difficulty than *stayers* in “making sense” of unsupportive administrators, inadequate resources, disciplinary problems, and low student achievement. Weick (1995) says that the “glue” of organizational culture is shared

meaning, and shared meaning is the result of people within the organization talking about and “hammering out” shared experiences. This opportunity was not available to the *leavers*, who attempted to make sense of the conflicts they experienced during the *encounter* stage without insider support.

Theme 3 - Adaptation:

Change, Empowerment, and Efficacy

As the teachers in the study neared the end of the school year, they reflected about the conflicts and frustrations they experienced as novice teachers. Some were beginning to make plans for next year, while others were uncertain about their futures in teaching. Louis (1980) says that when newcomers make decisions based on their experiences and sensemaking in the *encounter* stage, they are entering the *adaptation* stage.

Decisions during the *adaptation* stage fit patterns described by Festinger (1957). Within the framework established by Festinger (1957), when new teachers are faced with conflicts or “dissonance” in the environment, they will take steps to resolve the problem. They might accomplish this by changing their own behaviors to be more aligned with the existing ways of doing things. However, they might also change by leaving the profession altogether (Festinger, 1957).

Two subthemes emerged during this stage. The first involves the ways teachers adapted or failed to adapt their behaviors based on sensemaking (Subtheme A). The second involves how some teachers achieved a sense of satisfaction about what they had accomplished as teachers (Subtheme B).

Subtheme A: Adapting within the New Culture

Adaptability is a critical part of the sensemaking process (Weick, 1995). As new teachers interpret and explain elements of the school environment, they then make decisions and act in ways that alleviate conflicts and promote satisfaction. Weick (1995) says that when novices make changes, their actions are observed by others and have impact on others within the system. When this occurs, the organization shifts slightly. Each time a new teacher becomes an insider, the system is impacted (Weick, 1995).

However, the process of sensemaking is a continuous one. As novice teachers make changes in their own behaviors, they then encounter new surprises, and the process continues (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). It is recursive and cyclical (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995).

Brock and Grady (2007) found that the process of new teacher socialization involves a series of changes over time. These include internalizing the beliefs and behaviors existing in the new school culture (because the school culture does not adapt for the beginning teacher, and veteran teachers sometimes view new teachers as “threats” to the norm (Brock & Grady, 2007). In addition, the new teacher will adjust teaching methods to find those most conducive to student achievement and may forge collegial relationships (Brock & Grady, 2007). As these changes occur, beginners may change over time. How they change may impact their decision to continue in the profession, because the pattern of change appears to differ between *stayers* and *leavers*.

Stayers. From the way the teachers in the study described their experiences, it was clear that some had changed their perceptions of teaching and their ways of interacting with administrators, students, and peers. Those characterized as *stayers* made conscious decisions to change, based on the behaviors of administrators, the availability of resources, student behaviors, academic achievement, and interaction with mentors and insiders. Such changes in behavior are typical during the *adaptation* stage (Louis, 1980).

For example, in response to their perception that administrators were not supportive with discipline referrals, the *stayers* attributed this to the enormous responsibilities placed on administrators. They felt this was something that would not change in the future, so they then implemented their own system of consequences, such as after-school detention or parent conferences. They formed alliances with other teachers for their own “detention” systems, and they worked at establishing systems of rewards and consequences that led to more cooperative classrooms. This, in turn, diminished their need for administrative support in terms of student discipline.

Similarly, in response to the lack of resources, the *stayers* felt the district was supplying as much as was feasible, because it was operating on limited federal funds and a low tax base. They did not feel this situation would change in the near future. Therefore, they took actions to find the materials and supplies they needed. They seemed to have learned the “system” of knowing which personnel controlled which supplies or which budgets could be accessed by teachers. In addition, they watched for

grants or community programs that might provide technology for their classrooms. Some tried to find parts to repair broken equipment.

In other words, in response to the problem of inadequate and insufficient resources, the *stayers* altered their own behaviors, formed relationships and alliances with key personnel in their buildings and communities, and demonstrated a kind of initiative that was not apparent among the teachers in the other two groups. The *stayers* rationalized that if the resources needed for student success were not provided by the school, they would find an alternate source. This was a behavior modeled by the insiders with whom they worked. The *leavers*, however, continued to “wait” for more resources to be provided.

