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# Teaching with Passion and Compassion in Challenging Times: A Narrative Inquiry into Elementary Teachers' Experiences in Georgia

Erin Scroggs

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TEACHING WITH PASSION AND COMPASSION IN CHALLENGING TIMES: A  
NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE IN GEORGIA

by

ERIN PEAVY SCROGGS

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This study explores how teachers maintain their passion and compassion for teaching in spite of the impact of work-related challenges and subsequent obstacles upon their personal and professional lives. While much research has been conducted into teacher stress, very little has been done to connect the effects of stress on teachers' health and passions for teaching. Abby, Nick, Passion, and Anna, four elementary school teachers from different areas, counties, schools, and school districts in the State of Georgia, participated in the study. Theoretically, I draw upon an array of works such as *teaching towards freedom* (Ayers, 2004, 2010, 2016), *teachers as intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b; Giroux & McLaren, 1988), *the courage to teach* (Palmer, 2007), *when teachers face themselves* (Jersild, 1955), *emotions of teacher stress* (Carlyle & Woods, 2002), *why we teach now* (Nieto, 2003, 2008, 2014), and *why great teachers quit* (Farber, 2010). I also draw upon the literature that explores emotions as a response (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994; Frijda & Mesquita, 1998; Day, 2004), race and education (Love, 2019), gender and education (McGrath, Bhana, Van Bergen, & Moosa, 2019), COVID-19: A new challenge (Carvalho & Hares, 2020), the effects of stress (Lazarus, Deese, & Osler, 1952; Selye, 1956; Lazarus and Lazarus, 1994), teachers and stress (Figley, 1995; Travers and Cooper, 1996), understanding passion (R. Vallerand, personal communication, July 1, 2016, September 3, 2018),

and teaching with passion (Hargreaves, 1998; Day, 2004; Phelps & Benson, 2012).

Methodologically drawing upon narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; He, 1999, 2003, 2021a; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion & He, 2008; Clandinin & Caine, 2016; Sharma & Phillion, 2021), I gather the stories from my participants through semi-structured participant interviews, informal conversations, phone and e-mail communications relevant to the resulting effects of job challenges on their professional and personal lives. Five findings have emerged from my research. Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they build personal and working relationships with their students. Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they work in a positive school environment where teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and community members support one another. Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they maintain a healthy lifestyle and find ways to reduce their stress. Teachers remain passionate and relentless when they continue to learn and grow and further support their students even in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic. Teachers would remain in the classroom for longer periods of time if they felt supported, heard, and cared about with the intent to make a difference in the lives of children, which was the reason why they chose to teach. Listening to and learning from the stories from my participants help dive into the emotional, intellectual, moral, and physical aspects of teaching to sustain passion for teaching (e.g., Ayers, 2004, 2016a, b; He, 2010, 2018, 2021; Nieto, 2003, 2008; Palmer, 2007; Schubert, 2009) to invigorate the teaching profession in an era of fear, injustice, and political uncertainty.

**INDEX WORDS:** Passion, Narrative Inquiry, Georgia, Challenges, Experience, Stress, Anxiety, Teachers, Education, COVID-19, Teacher retention

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B.S., Auburn University, 2005

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is first and foremost dedicated to my husband, Tyler. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for the journey you have taken with me. I know we signed up for this together, but you were selfless in giving up much of our time together to support my dreams. Thank you for your patience during the long nights and stressful days. Thank you for taking on more than expected and making me work even when I was being stubborn. Thank you for always bringing a smile to my face and helping me find joy in each day. Thank you for loving me unconditionally. I know that achieving this goal of earning my doctorate would not have been possible without your love and support. I will never be able to express how grateful I am for you, your support, and love. You are an amazing husband and friend! I am thankful for you each and every day. It is now our turn and our time to enjoy more of life together. I love you unconditionally!

It is also dedicated to my parents, Tom and Rita Peavy, who have supported me through the many milestones in my life. You have always been my encouragers and believed in me even when I struggled to believe in myself. Thank you for supporting my dreams and lending a hand to read papers, edit, or just provide a pep talk. I know that many accomplishments in my life, including this one, would not have been possible without you both by my side. Thank you for your endless love and helping me develop the strength to go after my dreams and never give up. There do not seem to be enough words to thank you and show my appreciation and love for everything you have done for me throughout my life. I love you both!

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## PROLOGUE

On June 17, 2018, I received the news no teacher would ever want to receive. Three of my students were in a serious accident the night before, and two succumbed to their injuries. While I am neither a mother nor the mother of the boys, they were my children, my boys. I had known them for several years and had worked with them closely on a daily basis. We had shared hugs, smiles, congratulations, moments of pride, struggles, frustrations, and the words “I love you,” which were never spoken lightly.

An accident had occurred that no one had expected or imagined. The boys, 2 brothers and their cousin, were attending a Father’s Day event. As the boys stood watching, they were struck by a participating truck that malfunctioned and went off the track. I struggle with the loss of my two students, brothers Ryan Cole Moore and Justin Baily Moore. They entered my life as my classroom students, and both hold a special place in my heart. I can still see Justin's smile as he came into the school and walked over to hug me each morning. I can still hear his voice, "Good morning Mrs. Scroggs." "Good morning Justin, have a great day." "You, too." This exchange became routine throughout the years. I can still imagine Justin wearing his camouflage jacket, walking down the hallway. When he looked like he was having a rough morning, I made sure that I spoke to him, and I routinely asked about Ryan, his big brother. Ryan was in my third-grade class in 2013. He spoke little but worked hard. He had a drive that most teachers would love their students to internalize. Ryan was loving and was always willing to help in the classroom. After changing grade levels, his younger brother Justin was in my first-grade class the following year. Justin was the fun-loving young boy who wanted to be involved in everything around him. He was the student that kept you on your toes while making you smile because his humor and charisma were so appealing.

When I first entered teaching, I knew there was more to the profession than what happened in the classroom. However, I was not aware of how close teachers could be to students and their lives outside of the classroom. I sit here with tears in my eyes as the images of my students permeate my mind. When I began teaching elementary school, I never imagined I would tell a story relating to the loss of my students, and I never thought about hearing a parent respond with, "I can't believe they are gone."

Teachers endure challenges, and I have faced many. The news I received the morning of June 17, 2018, has been the most challenging experience to overcome in my career. I attended the funeral of Ryan and Justin to say my final goodbye. I always promised Justin I would watch out for him and check on him even after he left my school. My final check-in was standing weak-kneed at his graveside, having no words, and filled with grief. Each day I continue my search for understanding and healing.

Comprehending how a teacher or parent copes with the death of a child is difficult. Words fail to explain my personal grief and my pain for the parents of children who have died or been injured. My experience with Ryan's and Justin's deaths has been a humbling, awakening for me. My eyes have been opened to the additional challenges that teachers experience. I cannot imagine how another teacher would respond, but I believe Ryan and Justin would want me to use their story to help others. As days turn into weeks and months, I remember my time with Ryan and Justin, and I trust that I was a teacher who they considered to be passionate and compassionate. I hope I was able to touch their lives as much as they did mine. This major event deeply influenced my life, but as I thought about my career, I realized other events also impacted the way in which I teach, relate to students and co-workers, and the reason I believe the voices of teachers are an essential part to improving teaching for future generations.

In my third year of teaching, a first year teacher joined our faculty. I had sat in on his interview the previous year, so I was somewhat familiar with the gentleman. He worked hard throughout the school year trying to stay afloat, as is common with new teachers. I checked on his progress and tried to offer suggestions and support throughout the year. I was not his mentor, but I felt, as a fairly new teacher myself, I could offer possible solutions to his problems. The following school year, the teacher returned, but began having personal difficulty handling the stress of the classroom. He felt overwhelmed and like the walls of the classroom were closing in on him. He came to work each morning and at a certain point in his drive, his anxiety began and became all consuming. There were days he could not begin the day with students because of his anxiety and there were some days he made it a few hours before having to be taken home. His anxiety was so overwhelming, he was not allowed to drive himself. The anxiety became debilitating, but at the same time, he did not know what was occurring and why he could not handle his classroom. When talking later, the teacher said that he experienced some anxiety in college but had not had any occurrences for many years. Eventually, anxiety led to depression. He was unable to work due to the undiagnosed anxiety which led to frustration and sadness which ultimately resulted in depression. Each day was a struggle to wake up, get out of bed, make it to work just to be sent home again. Eventually, he had to take a leave of absence from teaching and worked to receive help to control and balance his emotions. When the time came to return, the substitute said that she would work with him in the room so he could work his way slowly back. This was also suggested by the physician treating the anxiety and depression. The school district and administration had other ideas. The teacher was called in to the superintendent's office and given an ultimatum. The teacher was told you either go back full time right now or resign without penalty to your teaching certificate. The teacher was given no



other options nor were the orders of any doctor considered when this ultimatum was made. The teacher ultimately resigned because he was not sure if he was completely ready to return to a classroom full time nor was he sure that the progress he made outside of the classroom would continue once the stress of teaching returned. The teacher, also being just over a year into his career, was not sure how to handle the abrupt meeting. He was not given an opportunity to make an informed decision or consult with anyone outside of the office. The life changing decision was met with no sympathy or concern for the teacher's well-being. He was forced out of the classroom and the profession with no regard and life moved on as if this teacher did not exist. Meanwhile, the teacher, now having lost his job due to the anxiety that resulted from the job was on his own to continue to heal and plan his future. The school district offered no support, no help, no guidance through any of the difficulties this teacher experienced.