The *stayers* attributed many behavior problems to a lack of engagement or a lack of interest, a situation that was not likely to change unless the teaching practices changed. Therefore, they adapted their teaching practices. They changed in ways such as moving from a direct instructional approach to more small group and discovery learning. *Stayers* described learning to facilitate or guide instruction through student discovery and activity rather than lecturing. In doing so, they exhibited a sort of “personal responsibility” for what happened in their classrooms. They alluded to becoming more capable at diffusing problem behaviors and better at planning. Jerome displayed a typical attitude among *stayers*:

You know, if I'm not giving the kids good service, I've got to take a hard look at myself. You know, if the kids are acting up, I look at myself in terms of what I am doing that might contribute to that, you know, or what I could do to lessen that. It's part of every day.

Several *stayers* described seminars, university courses, and professional development sessions they had attended at their own expense, with the goal of improving their ability to assist struggling learners. Jerome said he and another teacher on his team often critique the day's instruction together, trying to see what worked, what didn't work, and how the instruction could be better the next time around. This was typical of the reflective attitude exhibited by *stayers*.

The *stayers* reached a realization that they could not fix every problem within one year, and they learned to let go of some things and work hard to change others. In addition, they learned the value of active learning, structuring units to be more relevant to students, and "picking your battles" when it came to student behaviors. For example, they used humor or extinction to counter students who "talked back" or argued with directions, as long as the students eventually complied. They realized that keeping students in the classroom was more beneficial in terms of student achievement than sending them to the office.

Also, the *stayers* alluded to talking with other teachers and searching the Internet for ideas that would help to manage behavior or motivate students. Even in mid-year, they were already thinking about how they could do things differently in hopes of having more success next year. This shift in thinking about teaching indicated a move toward *adaptation*.

The perception among the *stayers* that many elements in their environment were stable or constant is in keeping with what Louis (1980) says about the factors leading to *adaptation*. Louis (1980) says that when newcomers attribute events to stable causes,

they are more likely to change their own behaviors than when newcomers attribute events to temporary causes. The *stayers* looked at factors such as student behavior, administrative support, and resources as stable or unchanging. They then took the initiative to change their own behaviors in ways that would improve their situations.

Leavers. The *leavers* failed to adapt in the ways exhibited by *stayers*. This may be because they regarded problems they encountered as temporary rather than stable. For example, they felt things would be better “if we got a new administrator,” or “if they give us new computers,” or “if they change the attendance boundaries of the school,” or “if they send me to another campus.” Louis (1980) says that if newcomers make sense of the frustrations they encounter by identifying temporary causes, they are less likely to make changes themselves. Because the *leavers* felt so many factors were temporary, they failed to change in the ways that the *stayers* did.

Instead of making changes that might lead to job satisfaction, the *leavers* followed a pattern described by Festinger (1957). Festinger (1957) says that some individuals react to dissonance not by altering their behaviors but by exiting the new environment altogether. This appears to be the direction in which the *leavers* were moving.

Teachers in the *leaver* group were less likely than those in other groups to describe ways they had changed in terms of teaching methodology or behavior with students over the course of the year. When asked if they had changed approaches to discipline or tried innovative instructional techniques, they said they had not. They felt

such changes were impossible, given the behavior of students and the lack of support from administrators.

The *leavers* said they were doing well to survive, and they blamed others (students, the culture, administrators, teacher preparation programs, and mentors) for the frustrations they encountered. They did not believe that changes on their part would result in significant differences. Typical of the *leavers* at the end of the year, Helena was weighing the frustrations of teaching against the rewards. She was not sure if it was worth continuing:

I meet with the other new teachers in the district every last Thursday of the month, and it seems like all the new teachers have the same problems, and they all want to leave. They are not staying here another year. It doesn't matter how hard you work or how much you like the kids. You just can't teach like this.

After the first two months, I started being upset with school and I didn't want to come to school. It was hard to get up. I feel very disappointed with this job. I mean, I know that every job is hard and you have to work. But, you know, teachers have to do so many things. They have to do lesson plans, and they don't have enough planning time, and we have to do surveys and meetings and after-school sessions and trainings – and it's just so many things. That's why some teachers would rather do other jobs, even if it doesn't pay as much. They are at peace. I would rather have peace of mind. I don't know if it's the administrators or the kids. For me, it's both. And it's both academics and discipline. In my classroom, if the discipline improved, things would be better. But that is only one factor. I never imagined in a million years that it would be like this. If I had any choice, I would not stay here another year.

Because the *leavers* did not believe they had power to change things for the future, they appeared to view their situations as hopeless, and they did not change or adapt. Their perceptions of administrators, other teachers, and students were more negative than the other two groups. The *leavers* tended to regard “these kids,” their parents, and their community negatively. They felt powerless.

This correlates with Bandura's (1998) contention that when newcomers lack a sense of empowerment over their circumstances, they experience high levels of frustration. The *leavers* perceived themselves as victims. This was contrary to their original perception of themselves as providing a service, making a difference, and building relationships with students. They were unable to resolve the dissonance between their prior expectations about teaching and what they actually encountered.

Subtheme B: Achieving a Sense of Accomplishment

With regard to the *adaptation* stage, a second subtheme involves achieving a sense of accomplishment. Of the three groups, *stayers* were most likely to feel a sense of satisfaction about what they accomplished as teachers. *Leavers* made few changes in their own behaviors, despite frustrating circumstances, and they failed to achieve a sense of accomplishment.

Stayers. Bandura (1998) contends that people who are able to "exercise control" over their environment are more apt to persevere in spite of challenges. Among the teachers in the study, the *stayers* exercised more control over their classrooms than teachers in either of the other two groups. While they indicated they were concerned about their abilities to handle teaching before they began the year, they became very confident as the year progressed, and several saw a difference between their own success and the frustrations others experienced.

Teachers are more likely to feel successful and to have job satisfaction when they take responsibility for implementing effective instructional practices, establishing close collegial relationships, and exercising control over what they accomplish as teachers

(Johnson, S. M., Berg, J. H., & Donaldson, M. L.; 2005). The *stayers* exhibited confidence and pride in their abilities as teachers. Ellen exhibited a typical attitude among the *stayers* when asked why she felt she was an effective teacher:

This is going to sound pretty narcissistic, but I'm good at it. I'm good at it, and I know I am. I like to do things I am good at. I have observed teachers for years and years, and I think that while you can teach the skill of teaching, there are some people who just seem to be able to do it, and it works. They are wonderful, and the kids learn. There are other people, and their hearts are in the right place, but they just can't handle it. I wish that I knew the secret formula for what makes somebody good, because we have an entire profession of people who really are not.

Several of the *stayers* began to assume roles previously associated with “insiders,” a characteristic of the *adaptation* stage alluded to by Louis (1980). *Stayers* had been asked to assume leadership roles in committees, staff development activities, and extracurricular activities. They had been singled out by administrators as models for others to observe, and they had initiated new student programs and activities. As indicated in this statement from Jerome, *stayers* shared a conviction toward future improvement:

I view my students as customers, or clients. If I'm not giving them good service, I need to take a hard look at myself and figure out what I need to be better. That's part of the commitment, you know, to be the best teacher you can be, because you want to make some difference in folks' lives.

Job satisfaction may be enhanced by success in an experience, especially if the success occurs in the midst of difficult circumstances (Bandura, 1998). All of the *stayers* talked about teaching in terms of success and accomplishment. However, although their pre-service expectations about teaching centered on practical knowledge (lesson planning, classroom organization), they measured their success in terms of how

they were perceived by students. They said students “melt your heart” and that teaching gives you a “sense of accomplishment” because you make a difference in the lives of others.

Despite the fact that their students scored poorly on state assessments, they felt confident that they had made a difference in the achievement level of their students. The best summary of the attitude shared by the *stayers* was a statement from Delia:

All the fights and the nagging and the whining and the complaining . . . in that one moment when you connect with kids, it doesn't matter. It's a beautiful thing.

The *stayers* came into teaching believing that it would require a great deal of effort, but they felt confident they had made the right career choice and were committed to continuing. They exhibited forward thinking, often speaking of how they would do things differently “next time” or the plans they were making for next year. They spoke of teaching as “rewarding” and “gratifying.” When asked if they had considered other career options after entering the teaching profession, these teachers said they had not. The teachers in this group admitted there had been many obstacles, but like Jerome, they viewed the rewards of teaching as making the difficulties worthwhile:

I'm really glad I chose teaching as a career. I mean, just when you are totally frustrated, some kid will say something and you'll know that's why you became a teacher. You look at those notes that say, 'You saved my life,' or 'You challenged me to do some things I never would have done,' or 'You are the reason I come to school.' That's why I decided to go into teaching, so it makes up for all the frustration.

Leavers. On the other hand, the *leavers* found it difficult to pinpoint ways in which they had made a difference for the school or the students. When they were asked to describe their success as a teacher, it was more often in terms of student attitude or

involvement than student achievement. They said they felt their students liked them better by the end of the year. Some felt they had helped by assisting with student organizations or activities. However, none of the *leavers* felt the level of accomplishment described by the *stayers*. Typical of the *leavers*, Glenn said it was difficult to describe what he had accomplished:

I guess that is hard to gauge. I hope I had an impact just in the way that I conducted myself, you know, and the way I treat people and those kinds of things. But as far as teaching these kids, I'm not sure I made much of an impact.