This teacher, who I worked with for a little over a year changed my life in numerous ways. First, he showed me that anxiety and depression is real and can happen to anyone at any time. He also taught me that anxiety and depression are not to be feared if the individual receives the needed support and treatment to help them manage their emotions. In addition, I was taught that it is important for me to share my emotions, especially in relation to work and not to hold my emotions in because they could cause further health problems. And the teacher who entered my teaching life for a short period of time has remained by my side for the last eleven years. Tyler and I married four years after the events that caused him to leave the classroom and while he has moved on and found a career he loves unconditionally, there are still times we talk about the day he was told to leave and never return as a teacher. Sadly, we will never know the type of teacher Tyler could have become or the difference he could have made in the lives of his

students, but the decision to leave was made by people who found it easier to have him disappear than support him through a difficult time in his life and work to keep him in the profession.

The experiences I have had with the loss of Ryan and Justin and being with someone who once taught but was ultimately forced out of the profession have had major impacts on my life and my career. Due to this, my interest in teacher passion and why teachers choose to leave the classroom were furthered. These events ultimately led me to focus my research on challenges teachers experience in their careers and how teachers maintain their passion for teaching.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose of the Study**

Many teachers discover their passion for teaching at a young age. They may be influenced by a family member, but their passion may also be discovered through positive or negative experiences with former teachers. However, having passion does not indicate that challenges will not occur. Since challenges are part of life, teachers understand that challenging experiences will occur in the classroom as well, but many believe that their passion for teaching will help them endure the difficulty they experience. Consequently, while undertaking a challenge, obstacles may occur which attempt to impede the progress of the task. In turn, certain obstacles may become new challenges for an individual to address. As a teacher, the required curriculum is arduous because teachers must develop appropriate methods to disseminate required information to their students. After receiving the curriculum standards, teachers analyze and order the standards before preparing their lessons. Despite the prior planning, obstacles may occur that prevent the completion of a lesson, which in turn, prevents the teacher from meeting the challenge of implementing the required curriculum. During a lesson, teachers may experience obstacles related to student behavior, outside classroom interruptions, unexpected time constraints, and lack of prior student knowledge, to name a few. The obstacles encountered while teaching a lesson may then become new challenges for a teacher to address. However, the progress of managing new demands may also be hindered with unexpected obstacles. Additionally, teachers may experience challenges related to their gender and race. There are few male teachers in an elementary school setting, so when that occurs, they may have different expectations of how to act or tasks to complete. Male teachers may be asked to direct traffic, lift

heavy items, address concerns with male students, or lead committees in the school. In addition, male teachers may receive more inquiries from parents, especially from those with young daughters. Furthermore, some teachers experience challenges due to their race, especially if they work in a predominantly white community. Some teachers may feel pressure to change how they speak and act to fit in and some feel like they become a representative for their entire race. Teachers of color may experience direct questions related to racial issues and feel as if they are expected to have all the answers and solutions. Additionally, some teachers of color have had challenges finding a job outside of an urban school setting or a Title I school. Male teachers of color are more often seen as custodial or maintenance workers, so they are pre-judged before ever arriving for an interview. Male teachers and teachers of color may have an immense passion for teaching, but the excess of challenges they experience may motivate them to leave the profession. Sadly, despite the passion many teachers possess, they choose not to remain in the classroom. As a result, the purpose of this study was to explore how work-related challenges and subsequent obstacles affected teachers' personal and professional lives but not their passion for teaching.

### **Autobiographical Roots**

My autobiographical roots, like many teachers, are linked to my personal experience of becoming a teacher. My dad, an educator, was the man I admired throughout my childhood. Growing up, my dad experienced many individuals who did not believe in his abilities, and obstacles such as poverty blocked his pathway, so he carved out his own educational journey. He chose the military and education as the way to make a better life for himself and his family. His journey included working with prison inmates for thirty years, adult psychiatric patients, and adolescents with behavior disorders and learning disabilities. Throughout his career, he

continued to pursue higher educational degrees and teach while enduring the stress and consequences of working in state institutions. He was my first inspiration to become an educator.

When I began elementary school, I was not the student most teachers would dream of having in their classes. I was lazy, talkative, and easily distracted. I had little concern for learning. If I did not learn something quickly, I abandoned hope. I often received unsatisfactory scores for following directions and listening attentively, which meant I enjoyed talking to others rather than listening to my teachers. I was not motivated. I did not feel smart, nor did I feel that my teachers believed I was smart. After three years of struggling, my life changed.

On the first day of third grade, I met Mrs. Smith. As my third-grade year progressed, I found myself talking less and becoming more withdrawn in class. I changed from "talks too much" to "hardly talks at all," and something else began to change in my life. Grades became important to me, and most of all, Mrs. Smith's opinion became important to me. She was my encourager and coach. She never let me give up on myself, and she helped me find confidence in myself. It was in my third-grade classroom that I found my passion. I wanted to be a teacher! At the time, I wanted to be Mrs. Smith, but later my passion changed to wanting to make a difference in struggling students' lives and be their coach. I wanted to change students' lives, just as Mrs. Smith had changed mine. It was my desire to work with young children, especially those who struggled in school. I yearned to help children find their interest and help them understand that struggling does not mean the lack of achievement. Mrs. Smith's classroom is where my passion for teaching developed.

After completing elementary school, I went through middle school keeping my head down and hoping not to stand out in the crowd. When I went to high school, other students were developing a plan for their futures, and I was working on mine. My senior year, I enrolled in

Teacher Cadet, a class that allowed seniors to experience the education profession to determine if it was a potential career path. The second semester of Teacher Cadet concluded with full-time support teaching at the level of my choice, and I chose the elementary level. My Teacher Cadet class was my introduction to education, and I loved every minute of working in the classroom. The Teacher Cadet course confirmed my passion for teaching, and I did not doubt that education would become my career.

After graduating from high school, I received a letter from Ms. Starling, my Teacher Cadet teacher. She wrote about the lasting impression I made on her during my senior year. She spoke of me as being confident, creative, and enthusiastic. These are words I would never have chosen for myself at the time. I keep her final words with me to this day, "but as you forge ahead with your dreams, stay strong in the belief you have in yourself." Little did I know I would have to continue to believe in myself even when circumstances of life may have derailed my future, and when my body was struggling to continue teaching.

Through the years, I never questioned my desire to teach. I continued to work hard through school; and while I was never the top of any class, I maintained my grades and became a college graduate. My undergraduate years seemed to fly by, and finally I was ready to begin my teaching career.

I stood in my own classroom, full of hopes and dreams for the difference I would make in the lives of the children ready to enter. I worked hard all summer preparing for my incoming second-grade students. This was it—my dream come true! Everything was in perfect order on the first day, and I was ready for a fantastic year. I worked hard every day; I had my lesson plans turned in on time, and I stayed late at work to keep up with requirements. It was not enough. My passion was not enough. I did not receive a contract for another year. I was not enough, or so I

thought. As I stood waiting to leave the school for the final time, my assistant principal told me, "It wasn't you. Keep doing what you are meant to do." At that moment, my passion for teaching was flickering like a candle burning low at midnight. I questioned the love, devotion, desire, and passion I had spent my life preparing to share with students. My dream had always been to teach, and now a principal told me I was not good enough; I had not been enough. I lost the belief in myself, and the belief that Ms. Starling encouraged me to maintain was gone. My life felt shattered, and teaching did not seem to be in my future any longer. A fourteen-year dream was demolished in a second.

That summer, I struggled to find my passion. I thought about other professions, but none appeared to be something I would genuinely love. I reluctantly began applying for teaching jobs for the next school year, even though I was not interested in teaching at that time. Like many new teachers, after only one year in the classroom I was enroute to becoming a statistic, like the 44% who leave the profession within the first five years. The person who encouraged me during that period was my dad, the man who never let "no" stop him from pursuing his goals. In July of that year, I received a phone call from a principal who wanted to arrange an interview for a teaching position. Even though I was reluctant, I agreed to accept and travel for the interview. When I met with the assistant principal at the school, I immediately felt as if I had gone back in time to my own elementary school. I almost expected to see Mrs. Smith standing in the hallway, greeting me as I toured the school. The smell of the school that was built in the 1960s and had been closed for the summer took me back in time. Was this where I would find my passion again? After receiving a contract offer, I wrestled with my thoughts and emotions, but ultimately, I chose to teach once again.

When the new school year began, I stood in an old, musty-smelling classroom, seeking to find the passion that had been torn from me just a few months prior. While I was full of hopes and dreams for my future students, I continued the battle to find faith in myself. As before, everything was in perfect order on the first day of school, and I was ready for a year filled with the unknown of a new school, a new community, and new living arrangements. I continued to question myself most of the year; but when in doubt, I thought of the enormous smile on my new principal's face when we met, and he told me, "You are going to fit in just fine here." He encouraged me and was my coach. He believed in me when others let me down, including myself. He supported me and saw me as a leader. He was my strength through tough times during that year. As much as I had the desire to make a difference in students' lives, other individuals were doing the same in my life. I had finally made it! This was the dream I had worked so hard for and the type of school in which I had longed to teach. It was old, but it was full of excellent teachers and students, and it was all mine! That school year, I found my passion for teaching once again with the help of many educators.