Among the *leavers*, there was originally some hope that teaching would be a good career choice, but the teachers in this group felt the personal sacrifices required of teachers were excessive. They tended to focus more on what had happened in the past than on the possibility of changing things in the future, and they saw themselves as victims.

Johnson (2004) found that a lack of empowerment led to job dissatisfaction and decisions to leave the profession among entry-level teachers. The data in this study seem to support the contention that when teachers feel hopeless or are unable to envision improved circumstances in their future, they are less likely to be satisfied with the job. The *leavers* felt that most of the conflicts they experienced were beyond their control to remedy. They felt powerless. They therefore made few changes in their own behaviors. Because they did not change, they failed to acquire the sense of accomplishment evident among the *stayers*.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study centers on new teacher attrition, a subject of concern among educators. Nearly fifty percent of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Johnson, 2004). Because teacher attrition is expensive financially and because student achievement is dependent on a highly qualified, experienced teaching force, school administrators need effective approaches for retaining new teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Traditional approaches for supporting them, however, have not been successful.

One reason for this may be that traditional approaches are provided in a uniform, systematic way for all new teachers. However, the entry-level experience is a highly personal one that cannot be addressed through “one size fits all” approaches (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995). What do new teachers experience that is so frustrating they are willing to give up careers for which they had planned and trained? Why do some new teachers stay and others leave?

One way of answering these questions is to examine how individual new teachers explain and deal with frustrations during their entry years. The process of “coming to terms” with entry-level frustrations is referred to as sensemaking. This study examines the sensemaking of twelve novice secondary teachers.

The study reveals how they made sense of the changes, surprises, and challenges of teaching. Differences were noted between the ways *stayers* (those who felt satisfied in their roles as teachers) and *leavers* (those who were dissatisfied with their roles as teachers) developed perceptions about teaching prior to entry, assigned meaning to the experiences they had as teachers, and reacted to those experiences.

Data were gathered from a small group of secondary teachers from three urban districts, so the findings may not be applicable to all new teachers in all settings. However, hearing their story may add to the understanding of how schools can support and retain new teachers. Some of the teachers in the study were “typical teacher leavers,” a group described as white, female, under the age of 30, and teaching in an urban secondary school in a southern or western state (Johnson, 2004; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2007). Others were from groups typically underrepresented in the teaching population, including teachers-of-color and males. All were employed by urban districts serving high populations of economically disadvantaged African-American and Hispanic students. The schools were selected because the level of new teacher attrition is highest in economically disadvantaged areas and in inner city and remote rural schools (*Tapping the potential: Retaining and developing high quality new teachers*, 2004).

The study was positioned within a framework developed by Meryl Reis Louis (1980). Louis (1980) proposes that new employees are frustrated when they encounter differences between their prior expectations about a career and what they actually experience. She identifies a series of stages through which newcomers pass.

The first is *anticipatory socialization*, when the employee has not yet joined the organization but is developing notions about what he will experience in the new role. The second is the *encounter* stage, when the newcomer tries to make sense of conflicts and frustrations he encounters). The third is the *adaptation* stage, when the individual may change or adapt in response to that sensemaking (Louis, 1980). The experiences of the teachers in this study were organized and examined within these stages.

This chapter presents the findings, along with recommendations for practice. In addition, recommendations for future study are addressed. It is hoped that the results of this study add to an understanding of sensemaking among novice teachers. Since sensemaking is an inherent part of entry into any new environment (Weick, 1995), an understanding of how new teachers make sense of the entry-level experience might help districts build structures to support and retain them.

Findings

Finding 1 – The Nature and Impact of Prior Expectations

Typical of anyone preparing for a new career, the teachers in this study developed perceptions about what they would do and how they would feel when they became teachers. They formed these images of teaching based on many factors, including their own personal experiences, input from teachers in the field, their teacher education programs, student teaching or field experience, and prior career experiences. Although they were interviewed after they had been teaching for several months, most could still recall and describe the expectations they had before the first day on the job.

Their preconceived ideas about teaching are important, because the perceptions they developed during the anticipatory socialization stage served as the foundation of their sensemaking. Typical of anyone preparing for a new career, the teachers in this study developed perceptions about what they would do and how they would feel when they became teachers. They formed these images of teaching based on many factors, including their own personal experiences, input from teachers in the field, their teacher education programs, student teaching or field experience, and prior career experiences. Although they were interviewed after they had been teaching for several months, most could still recall and describe the expectations they had before the first day on the job. Their preconceived ideas about teaching are important, because the perceptions they developed during the anticipatory socialization stage served as the foundation of their sensemaking.