During my second year of teaching, I began having unexplained abdominal pains. I visited numerous doctors who could not provide answers. Finally, after numerous tests, I was diagnosed and told, "It's stress." I was in complete disbelief and resorted to denial. I did not want to believe that stress could cause such debilitating pain. I continued to teach and worked to hide the excruciating pain that at times overwhelmed my body. I did not want my students or my co-workers to view me as weak or incapable of completing my job requirements.

After three years, the school that gave me a second chance as a teacher was scheduled to be demolished, so I transferred to a newly built school within the school system. I continued to work and endure many painful episodes over the next six years. I taught first through fourth



grades, and even though the pain was not always constant, it remained. I also continued to visit doctors during this time because I believed stress could not cause the pain I experienced. Each test continued to come back with negative results. As far as the doctors were concerned, I was healthy. After eight years as a homeroom teacher, I had the opportunity to use my master's degree and transition into a technology teaching position. In this setting, I taught six classes a day that ranged from kindergarten through fifth grade. A few months into the school year I was asked about my abdominal pain. I realized I had not recently experienced any painful episodes and I have continued to be pain free. The debilitating episodes I experienced up to that time had disappeared as quickly as they appeared. I later transitioned from my technology position to be an intervention specialist, and the pain has not returned. While my current teaching position includes a different type of stress, I found a teaching position where my health, job stress, and passion for teaching work together and allow me to continue being available for my students.

In March 2020, COVID-19, a pandemic, changed my professional and personal life. A contagious virus was spreading and there were numerous reports of sickness and death related to the virus. My students, co-workers, and I were sent home on a Friday not knowing this would be the last time we would spend class time together. My school system, like most around the world, chose to make the safety of their staff and students a priority and schools were closed indefinitely. Classes shifted to online or virtual learning during this period, a challenge that many teachers and students were not expecting or prepared to shoulder. The teachers at my school spent a week working on plans of how to teach from home and how to complete their school year. There were numerous meetings, and everyone was filled with anxiety, not only about making the best decisions for our students, but also anxiety relating to an unfamiliar virus that was affecting people throughout the world. The news media continuously reported on numbers

of individuals who were positive for COVID-19, individuals who were in the hospital with COVID-19, a lack of availability in hospitals for COVID patients, and deaths related to COVID-19. My greatest concern was for the safety and well-being of my students, their families, my co-workers, my friends, and my family. Each day I worried about someone getting sick from COVID-19 and the unknown of what might follow. Individuals were asked to stay home, wear masks, and sanitize everything. I had to learn to work from home and support my students the best way possible in order to complete their suddenly shortened school year. At the same time, I had to learn and manage my fears and anxieties relating to all the uncertainties that accompanied COVID-19 as we continued Zoom calls with our students, putting on smiles, and assuring them we would all be okay and see each other again soon. As the new school year approached, there were many challenges, and normalcy was a distant memory. Our community worked together to stay safe and healthy, and we were able to keep our students in school and provide the best education possible while uncertainty engulfed the world.

I continue to teach because of my students and the love I have for being a teacher. My hug may be the only one my students receive that day, or I may be the only adult that is a constant in their lives when their homes are chaotic. I continue to teach to reach struggling students who do not believe in themselves or who believe that no one cares. I continue to teach in hope that I can be the Mrs. Smith or Ms. Starling to a child who needs the encouragement to continue to fight, change their path in life, or find their passion. I continue to teach to fight for my students' voices to be heard and to allow them to share their thoughts and ideas and know they matter. I continue to teach so that my students can hear my story of academic struggle and know that they are not alone and that they can overcome. I continue to teach so that I can be part of students' lives. While I do not know their futures, I can love and encourage them during their

time with me. Though I engage with parents, work on paperwork and lesson plans, assess students, and attend meetings, my students are my priority. I still teach with passion because my students help me be a better person and teacher.

### **Research Contexts and Key Research Issues**

Teachers influence the classroom environment with their energy and passion. Passionate teachers must emotionally connect with their students, advance their professional knowledge, and establish caring and trusting relationships with their students. Teachers who are passionate may feel “energy, determination, conviction, commitment and even obsession” (Day, 2009, p. 4). In addition, passionate teachers may experience emotional or bodily stress because “the processes of teaching and learning are rarely smooth, and the results are not always predictable” (Day, 2009, p. 5). However, passion is not permanent because it may “grow or diminish according to personal and social circumstances” (Day, 2009, p. 5). In fact, the personal and professional identities of elementary school teachers “contribute to motivation, commitment and job satisfaction” (Day et al., 2006, p. 610), so conflict experienced within the work environment and virtual learning environment may cause discontentment and stress.

Stress may produce both positive and negative experiences for individuals. The physical response to negative stress may cause an individual to develop headaches, ulcers, back or neck problems, exhaustion, or heart disease. In addition to the physical symptoms, teachers may also develop behavioral and mental symptoms of stress. Some responses to such symptoms include anxiety, guilt, lack of motivation, sleep disturbance, eating disorders, low energy levels, headaches, and burnout, which affect teachers’ professional and personal lives. Although positive stress, also known as good stress or eustress, promotes brain growth, improves memory, increases energy, helps avoid illness, increases focus, develops confidence, and provides a

meaningful life outlook (Donvito, 2020); much of "the stress teachers are facing is having adverse effects" (Travers & Cooper, 1996, p. 20).

As with many experiences in life, there is no single cause of stress. Specifically, teachers indicate that they are stressed by the amount of work they sustain, student behavior, limited opportunities for promotion, inadequate working conditions, and substandard relationships within the work environment (Travers & Cooper, 1996). Moreover, due to a once in a lifetime pandemic that began in 2020, teachers were forced to move instruction to a virtual platform and learn different methods to connect with students and their families. There was no warning and no prior preparation or training for teachers, so they had to adapt learning for their students at a moment's notice. Many schools were virtual or partial face-to-face for the 2020–2021 school year, so teachers had little opportunity to form in person connections with their students and their families. Losing the connection with students and learning to work in a virtual environment where other distractions were abundant, teachers experienced a new kind of stress. While no one can predict how COVID-19 will affect schools in the long term, throughout the world school closures due to COVID-19 are affecting students' educations. From March 2020 to February 2021, schools in Latin America and the Caribbean were fully closed 158 days and South Asian schools 146 days (Avanesian & Mishra, 2021, p. 6). These two regions were the most affected by school closures. Additionally, North America ranked highest for partial school closings at 192 followed by South Asia at 71 partial school closures (Avanesian & Mishra, 2021, p. 6). Throughout the world, "schools were closed for an average of 95 (roughly 50 per cent) instruction days" (Avanesian & Mishra, 2021, p. 6) between March 2020 and February 2021. This means that "214 million pre-primary to upper secondary education students in 23 countries missed at least three-quarters of classroom instruction time" (Avanesian & Mishra, 2021, p. 8)

and among the 214 million students, “78 per cent missed almost all in-person classroom instruction time” (Avanesian & Mishra, 2021, p. 9). Additionally, “168 million students in 14 countries missed all in-person classroom instruction since March 2020” (Avanesian & Mishra, 2021, p. 9). As the world begins year two of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be essential for schools to build inclusive and responsive educational systems that are able to handle future disruptions and better support student learning whether face to face or otherwise. It will also be essential for school to build support systems for teachers. Due to the pandemic, teachers are experiencing changes in the school environment which prevents forming deeper connections with students and colleagues. Teachers are also experiencing additional work due to students being in quarantine for lengthy periods of time. Due to this extraordinary event, teachers are experiencing more pressure than before to help students learn new content missed in previous years, teach new content for the current grade level, and support students to review missed work once they return from quarantine.

Even though numerous stress indicators are noted, many teachers “are often reluctant to admit the extent to which they experience stress due to the fear that it may be seen as a weakness” (Travers & Cooper, 1996, p. 3). However, teachers who inadequately manage stress may experience a manifestation of negative emotions. Since emotion is an important part of teaching, it is important for teachers to maintain their emotional health. A teacher who maintains a strong emotional health has the ability to manage the strong emotions they will continuously experience as a teacher (Day et al., 2006), and remain passionate and hopeful through difficult circumstances.

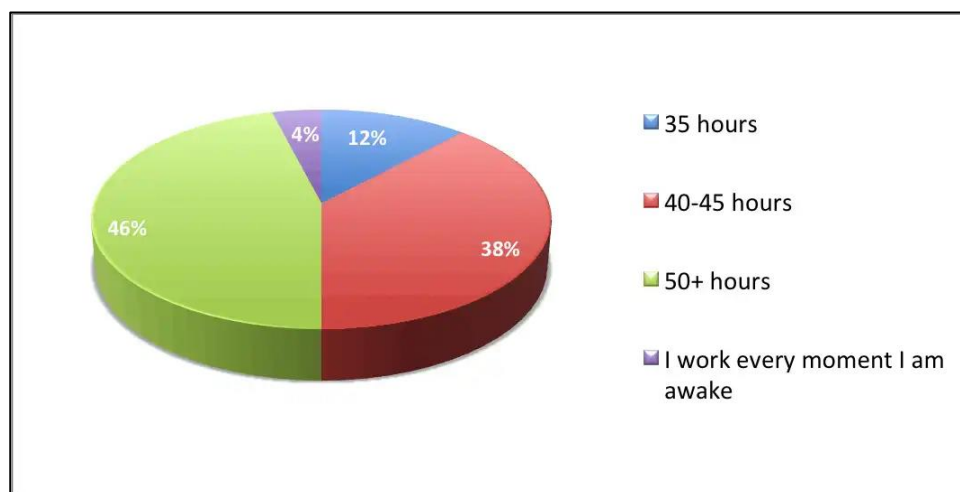
To address teacher stress, The Teacher Burnout Assessment Tool was created by James Anthony (2019). It was a voluntary online survey aimed to inform teachers how close they were

to burnout. The survey topics were found to be symptoms of teacher burnout. In June 2019, it was reported that 12,728 teachers chose to complete the assessment, which led to it becoming the World's Largest Teacher Burnout Survey.