One finding evident from the data is that during the anticipatory socialization stage, the new teachers in the study who thought about and talked about teaching in practical terms rather than idealistic and transmissive terms were more satisfied with the entry-level experience. In other words, there was a difference in the nature of prior perceptions about teaching among the participants in the study.

First, the *stayers* thought about and talked about teaching in ways that focused on the practical aspects of the job, such as grading papers, planning lessons, and managing students. They planned seating arrangements and classroom rules. They worried about how they would deal with “difficult” students who challenged their rules. Some of the white teachers worried that they might not know how to “relate” to students whose backgrounds were different from their own.

On the other hand, all three *leavers* said they had not thought extensively about the “work” of teaching, and they came into the profession with highly idealistic views. They thought about the relationships they would form with students, rather than focusing on the teaching itself. The *leavers* envisioned themselves lecturing and “delivering” instruction, and they believed students would be “willing to learn.” They said they felt they would be able to “help kids,” “build relationships with students,” and “find out how to help failing schools,” but they spent little or no time thinking about the “work” of teaching. Their image of teaching was similar to the “romantic” ideas described by Ladson-Billings (2006), who said when teachers have romantic images of teaching, they are often disillusioned and frustrated.

The teachers in the study relied on several sources in developing these perceptions. Some drew on information from veteran teachers in their own families or their own social circles. Others remembered their own experiences as students. A primary source, however, seemed to be student teaching and other field experiences provided through teacher education.

The type of teacher preparation program they attended did not appear to be a factor. No distinction was evident between traditional teacher education programs and alternative certification programs. Seven of the teachers in the study completed traditional programs, and five were alternatively certified. Within each group there were both *stayers* and *leavers*.

What did appear different, however, was that the *leavers* described the field experiences they had as “totally unrealistic” and unrelated to what they actually

encountered as teachers. For example, one *leaver* said her field experience was in a summer magnet program, where student-teacher ratios were ten to one and where many of the students were gifted and highly motivated. This was far-removed from the classroom to which she was assigned when the year began. The school where she was placed had 35-40 students in each class, and most of the students were difficult to motivate and struggling academically.

The experience was different for the *stayers*. Several of the *stayers* completed student teaching or field experiences in schools similar to those in which they were placed. Among the teachers in the study who participated in traditional student teaching programs, all had requested to remain at the schools where they were student teachers, a sign of a possible link between student teacher placement and retention.

Two other factors that seemed to impact the *stayers* were age and prior career experiences. The mean age of the *stayers* was 34, while the mean age for leavers was 26. Also, three of the *stayers* had prior career experiences. One had been in accounting, and two had been in public relations. They felt their experiences in other careers helped them prepare for the hours required of teachers as well as how to relate well to and collaborate with peers. This is supported by research from Brock and Grady (2007), who found that second career teachers were more prepared to deal with many aspects of entry-level teaching than students just out of college. None of the *leavers* had prior career experiences.

It is possible, of course, that elementary teachers might not have the same types of idealistic and transmissive views of teaching that were exhibited by the *leavers* in this

study. All of the study participants were secondary teachers. However, the findings suggest that helping pre-service teachers develop accurate and realistic perceptions about teaching might make their transition into teaching easier. This coincides with Louis's (1980) theory that when novices encounter many differences between their prior expectations and what they experience on the job, they are less able to make sense of or adjust to the new culture.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings about prior expectations suggest the importance of helping pre-service teachers develop realistic perceptions of teaching in practical, workload-related ways. First, teacher education programs must provide pre-service teachers with field experiences that are reflective of what they will actually encounter in the classroom. In many instances, field experiences involve a few hours a week observing master teachers during academic instructional time. Instead, it might be beneficial to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to shadow several veteran teachers in a variety of teaching assignments for entire days, getting an idea about the before and after-school expectations, student issues, day-to-day routines, meetings, and other aspects of the "real" teaching experience.

University-based and alternative certification programs share the burden with districts in providing these realistic views of teaching. The teachers in this study said their field experiences were in schools far-removed (both geographically and demographically) from the ones to which they were assigned later.

What often happens, instead, is that student teachers and interns are placed in the classrooms of master teachers in high-performing schools. This is done to provide modeling of best practices, but such exposure may cause new teachers to develop unrealistic or inaccurate views of what the job actually involves.

If possible, student teaching placements should be in the schools most likely to need new teachers the following semester. Among the teachers in this study, all who had student teaching experiences asked for placements in the schools where they had those experiences. If they had been provided that opportunity, it might have increased their likelihood to remain.

Second, district recruiters and administrators must provide prospective new hires in middle schools and high schools with honest views of the student achievement, resources, and behavior in the schools they are considering. Even when the teachers in this study were concerned about the challenges they might face, those with the most realistic prior expectations fared better than those with inaccurate expectations. Those who felt they had been deceived by the district were resentful of the situations they encountered.

For example, one *leaver* said a district representative had taken her to the school, but they went directly to observe a “pre-arranged” activity in a classroom for advanced students, and they left before the class period ended. She said if she had observed student behavior in the hallways, had been in a regular education classroom, or had visited the neighborhood surrounding the school during the evening, she would not have accepted the teaching assignment.

Finally, the fact that half of the *stayers* had previous career experiences and that as a group they had a higher mean age could have implications for administrators and human resource departments. It may be that maturity and job experiences among “second career” applicants make them more likely to remain in teaching.

Finding 2 – Frustrations and Conflicts

When the participants in the study began teaching, they soon found that the prior perceptions they had of what they would do and how they would feel as teachers were not always accurate. Because the *stayers* came into teaching with more practical perceptions about the job, they encountered fewer surprises and conflicts than the *leavers*. However, both groups encountered some unexpected situations.

The aspects they found most frustrating were similar for the two groups. First, all identified a lack of support from administrators as one of the most problematic factors. Both *stayers* and *leavers* perceived a lack of support in terms of student discipline. They felt that when they wrote a discipline referral and sent a student to the office, the consequences for the student were either minimal or non-existent. They said students felt an office referral was “a joke.”

Some of the teachers in the study said there was little consistency between school policy about consequences and actual practice. For example, one said the student handbook stated that any student involved in fighting would be immediately suspended. However, when she sent students to the office for fighting, they were always back in class within a short time.

While the *leavers* seemed to be most frustrated by lack of administrative support with discipline, they also said administrators were non-supportive in terms of instructional leadership, communication, and evaluation. They were therefore more dissatisfied in this area than teachers in either of the other groups.

Second, all of the teachers in the study said lack of resources was a problem. In describing the resources they lacked, the middle school teachers complained about not having enough books. They also said copy paper was in short supply, and they found the district curriculum guides often contained lessons that required manipulatives or materials they did not have.

The high school teachers identified technology as a primary resource they needed. They complained about overhead projectors and computers that had been broken for months, and they felt the use of LCD projectors, graphing calculators, and technological tools for science were essential to teach effectively. None of these were provided for them.

Finally, all teachers in the study were concerned by student factors. The *leavers* were especially frustrated by student discipline, such as off-task or disrespectful behavior, defiance, inappropriate language, and violence. The *stayers* were especially frustrated by poor academic achievement and low morale or self-esteem among their students.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings about conflicts and frustrations identified by the teachers in the study substantiate data from several studies of teacher attrition. New teachers found a number of frustrating elements in the teaching environment.

A lack of administrative support, inadequate resources, and student discipline were included among the most problematic factors identified by Johnson (2004), Brock and Grady (2007), and Certo and Fox (2002) among others.

The fact that both *stayers* and *leavers* identified lack of administrative support as problematic suggests that some schools need to re-examine the level of availability and support provided to new teachers by administrators. This might be accomplished through better training for administrators on how to support novice teachers. However, it may not be a lack of training alone. Instead, administrators may mistakenly believe new teachers are already receiving all the support they need.

One study of new teachers indicated that administrators do an exceptional job with welcoming new teachers and providing a school orientation (Brock & Grady, 2007). However, they then fall into a pattern of “benign neglect,” assuming mentors and veteran teachers are providing all the support needed by novice teachers (Brock & Grady, 2007).

The findings suggest that districts may need to raise the expectations about how and when administrators are available to assist new teachers. Administrators may not realize the impact their attention makes with novice teachers. In several instances in this study, the teachers indicated that just a word of approval or encouragement from an administrator would make a significant difference to them.

Of course, some of the problems the teachers encountered are not within the immediate control of the administration or the school district. No amount of support will change the economic deprivation from which the students come. In large districts like those in the study, administrators' hands are often tied with regard to teacher-student ratios, funds for new equipment, or written and unwritten suspension and expulsion policies – all things described by the teachers in the study as indicators of “lack of support.” Guiding new teachers in understanding the limitations placed on administrators might be helpful to the novice teachers in this regard.