Figure 1 presents information on the average number of hours teachers work in a week. Anthony (2019) found that 46% of teachers work an average of 50+ hours each week and 38% worked 40–45 hours each week, with at least half of the respondents being classified as working unsustainable working hours. Additionally, 12 % of teachers noted they work 35 hours a week, which is not uncommon, but on the opposite spectrum, 4% of teachers state that they work every moment they are awake which is harmful for their health. For beginning teachers, the number of hours required by their new job may be alarming, which may ultimately lead to teachers leaving the profession. Additionally, as teachers gain experience and have families, they may be less willing to sacrifice the time required by many schools.

### Figure 1

*Average Number of Hours Teachers Work Each Week*



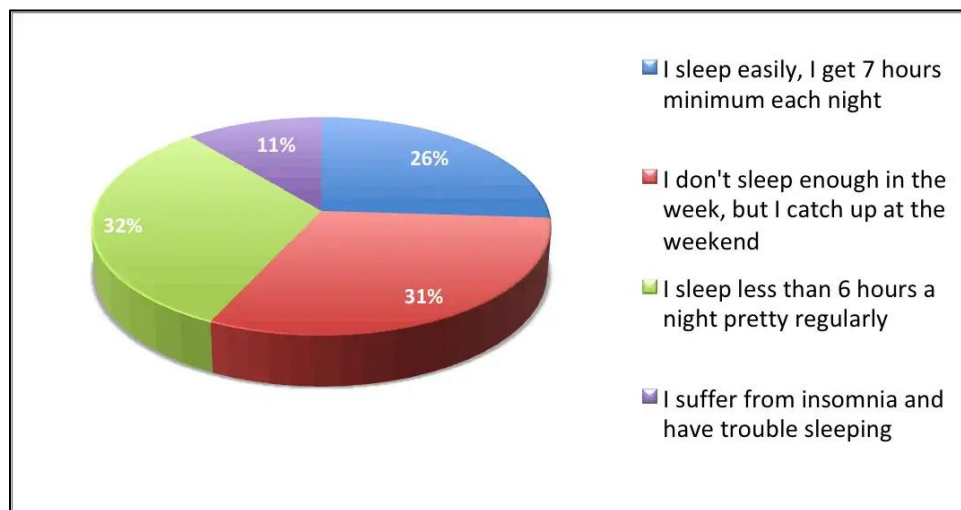
*Note.* The average number of hours teachers sleep is from a voluntary online Teacher Burnout Survey. From "7 Conclusions from the World's Largest Teacher Burnout Survey," by James

Anthony, 2019, (<https://notwaitingforsuperman.org/teacher-burnout-statistics/>). Reprinted with permission.

Figure 2 focuses on the average number of hours teachers sleep each night. On an average day, 43% of survey participants obtain less than six hours of sleep each night but it is unknown how much sleep deprivation is due to work and stress. Additionally, 31% of teachers use their weekends to regain sleep from the work week while 11% of participants noted they suffer from insomnia and have trouble sleeping. Furthermore, teachers who get less than seven hours of sleep at night may begin to experience more health problems, yet many teachers appear to brag on their lack of sleep. Walker (2017) maintains that "sleep is the single most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health each day" (p. 2) and prolong our lives. For individuals who sleep less than six or seven hours a night, the immune system is compromised, which can double the risk of cancer. A lack of sleep is also a determining factor in the future development of Alzheimer's disease. Furthermore, there is a higher likelihood of blocked arteries, which could ultimately cause a stroke or congestive heart failure which increases when an individual does not get enough sleep. Due to a lack of sleep, over half of the teachers are constantly tired which then correlates with difficulty concentrating at work. However, it is important to note that 26% of the participants do sleep easily and obtain the seven hours minimum they should sleep each night.

**Figure 2**

*Average Number of Hours Teachers Sleep Each Week*



*Note.* The average number of hours teachers sleep is from a voluntary online Teacher Burnout Survey. From "7 Conclusions from the World's Largest Teacher Burnout Survey," by James Anthony, 2019, (<https://notwaitingforsuperman.org/teacher-burnout-statistics/>). Reprinted with permission.

Other questions in the teacher burnout survey inquired about teachers' social lives, their tiredness levels, daily moods, thought clarity at work, and co-worker interactions. Overall, the survey showed that teachers do not feel they have much time for their personal lives due to their job demands. It is not surprising then that half the teachers continuously felt tired. Interestingly enough, teachers' moods were nearly equal, no matter the amount of sleep they had or their tiredness level.

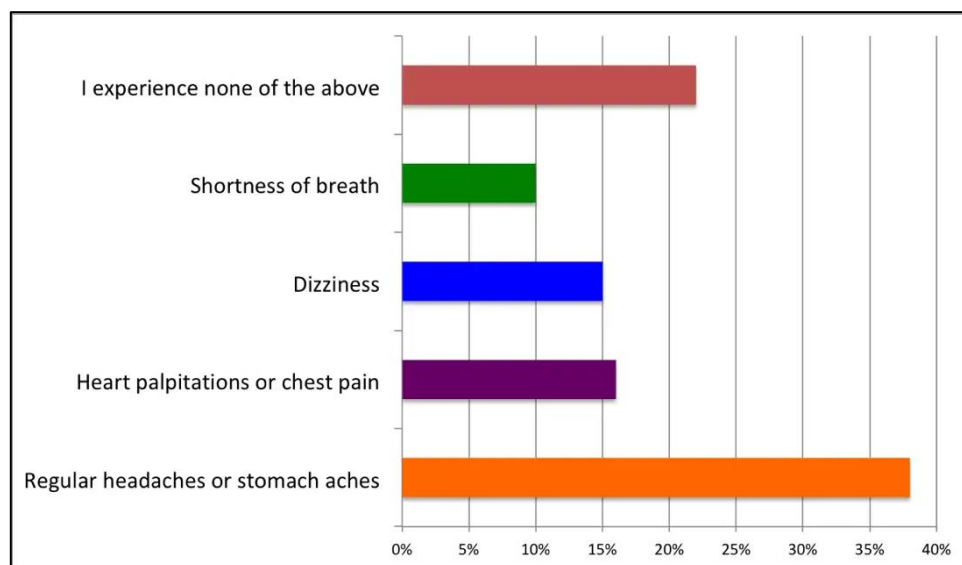
There is a relentless drive for educational improvement, but at the cost of teachers' health. As seen in Figure 3, teachers are also experiencing physical symptoms that often exist because of emotional strain. Teachers participating in the survey experienced physical symptoms such as shortness of breath, dizziness, heart palpitations or chest pain, and regular headaches or stomach aches. Out of the provided physical symptoms, teachers experienced regular headaches



or stomach aches between 35–40% of the time, which was by far the highest percentage of any physical ailments the participants experienced. A little over 15% of participants experienced heart palpitations or chest pains, 15% experienced dizziness, and 10% experienced shortness of breath. Anthony (2019) noted that 75% of teachers who responded to the survey complained of the health problems that are listed in Figure 3. The listed health problems are often signs of an individual’s failure to manage stress. It is also important to note that other physical ailments may have been experienced, but of the survey participants, a little over 20% did not experience any of the physical ailments listed as choices in the survey.

**Figure 3**

*Physical Ailments Experienced by Teachers*



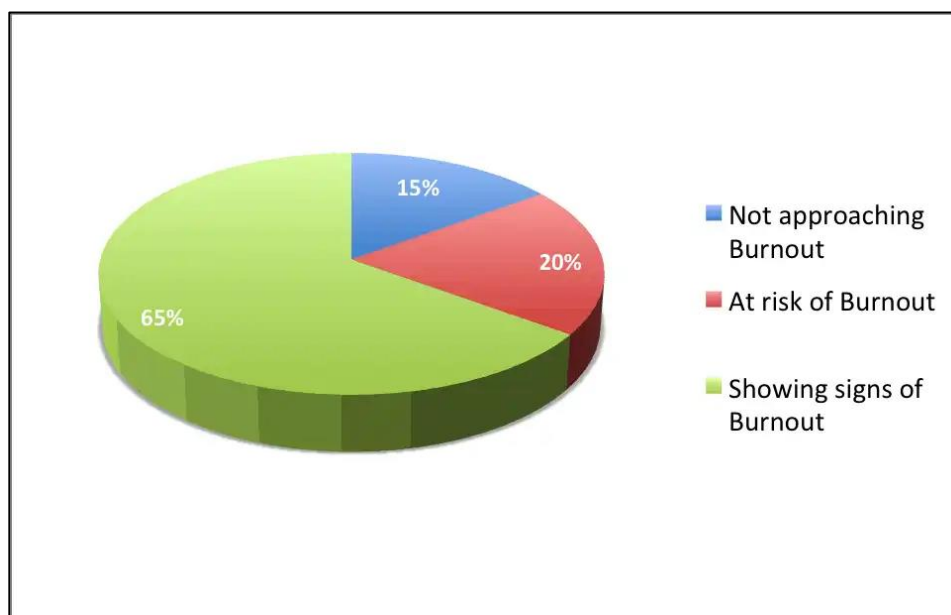
*Note.* The average number of hours teachers sleep is from a voluntary online Teacher Burnout Survey. From "7 Conclusions from the World's Largest Teacher Burnout Survey," by James Anthony, 2019, (<https://notwaitingforsuperman.org/teacher-burnout-statistics/>). Reprinted with permission.

Furthermore, out of the 12,728 participants in the teacher burnout survey, Figure 4 reveals that “65% of teachers responding identified signs they were burning out in their jobs”

(Anthony, 2019), which could precipitate early retirement or long absences from work. In addition, another 20% of survey participants are at risk of burnout in their jobs. Furthermore, when looking at teachers who are at risk and showing signs of burnout, “85% were diagnosed as working ‘unsustainably’ with significantly increased risks to their health as a result” (Anthony, 2019). Sadly, only 15% of the over 12,000 teachers who took the teacher burnout survey were considered as not approaching burnout. When teachers are unable to manage their emotional strain adequately, not only will instruction suffer but also the well-being and achievement of students will be impacted.

#### Figure 4

*Possible Teacher Burnout Percentages*



*Note.* The percentage of teachers showing signs of burnout is from a voluntary online Teacher Burnout Survey. From "7 Conclusions from the World's Largest Teacher Burnout Survey," by James Anthony, 2019, (<https://notwaitingforsuperman.org/teacher-burnout-statistics/>). Reprinted with permission.

Even though there are inconclusive results to demonstrate that teaching is the most stressful profession, there is an agreement that teaching does result in stress. In addition, it is difficult to accept teaching as a caring profession when the health of teachers is neglected. Furthermore, teachers whose health and well-being have been neglected may experience significant long-term effects of burnout. Failing to understand the challenging conditions teachers are experiencing can impact teachers' passions and may consequently cause them to vacate their positions.

While teachers experience a myriad of positive emotions and experiences during a school year, not every teacher is inclined to continue teaching. In Georgia, "44% of the state's public-school teachers leave education within the first five years of employment" (Owens, 2015, p. 3). In response to the high attrition rate, the Georgia Department of Education distributed a survey to current teachers to gain their perspectives. According to Owens (2015), over 53,000 surveys were completed by teachers across Georgia, and over 30,000 of the respondents had 1–15 years of teaching experience. The survey allowed teachers to rank common causes that were potential motives for teachers leaving the profession prematurely. The opinions of causes for high teacher attrition in Georgia public schools are shown in Table 1. There was a 95% participation in the survey question. Participants ranked possible attrition causes from 1–8, with 1 being the most prominent cause and 8 being the least prominent cause for teacher attrition. As described in Table 1, standardized testing and teacher evaluation ranked as the highest possible reasons for teachers leaving the profession within five years. This signifies that when teachers ranked the attrition causes from 1–8, testing and evaluation appeared more often in the 1–3 rankings as most prominent. Following, participation in decision-making, other teaching responsibilities, and benefits/compensation occurred most frequently. This denotes that these areas were often listed

in the 4–6 rankings of attrition causes. Lastly, teachers noted support, leadership, and preparation as the lowest reasons they believe teachers left the teaching profession in Georgia. This conveys that these attrition areas were ranked 7–8 more frequently than other attrition causes.

**Table 1**

*Causes for Public School Teacher Attrition in Georgia*

Causes	Average Ranking
Number and emphasis of mandated tests	3.13
Teacher evaluation method	3.65
Level of teacher participation in decisions related to the profession	4.20
Non-teaching school responsibilities/duties	4.22
Level of benefits/compensation	4.50
Level/quality of support, resources, and professional learning	5.00
School level/District level leadership	5.01
Level of preparation when entering the profession	6.29

*Note.* Reprinted from “Georgia’s Teacher Dropout Crisis 2015: A Look at Why Nearly Half of Georgia Public School Teachers are Leaving the Profession,” by Owens, S., 2015, p. 3, Georgia Department of Education. <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/communications/Documents/Teacher%20Survey%20Results.pdf>

Teachers verbalized their desire to teach without the requirement to excessively test students. Of the teachers surveyed, 14,699 cited tests as the reason they think teachers with 1–5 years of experience leave the profession. Many of the educators surveyed indicated the time spent implementing assessments intruded on teaching and caused unnecessary stress in students. In addition, the survey reveals that teachers think teacher evaluation methods contributed to elevated attrition statistics. In Georgia, teacher evaluation is completed utilizing the Georgia Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES). The goal of TKES is to “provide teachers with

more meaningful feedback and support so they can achieve the goal of increasing academic learning and achievement for all students” (Georgia Department of Education, 2020, p. 3). A portion of the yearly evaluation includes student growth, which is calculated based on state assessment data. The teachers surveyed wrote of injustice regarding the testing of minors influencing a teacher’s performance (Owens, 2015).

Additionally, teachers “wrote in tones resembling frustration and hopelessness” (Owens, 2015, p. 5) regarding decisions related to the teaching profession. Teachers were frustrated because they thought their voices were being silenced and excluded from state level educational discussions and decisions. The teachers surveyed also indicated that non-teaching school responsibilities were a possible contributing factor to teachers leaving the profession early in their career. The survey indicated that the phrase “lack of time” was mentioned by 19,000 respondents. This phrase refers to any non-teaching responsibility or duty, such as custodial work, lunchroom monitoring, secretarial work, counseling services, after school events and meetings. Many of the non-teaching responsibilities are linked to the TKES professionalism standard which necessitates teachers fulfill other roles inside and outside of their classroom.

In addition to the 2015 teacher attrition survey conducted by the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission produced a teacher workforce status report in 2015 which also included teacher attrition of new teacher hires. The statewide cumulative teacher attrition numbers of new teacher hires for Georgia between 2008–2015 are shown in Table 2. A new teacher hire is any individual without a “teacher” job code in the Certified Personnel Information report in any preceding report cycle. Attrition numbers include workforce exits and former teachers who transitioned into non-teaching roles. Table 2 reveals that Georgia hired 10,198 new teachers in 2008, and after their first year, 1,385 (14%) teachers

chose to leave the classroom. In each of the following four years, new teachers hired in 2008 continued to leave the classroom. At the end of five years, 4,457 (44%) teachers whose career began in 2008 were no longer in the classroom. This trend is also observed for 2009–2010. The total new teacher hires in 2011 was 4,722. After their first year, 612 or 13% of those teachers left the classroom. After their second year, 23% left the classroom, followed by 31% and 37% in the third and fourth years after teaching. Due to the report timeline, the new teacher attrition statistics ended after their fourth-year teaching. The 4,978 new Georgia teachers' attrition statistics were tracked through their first three years of teaching while the 4,902 new teachers in 2013 were tracked for only two years. What is clear when comparing new teacher hires from 2008–2014, a similar number, between 12–16%, left the classroom after one year. The attrition percentage is also similar after two years in the classroom where between 2008–2013, 21–26% of new teacher hires from a specified year had left the classroom. While the number of newly hired teachers fluctuated, the trend of teachers leaving the profession each year was consistent. In the three years, 2008–2010, of new teacher hires who were tracked over a five-year period, 44% of each group was no longer teaching in the classroom after their fifth year.

**Table 2**

*Georgia's Cumulative Attrition of New Teacher Hires 2008–2015*

Year	New Teacher Hires	Cumulative Attrition after 1 Year	Cumulative Attrition after 2 Years	Cumulative Attrition after 3 Years	Cumulative Attrition after 4 Years	Cumulative Attrition after 5 Years
2008	10,198	1,385 teachers (14%)	2,339 teachers (23%)	3,334 teachers (33%)	3,919 teachers (38%)	4,457 teachers (44%)
2009	8,153	1,080 teachers (13%)	2,063 teachers (25%)	2,688 teachers (33%)	3,117 teachers (38%)	3,571 teachers (44%)
2010	3,991	631 teachers (16%)	1,032 teachers (26%)	1,339 teachers (34%)	1,530 teachers (38%)	1,738 teachers (44%)

2011	4,722	612 teachers (13%)	1,072 teachers (23%)	1,482 teachers (31%)	1,737 teachers (37%)	
2012	4,978	641 teachers (13%)	1,185 teachers (24%)	1,595 teachers (32%)		
2013	4,902	591 teachers (12%)	1,006 teachers (21%)			
2014	6,406	817 teachers (13%)				
2015	8,038					

*Note.* Reprinted from “The 2015 Georgia Public P-12 Teacher Workforce: A Status Report,” by Henson, K., Stephens, C., Hall, T., & McCampbell, C., 2015, p. 6, Georgia Professional Standards Commission. <https://www.gapsc.com/media/workforce2015.pdf>

Undoubtedly, the attrition percentages for Georgia educators are alarming, but the United States has also seen an increase in the overall percentage of teachers leaving the profession. In 1992, 5.1% of educators left the profession and by 2005, the percentage had increased to 8.4% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Since that time, the United States has continued to maintain an approximate 8% teacher attrition rate (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher attrition percentages in Georgia exhibited similar trends to the country. The attrition rate for the teacher workforce from 2008–2014 fluctuated between 8%–10% after one year (Henson et al., 2015). After leaving the classroom, many former teachers transferred to other positions in the educational field, stayed home to care for family members, worked in other professional fields, returned to school, or were unemployed (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, many teachers, such as the participants in this research, remain in the classroom even though experiencing similar challenges as teachers who chose to leave. Of the four participants, three began their teaching careers during the period the attrition statistics were gathered;

therefore, they are counted in the total number for the new teacher hires the year they began teaching.