However, many of the teachers (including the *stayers*) felt inadequate support with student behavior, and many felt the administrators were unable or unwilling to listen or provide assistance. These factors seem to be within the control of district leaders. In terms of administrative support, Behrstock and Clifford (2009) found four factors to be the most significant in reducing teacher attrition, and these appear to be supported by data from the study. Their recommendations include the following (a) administrators should support teachers when they are dealing with student behavior or confrontational parents, (b) administrators should exhibit fairness, trustworthiness, and respect for teachers, (c) administrators must communicate effectively, and (d) administrators should empower teachers. The findings from this study support the implementation of these recommendations.

While perceived as less critical than administrative support, teachers in the study also identified a lack of resources as a source of surprise and frustration for them. Within this category they included supplies, books, technology, and personnel (such as

teacher aides). The establishment of district “media centers” where teachers could check out equipment on a more equitable basis or involvement of new teachers in establishing priorities for supply budgets might be steps in that direction.

Finding 3 – Stability, Causality, and Change

As the teachers in the study encountered conflicts between their prior expectations and the actual teaching experience, they began the process of sensemaking. They tried to determine why the areas they found most frustrating (administrative support, resources, student behavior, and academic achievement) were not as they expected them to be.

Among the *stayers* there was a tendency to rationalize or justify the problems they faced as stable in nature. For example, when they tried to understand why administrators were not supportive, they said they realized administrators were overwhelmed by the demands of accountability systems, parents, district demands, and paperwork. They determined that administrators were too busy to deal with student discipline effectively, and they saw this as a situation not likely to change. Therefore, they found alternate methods to deal with inappropriate student behavior, rather than writing referrals.

This same pattern was evident in the *stayers’* responses to each frustration they encountered. They justified the lack of resources as due to limited tax bases and federal funding sources. They felt this was a stable condition, so they found ways to repair equipment or acquire materials on their own. When they talked about student behavior or academic achievement, they rationalized that the problems they encountered among

students were understandable, given the poverty in which the students lived, and they took steps to find more effective management and teaching strategies.

In other words, the *stayers* rationalized that what they encountered in terms of administrative support, resources, student behavior, and student achievement were not going to change. They made decisions, engaged in problem-solving, and demonstrated individual responsibility for improving each of these situations.

On the other hand, *leavers* regularly assigned blame for frustrating situations on the character of others or on the culture of the students. When they talked about the lack of administrator support, they described their administrators as unwilling to help or as worthless. Throughout the year, they continued to send students to the administrators they viewed as “ineffective,” because they felt it was the administrators’ responsibility to maintain discipline. They said perhaps they would get a new administrator next year or perhaps they would be granted a transfer to another campus. They kept waiting for things to get better.

The pattern was the same in other areas. For example, when discussing the lack of resources, the *leavers* said the district was to blame if the materials and supplies were not provided, so they managed to “get by” with few resources and inadequate materials. They voiced hopes that the district would get a grant or additional federal funds to provide better technology or more materials in the future.

In terms of student discipline and achievement, they characterized the students as lazy and not interested in learning. They felt the students’ parents did not value education. Since they believed that students were responsible for their own actions and

achievement, the *leavers* did not feel that any change on their part would result in improvements. They voiced hopes that the students they would have next year would be better behaved or more proficient academically.

In other words, the *leavers* blamed the administrators, the district, the students, and their culture, and they attributed the frustrations in their environment to temporary factors. Louis (1980) contends that when individuals view frustrating factors in their environment as stable, they are likely to adapt their own behaviors in an attempt to eliminate the frustration. When they view frustrating factors in their environment as temporary, they do not change. This seems to be substantiated by the findings.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings suggest that both teacher preparation programs and district induction programs should help pre-service and novice teachers understand the stable aspects of district/campus demographics, cultures, administrative responsibilities, and economics. In addition, there was a marked difference in the way *stayers* viewed students, their parents, and their cultures. Certainly this suggests the need for new teachers to have a better understanding of the culture of poverty.

In addition, the *stayers* accepted personal responsibility for making changes that improved student behavior and instruction. The *leavers* did not. This suggests the need for induction programs that focus on empowering new teachers in the areas of management, cultural awareness, and instructional delivery. Membership on

committees, discussions in peer support groups, and participation on collaborative teams might foster this type of empowerment.

Many induction programs seem to provide information on policies, procedures, curricula, assessment, and teacher evaluation. While these are necessary, of course, the findings here suggest that for the teachers in this study, they were not sufficient. The teachers who were not only well informed but who felt empowered to change what they saw as problematic were the most likely to remain.

Finding 4 – The Role of Mentors and Insiders

Another finding evident from the data is that during the encounter stage, the new teachers in the study who relied on guidance from an insider were more satisfied with the experience of entry-level teaching than those who did not rely on an insider for support. Of all the factors identified by *stayers*, support from an insider was considered the most significant in leading to job satisfaction. When they spoke about the insiders who helped them, they were passionate and insistent that “I wouldn’t have survived without them.”