Truly, the attrition statistics can paint the United States educational system in a negative light. However, 88% of teachers in the United States “agree that the rewards of teaching outweigh the challenges” (Mayer & Phillips, 2013, p. 26). The primary concern of classroom teachers is the constantly changing demands, such as “changes in leadership, policies, curriculum, and administrative systems” (Mayer & Phillips, 2013, p. 18). The changing demands add additional pressure on time and resources which are already an existing concern for teachers. Throughout the last 15–20 years, teachers have shouldered more responsibility while communities and families have accepted less (Travers & Cooper, 1996). Though a shift in responsibility has occurred, teachers have not been equipped to address their new roles and, as a result, teachers may have encountered stress.

However, the State of Georgia’s 2020 K–12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Status Report shows that “from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020, 90.8% of teachers remained in their perspective role between school years” (Pelfrey & Flamini, 2020, p. 33). Additionally, the same retention rate was noted between 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 “which shows relative stability in the teacher workforce” (Pelfrey & Flamini, 2020, p. 33). Out of the one hundred eighty districts, forty-nine “have retention rates equal to or higher than 90%” (Pelfrey & Flamini, 2020, p. 33), with districts in North and Southeast Georgia having lower retention rates compared to other regions. While the teacher retention percentage has increased, the 2020 Georgia K–12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Status Report noted that teacher shortages are still prevalent in the state. The 2019–2020 school year included 1,455 Georgia teachers who held a provisional teaching certificate or other certificate types. In Georgia, certificates identified as “other” may be content



area focused, which does not necessarily require an educational degree. For instance, the Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) programs offered in schools are becoming more popular. With courses such as Cosmetology, Construction, Culinary Arts, and Aviation, students can gain exposure to their chosen career field. Teachers in particular CTAE programs must retain minimum education requirements, but they also hold a license in their designated industry.

Throughout Georgia, during the 2019–2020 school year, 40% of teachers in the Metro area were non-certified. The Northwest region reported 21% non-certified teachers during the school year and the Northeast region reported 17%. Following, the Southeast region reported 12% non-certified teachers in 2019–2020 while the Southwest region reported 10%. If the teacher shortage was divided equally throughout Georgia, “approximately eight positions in each district would have been filled by a non-certified teacher” (Pelfrey & Flamini, 2020, p. 35). What is evident is the Metro region of Georgia has a significantly higher number of non-certified teachers, so further examination of this area and the teachers that leave the Metro region is needed.

Additionally, as COVID-19 consumed the 2020–2021 school year, it will be interesting to note changes in teacher retention after the pandemic as compared to before.

As purveyors of passion and hope, veteran teachers must become leaders to assist in resolving high teacher attrition numbers as well as supporting the reduction of teacher stress. Listening to the educational perspectives of current teachers and the challenges they experience in the classroom is essential to obtaining this objective. Educators often represent their experiences through stories. The stories can “provide insight and understanding that cannot be directly observed” (Keene et al., 2016, p. 3) and provide a deeper understanding of the teachers’ experiences. Therefore, narratives of experience that include teachers' voices offer “an

opportunity to present the complexity of teaching to the public" (Moen, 2006, p. 10) and allow teachers to share their stories for themselves and others.

The key research issues for me to explore in this study were:

- How does teachers' stress that is related to challenges and obstacles affect their passion for teaching?
- How does stress affect teachers' health and their ability to teach?
- What daily challenges and obstacles have teachers experienced in the work environment, and how are those challenges and obstacles managed?
- What are the suggestions for decreasing teachers' stress and increasing teacher retention?
- How has COVID-19 affected the way teachers teach?
- In what ways has COVID-19 affected teachers' passion for teaching?
- What steps have teachers taken to reduce their stress?
- How have teachers changed as a result of COVID-19?

### **Significance of the Study**

Much has been written about the passion of teachers and teachers staying or leaving the classroom. However, few studies reveal the educator's classroom experiences and how the experiences affect the professional and personal lives of teachers, including their health and passion for teaching. Research with a focus on "teacher health and wellness is needed" (Greenberg et al., 2017, p. 9) with a particular focus on the impact of teacher stress in disadvantaged schools. Additionally, more research is needed regarding teachers' workloads and stress factors (Smiley, 2020). Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic affected the education field around the world, research is needed regarding numerous aspects of student, teacher, and administrator experiences. Research will be needed regarding the long-term effects of virtual

learning on student success, the mental and emotional toll on students and teachers, and how to manage stress after the pandemic. Additional research will also be needed regarding feelings of security and connectedness and the effects on students and teachers during the pandemic. Moreover, further research on how COVID-19 changed teacher passion and affected instruction will be important to determine if a year of virtual teaching, face-to-face teaching, or a hybrid teaching model made a difference in teacher passion. While it is impossible for this study to address every aspect of teacher passion, by gathering stories and insights of current teachers who have remained in the classroom more than five years, it is possible to begin understanding the challenges they experienced and how different challenges impacted their professional and personal lives as well as their students' educations. Furthermore, the opinions and experiences of teaching professionals provide a course of action for the improvement of Georgia's educational system to ensure that future Georgia educators remain in the classroom beyond five years.

### **Literature Review Overview**

The theoretical framework guiding my study consisted of a variety of works. The included works highlight the importance of teachers understanding themselves so they can empathize with and assist their students. The works also focus on environment, stress, and finding balance in order to maintain a passion for teaching. The works demonstrated the importance of teachers' implementations of self-discovery and self-understanding. This process supports teachers in becoming more aware of themselves so they may better serve students and find an appropriate means to address stress when it occurs. The subsequent literature review focuses on research conducted on emotion, stress, and passion. The research describes the connection between emotion and stress and their impact on passion. Additional sections on

teachers and stress and teaching with passion are also included. These sections address how teachers are impacted by stress and how teachers remain passionate.

The literature review research is important to gain a better understanding of how emotion and stress can affect the passion of teachers. Passion is a necessity for teachers to remain in the classroom for an extended time, and certain barriers may stifle their passion. While research exists on the health effects of stress, examining the connection between emotion and passion, as well as the changes that may affect an individual's well-being, is also needed.

### **Methodology Overview**

In order to examine the perspectives of teachers regarding their passion for teaching and the challenges they experience, the research will utilize narrative inquiry. Educators often represent their experiences through stories because they can "provide insight and understanding that cannot be directly observed" (Keene et al., 2016, p. 3) and can provide a deeper understanding of their experiences. Narratives of experience that include teachers' voices "[offer] an opportunity to present the complexity of teaching to the public" (Moen, 2006, p. 10) and allow teachers to share their stories for themselves and others. Participants were teachers throughout the State of Georgia who had different paths that led them to teaching. The participants included two Caucasian female teachers, one African American female teacher and one African American male teacher. As a means to gather participants' stories, interviews, informal conversations, and phone and e-mail communication were utilized.

### **Chapter Outlines**

My dissertation consists of a Prologue, five chapters, and an Epilogue. In the Prologue, I provide readers an opening glimpse into my pain after the loss of two students. The Prologue further introduces my husband who was a teacher, but after a lack of support and empathy from

administrators, he was forced to leave the teaching profession. Through the challenge of losing students and watching a loved one not receive the support they so desperately needed, I was challenged with numerous emotions and questions regarding teacher passion which further guided and emphasized my research interest.

In Chapter 1 (Introduction), I discuss the purpose of my study and challenges that could affect passion that teachers may experience in their careers. I then explore my own autobiographical roots, providing an outline of my life experiences, the influences which led me to teaching, the challenges I have confronted since beginning my teaching career, and why I remain passionate about teaching. Following, I discuss the research context and key research issues related to my research. The context and issues are related to the influence of teachers, the stress and emotions that could influence passion, the causes for public school teacher attrition in Georgia, and the key research questions I hope to answer. Next, I discuss the significance of the study by noting other research that could emerge from this study, while providing an overview and brief description of the literature review and the methodology that will appear in later chapters and conclude with the chapter outlines.

Chapter 2 (Review of Literature) provides a theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework builds upon multiple works that explore *teaching towards freedom* (Ayers, 2004, 2010, 2016), *teachers as intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b; Giroux & McLaren, 1988), *the courage to teach* (Palmer, 2007), *when teachers face themselves* (Jersild, 1955), *emotions of teacher stress* (Carlyle & Woods, 2002), *why we teach now* (Nieto, 2003, 2008, 2014), and *why great teachers quit* (Farber, 2010). Additional literature explores emotions as a response (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994; Frijda & Mesquita, 1998; Day, 2004), race and education (Love, 2019), gender and education (McGrath, Bhana, Van Bergen, & Moosa, 2019), COVID-19: A

new challenge (Carvalho & Hares, 2020), the effects of stress (Lazarus, Deese, & Osler, 1952; Selye, 1956; Lazarus and Lazarus, 1994), teachers and stress (Figley, 1995; Travers and Cooper, 1996), understanding passion (R. Vallerand, personal communication, July 1, 2016, September 3, 2018), teaching with passion (Hargreaves, 1998; Day, 2004; Phelps & Benson, 2012).