There was a difference between a mentor and an insider. All of the teachers in the study had officially designated mentors. They were perceived by teachers in the study as valuable for providing the logistics of teaching but not valuable on a social or emotional level. The teachers in the study viewed the evaluative role of the mentor as prohibitive in terms of forming a close bond. In addition, officially designated mentors were often assigned to multiple mentees. This meant they were unable to visit often and

they did not necessarily share a content area with the newcomer. In most cases, they were housed in an office at another location.

However, all of the stayers found an unofficial mentor or insider at their campuses, and it was this person they viewed as most critical in helping them navigate the new culture of teaching. Insiders or “unofficial mentors” commiserated with the novice teachers, shared ideas and experiences, and served as sounding boards and resource sources. Their rooms provided a safe environment in which newcomers felt free to complain, laugh, cry, or plan.

The insider shared information an official mentor might not, such as which teacher unions were favored by administrators or which conversations to avoid in the teacher’s lounge. They also helped the new teachers feel that they were experiencing the same things others were facing. This validated their feelings and helped them realize they were in a position to change things for the better. The role of the insider was supportive and friendly, never judgmental or evaluative.

Implications for Practice

The data from this study indicate a need to facilitate multiple opportunities for new teachers to form bonds with other teachers in a less-structured environment than the school day. In addition, veteran teachers should be trained and encouraged to support new teachers in ways that are social and emotional as well as practical. Behrstock and Clifford (2009) found that new teachers, especially those under the age of 30, learn best in collaborative atmospheres and are more satisfied with teaching when they feel a part of a learning community. This appears to be supported by the findings in this study.

In literature about new teacher attrition, isolation and the need for collaboration are often cited as problems facing new teachers. Suggestions often include “providing better mentors” or “establishing more elaborate mentoring programs.” The experiences of the teachers in this study suggest that administrators need to recognize and address the limitations of mentoring programs in providing the type of support needed by new teachers.

For the secondary teachers in this study, mentoring programs did not provide the type of support they needed most. Administrators may need to facilitate connections between newcomers and veteran teachers in ways that are far-removed from typical mentoring arrangements. This means providing opportunities for insider connections and looking for veteran teachers who exhibit the characteristics most highly valued by novices.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study examines the sensemaking activities of a group of twelve novice teachers in urban secondary public schools in Texas, Louisiana, and Arizona only. Future studies might examine data gathered from teachers in other contexts, such as elementary teachers or teachers from rural schools. In addition, this study focused on teachers currently in the profession. Future studies might include data from those who have already left the profession, since the teachers in the study may not have felt safe to be completely open.

Since the study indicates the importance of practical knowledge rather than idealistic thinking among pre-service teachers, further examination of the structure of

student teaching programs, field experiences, and school to university partnerships might be helpful. Such studies might examine the characteristics of programs that help pre-service teachers develop realistic perceptions of teaching.

Since the participants in the study seemed highly frustrated by the lack of administrative support, additional studies about the characteristics of administrators who are perceived by new teachers as supportive in contrast to the characteristics of administrators who are perceived as non-supportive might reveal ways to improve higher education programs in educational administration. In addition, research about the factors impacting this perception (i.e. age, years of experience, ethnicity, and gender) might be of benefit to districts in placing the most supportive administrators with novice teachers.

Since the support of the “insider” or unofficial mentor was such a significant factor for the *stayers*, further studies examining the differences between the official mentors and the insiders might be of value to those who design induction and support programs for new teachers. In addition, it might be beneficial to examine three aspects of insider support. These include (a) the characteristics of effective insiders, (b) the types of support they provide that is viewed as critical by novice teachers, and (c) ways administrators might facilitate the connection and communication between novice teachers and the insiders who might support them.

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APPENDIX A**THE NOVICE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE IN SENSEMAKING
AND SOCIALIZATION - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe your typical teaching day.
2. As a beginning teacher, what were your expectations about a typical day as a teacher?
3. In what ways (if any) is the teaching experience just as you expected? In what ways (if any) is the teaching experience different from your expectations?
4. In what ways (if any) is being a teacher frustrating? In what ways (if any) is being a teacher rewarding?
6. Describe people at your school who have been helpful to you (if any). In what way have they helped you?
7. Describe people at your school who keep you from doing what you need or want to do (if any). In what ways do they make things difficult for you?
8. How do you know what to teach?
9. How do you know where to get help if you need it?
10. What advice would you give to someone considering a teaching career?

VITA

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