Chapter 3 (Methodology) reviews the methodology used in this study. The chapter begins with a focus on narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodology that was developed by D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly. Methodologically, I used narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; He, 2003, 2021; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion & He, 2008; Clandinin & Caine, 2016; Sharma & Phillion, 2021) to gather the stories of teachers' experiences in the classroom. I also discussed how sharing narratives is beneficial in the reduction of stress (Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker & Chung, 2007). Then, I discuss the Three-Dimensional Framework (Dewey, 1916, 1938) which allows narrative inquirers to use interaction, continuity, and situation when theorizing stories. I then provide a general overview of the participant profiles, demographics, and teaching experiences. Following, I discuss story collection methods, how confidentiality was maintained, steps for participant consent, and interview question development. I also provide an overview of theorizing stories which included the use of field notes and interviews and the development of participant narratives. Finally, I provide a story compilation where the chapter is reviewed along with the importance and goals of each section.

Chapter 4 (The Voices of Passionate Teachers) begins with a chapter overview and more detailed information on the participants and how I connected with each individual. The participants' stories begin with Negotiating Research which provides a glimpse into the initial meetings between me and each participant. In this section, I discuss my feelings and impressions during my visits. The stories of each participant are told with a focus on their journey to become

a teacher, challenges in their career, their hope for the future of teaching, and their experience with teaching during COVID-19. Each story follows this format, except for Abby who chose not to participate in the COVID-19 stories. The beginning of each story is highlighted by words the participants chose to describe themselves as teachers. After each story, I provide preliminary reflections. At the end of the chapter, I reflect on the stories of all four participants and what each represents.

Chapter 5 (Inquiry Reflections) introduces the five findings from the study. After a literature review and methodology review, each finding is discussed in depth. My findings are linked to the literature review, and the participant stories highlight those findings. I also discuss the limitations and constraints of the study, implications, or who the study will benefit and what can be learned, and recommendations for further research. The conclusion then restates the goal of the research, reviews my journey and how I connected with the participants stories.

My dissertation concludes with an Epilogue. The Epilogue includes a review of my life since the completion of the study and the loss of Ryan and Justin. It also includes an update on Tyler's journey and what I learned from his experiences that I can now incorporate in my life and my career. In addition, I provide further information on how COVID-19 continues to impact my teaching and my students' lives. COVID-19 remains a challenge we have not yet overcome.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Educational research that involves emotion, stress, and passion is not a new notion. It is important, however, to understand and examine the affects each has on individual lives.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of this study views on an array of works which focus primarily on *teaching towards freedom* (Ayers, 2004, 2010, 2016), *teachers as intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b; Giroux & McLaren, 1988), *the courage to teach* (Palmer, 2007), *when teachers face themselves* (Jersild, 1955), *emotions of teacher stress* (Carlyle & Woods, 2002), *why we teach now* (Nieto, 2003, 2008, 2014), and *why great teachers quit* (Farber, 2010).

Additionally, to fully understand teachers' experiences, research must consider teachers as more than an entity within the classroom and discover how work-related challenges affect teachers' personal and professional lives and their passion for teaching. To develop a study that emphasized the importance of understanding the effects of work-related challenges and subsequent obstacles on passion, I further drew upon bodies of research which focused primarily on emotions as a response (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994; Frijda & Mesquita, 1998; Day, 2004), race and education (Love, 2019), gender and education (McGrath, Bhana, Van Bergen, & Moosa, 2019), COVID-19: A new challenge (Carvalho & Hares, 2020), the effects of stress (Lazarus, Deese, & Osler, 1952; Selye, 1956; Lazarus and Lazarus, 1994), teachers and stress (Figley, 1995; Travers and Cooper, 1996), understanding passion (R. Vallerand, personal communication, July 1, 2016, September 3, 2018), teaching with passion (Hargreaves, 1998; Day, 2004; Phelps & Benson, 2012).



## Theoretical Framework

### Teaching Towards Freedom

Before I can understand the individual stories of teachers' experiences, I must first understand the current structure of schools. Schools were developed to provide insight on societal values that were perceived as important. Additionally, the societal values were a means to transfer the achievements and desires of society to younger generations. Education is the avenue where teaching and learning are necessary for society to continue to grow. Therefore, many classroom experiences come with identical instructions for all students. This uniformity does not allow for intelligent conversations because experiences are different for each student, yet in this environment, all students are assumed to have similar backgrounds and life-experiences. However, students arrive in schools with a variety of unique experiences, dreams, academic levels, cultures, and languages. In addition, for educational reformers and teachers, frustration occurs when traditional educational methods of equipping students with knowledge for test-taking purposes overwhelms the school environment. In addition, testing commits schools to further serving the larger society because tests promote labels of winners and losers. Ayers (2016) states, "test results typically correlate with income and educational levels of families, which means they are first and foremost a measure of zip codes and a test of class backgrounds" (p. 22). The hierarchy of testing produces entangled rules, rigid schedules, and prison like structure of schools provide the appearance of facilities to punish rather than enlighten. However, change cannot occur until the larger society is disrupted. Ultimately, this change requires those who strive for an improved society to transform themselves by working together on a common cause. Teachers can contribute to an improved society by offering

educational alternatives while keeping in mind that change takes multiple individuals working in unison.

Teachers, however, are taught not to question mandates. Teachers are expected to teach toward academic standards which provide students an education society deems necessary. Even though teachers feel their instruction is not in the best interest of their students, teachers are told it is researched-based and are given appealing excuses. Test scores drive the concept of a student production line in schools, and many teachers become frustrated that their students are relegated only to a number on paper. However, Ayers (2004) states, “teaching toward freedom is always more a possibility than an accomplishment, more a project of people in action than a finished condition” (p. 81). Therefore, teachers who choose to deviate from the norm should continuously reevaluate the process of learning in their classrooms. In addition, teachers consider their classroom environments, and they work to transform their rooms into caring, nourishing, confident environments for all students. The environments should support individual student growth while also developing compassion and empathy for other students.

As a process, education should be focused on discovery and the freedom of thought, but there are schools that continue to choose practices involving obedience and conformity. Ultimately, the goal of education should be to open doors, minds, and possibilities as well as provide an opportunity to create an open learning environment. An open learning environment allows students to create, discuss, and learn from others’ lives and experiences. In addition, learning should be a common experience provided by parents and teachers which stimulates thinking and allows children to develop and identify solutions to problems. Furthermore, where freedom in education exists, people are encouraged and empowered to share their experiences and knowledge while considering challenges to subsequently undertake. Those who are

academically free, teachers and students alike, choose to question, demonstrate courage, explore imagination and creativity, while expressing empathy rather than conforming to social expectations. Free students construct their own educations which allows them to work across communities as well as negotiate and become more aware of the world around them. Students, like their teachers, are often works in progress and take time to develop their own thoughts.

Teaching is a journey that helps students understand and strive to reach their full potential, and teachers should work to validate a student's value. However, to make progress and learn, students must first admit there is a level of knowledge they do not currently possess. Therefore, teachers must guide students as they discover and learn rather than directly manipulate learning. Ayers (2004) states that teachers must "become students of their students" (p. 42). Teachers should allow students to be informational resources, lecturers, thought provokers, educators, activists, and students. Teachers should also work in partnership with their students and interchange responsibilities. However, teachers are often caught between knowing what is best for their students and completing the requirements of their contracts. The multi-layered decisions placed on teachers are becoming recurrent which damages teacher-student relationships. Sadly, authentic teacher-student relationships are rare because of complex pressures teachers encounter. For instance, professionalism, a term teachers continuously hear, can promote "rewards and punishments, create distance, and inevitably, contempt" (Ayers, 2004, p. 54) among teachers and students. Professionalism includes the requirement for student assessment and evaluation along with formal judgements of students that are not always accurate. Authentic teacher-student relationships are also hindered by the tension of professional conflict. Teachers will rarely take the side of a student over a co-worker which makes authentic teacher-student relationships difficult to maintain. Additionally, teachers experience pressure

between their personal circumstances and their curriculum. Teachers, especially those who teach a specific discipline, are usually passionate about their subject matter. However, the students and their individual growth must be the primary responsibility in the classroom, so teachers must find a balance between their students' needs and passion for their academic discipline. The severed relationships between teachers and students can only begin to heal if teachers and administrators address the larger idea of education. Education should open doors, minds, and possibilities for all students while allowing for learning through classroom disorder and freedom of action and thought. Teaching towards academic freedom is to consider what could be rather than what has already transpired.

Even though uncertain, teachers care about where the future of schools is leading. It is important to encourage the development of schools where everyone is teaching and learning simultaneously and where students are encouraged to demand a better world. It is also important for schools to maintain an environment that facilitates mental and moral growth. When teaching occurs which incorporates genuine, real-life situations and appeals to the daily experience, students can make personal connections. Once students develop personal connections, they are more likely to retain and implement the knowledge learned. These environments Ayers (2004) asserts are meant for students to "come forward as they really are, without masks, where every person can be both seen and heard, honored and respected" (p. 138). When teachers and students work together, a coordinated effort ensues to create an environment where education and life are intertwined and connected to the world. The idea of teachers and students working cooperatively is a journey and approach to learning that will need a deeper understanding from society and possibly other educators. As teachers continue to be mindful of their students, themselves, their

physical environment, and social mandates, they must also identify the obstacles blocking their voices from being understood and appreciated.

Ultimately, teachers are the individuals who often create change in education, so it is important for them to sustain their passion and compassion throughout their careers. Likewise, through developing a balance between work, life, and daily stress, teachers will be better equipped to guide the learners who enter their classrooms and open themselves to discovering how to make the impossible possible. To make a career in teaching, teachers must find their own path. Ayers (2010) maintains, the path may appear “tedious and demanding, sometimes confusing and uncertain, and yet it is as often creative and dazzling” (p. 14). During their careers, teachers must display a range of actions such as questioning, advising, guiding, modeling, and inspiring, as well as become students of their students. In addition, teaching is more than delivering scripted information of a preplanned curriculum. Teaching also includes pain and conflict, joy and intelligence, and uncertainty and mystery. Furthermore, teachers experience judgement, energy, and intensity while teaching their students to question their environments and thoughts. As opposed to what some believe, teaching requires an intellectual individual who is thoughtful, reflective, and caring. Throughout the career of a teacher, perfection nor finality in learning the job is ever accomplished because teachers continue to grow and develop since life continues to change and, thus, lessons are never replicated.

For teachers to continue growth and develop throughout their careers, they must be in continuous motion, searching for a better way to connect and communicate with their students. Good teachers work alongside their students and maintain high hopes and expectations for their students while often struggling to meet every expectation. Furthermore, teachers are not always able to achieve every goal, and Ayers (2016) asserts, “curriculum, teaching, and education are

arenas of struggle as well as hope” (p. 93). Struggle occurs because people are asked to look at the world, what has been created, and question what is worth knowing and experiencing. In addition, hope provides a look toward the impending future. Teaching is a calling for some, individuals who love youth, being with them, and watching them grow. For others, teaching occurs because they love the world and want to make a difference in the future. Regardless of how teachers choose to enter the teaching profession, they will all continue to grow, construct and reconstruct who they are as teachers and who they want to be for their students.

### **Teachers as Intellectuals**

Teachers are essential to preserving the school organization and conveying the morals needed to assist society. Schools are instructional centers where students learn about and experience the dominant society. In addition, students attain knowledge of status and class differences. While current teachers are not to blame for numerous concerns surrounding education, they can begin to examine their own approaches to teaching. If teachers critically examine their view of school knowledge, they will begin to understand their position in a society of domination and compliance. Furthermore, teachers should ask questions regarding socioeconomic groups and how current goals in education prevent economic and political independence. However, current educational reform movements demonstrate little confidence in teacher competency. Giroux (1988b) asserts that teachers “are the object of educational reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life” (p. 1870). Furthermore, by excluding teachers from reform conversations and then implementing curriculum packages which include teacher proof materials, the role of teachers is reduced to obedient technicians. The materials included in such curriculum packages also furthers the

deskilling of teachers by controlling the decisions of the teacher and removing all judgment.

When teachers are discounted in reform conversations, it gives the appearance that teachers are incapable of making significant decisions regarding educational reform. However, educators should have the opportunity to critically examine assumptions about learning, student achievement, teacher–student relationships, leadership objectivity and authority.

Unfortunately, when teachers are excluded from reform conversations, they are also hindered from understanding the conflict and apprehension that pervades education. In order to reframe the regard for teachers, their work must be acknowledged as critical. Furthermore, when the role of teachers is debated, it highlights them as intellectuals and leads to additional conversations regarding the purpose of education. Giroux (1988a) states, “teachers as intellectuals will need to reconsider and, possibly, transform the fundamental nature of the conditions under which they work” (p. 315). Giroux identified clerical tasks, extra assignments, and classroom instruction as problems to be addressed which would improve teaching. Teachers who are seen as intellectuals should have influence in decisions concerning the formulation of time, environments, activities, and knowledge in schools. In addition, intellectual teachers learn to reflect and enact decisions which empower students to address societal concerns.

However, future teachers are also in danger of being deskilled. In education programs, student teachers are required to focus on methodologies rather than developing critical thinking and reflection skills. Giroux and McLaren (1988) assert, “teacher education programs must begin to develop alternative roles for teachers as radical intellectuals both in and out of school” (p. 2527). By developing radical intellectuals, student teachers begin to link political concerns in schools with larger issues in society. However, for societal and structural change to transpire,

teachers and teacher education programs should work in conjunction to redefine and elevate teachers as intellectuals.

### **The Courage to Teach**

Teaching is a human activity that is developed internally which Palmer (2007) states is “built on movements of the human heart such as empathy, commitment, compassion, patience, and the capacity to forgive” (p. xvii). When individuals teach, they create a classroom community that has open communication so students have the opportunity to interact with the subject and each other. Likewise, the passion teachers bring to the classroom can create a contagious energy that brings teachers’ passions for subjects to the forefront of student learning. Good teachers have maintained a personal identity which allows them to connect themselves, their students, and the subject matter. Teachers who know themselves find teaching can bring joy and happiness as well as sadness and heartache because they are open and vulnerable to occurrences within their school environment.

Teaching revolves around vulnerability, but the internal strength teachers possess can lead to change. Teachers should teach from a place of curiosity and honesty and develop an environment where voices gather to be amplified. As individual voices gather, individuals may begin to question, challenge, and affirm while the teacher listens and replicates for future reflection. Palmer (2007) contends, “passion for the subject propels that subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle” (p. 122). A subject-centered classroom introduces students to the larger world and creates a community of truth. Furthermore, when teachers and students learn together, an opportunity arises to view reality through others’ experiences. Palmer (2007) asserts, “the growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it” (p. 148). As new teachers enter the profession, they should be provided



countless opportunities to watch veteran teachers teach and talk with them about the observed lessons.

Additionally, when teachers feel vulnerable, they begin to detach from everything required for connectedness. In this process, teaching becomes an act and walls are built to protect and separate feelings for personal protection. Many teachers begin their careers believing they are joining a community and profession of educators who will provide support, yet new teachers often find themselves feeling isolated and distant from their colleagues. In addition, new teachers may also find themselves in a competitive work environment where colleagues view them as a threat rather than an ally. Furthermore, teachers are divided by a grading system that isolates teachers from students due to competition that causes students and teachers to distrust their peers and bureaucracy that divides faculty and administration. Some teachers may eventually become cynical of the profession they once loved unconditionally because their initial hopeful spirit towards teaching is dashed by experience. To reduce vulnerability during difficult times, teachers may disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from themselves. They may employ defense mechanisms to help them cope and they begin to act the teacher's part. When teachers turn into performers, they are less likely to connect with their students, so teachers must self-examine within to know themselves, thus becoming a better teacher.

The educational system is also rooted in fear and has the power to divide. Fear can cause distancing between colleagues, teachers and students, subject matter, and even conflict within the teacher. Even though fear is used as a management tool by many administrators, fear can also provide health benefits because it helps people to survive and grow through experiences. However, teachers develop when their successes and personal identity are not determined by others or driven by fear. For teachers to continue and improve their craft, there should be a

dependence on collegial support and honest communication which should be fostered to enhance their professional knowledge. For continued development, teachers must speak openly about aspects of their lives, which is uncommon in a profession where teachers fear personal connections. As a result, teachers often seek safety in the technical aspects of their jobs which keeps colleagues at a distance. However, the courage to teach keeps the heart open in those times when Palmer (2007) suggests “the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require” (pp. 11–12).

As teachers begin their careers, encounters with mentors and students can be beneficial. Additionally, Palmer (2007) states, “any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the teacher within” (p. 30), a voice that “speaks not of what ought to be but of what is real for us, of what is true” (Palmer, 2007, p. 32). Teachers must begin listening to their inner voices to support the improvement of their work and their health. Teachers cannot let fear lead their decisions because it creates objectivism or a disconnection between teachers, subjects and students. In addition, teachers should not be afraid to let their students see them falter or fail. When teachers become vulnerable and allow their students to see failure, students also learn how to cope, reflect, retry, and persevere. The most important teaching that is done occurs when teachers are not in front of a classroom. Students continuously watch the interactions, reactions, and management techniques of teachers. Palmer (2007) contends, “the imprint of good teachers remains long after the facts they gave us have faded” (p. 22). Therefore, it is important for teachers to remember that students are more than data points or test scores. Students are people who will take the constructive and destructive pieces of lessons learned and implement them in their own lives.

## **When Teachers Face Themselves**

One of the most important requirements for teachers is to understand themselves, their history, biases, strengths, weaknesses, and goals. The actions of teachers affect students' attitudes towards themselves and can change how they think and feel about their self-worth. To achieve self-understanding, Jersild (1955) states, "one must have the courage to seek it and the humility to accept what one may find" (p. 83). To sympathize with and understand students' predicaments, a teacher must first experience similar problems that are frequently emotional in nature. A teacher who pursues problems in their life will be able to form a connection with others regardless of age, education, wealth, or professional rank and gain a deeper understanding of humankind. Self-knowledge is a perpetual cycle which may make an individual uncomfortable because they must face emotions which can be disturbing and depressing. Self-knowledge is important because feelings that have existed can be a catalyst for bias which is inserted in the educational discussion and decisions encountered. When taking a deeper look into their own lives, teachers begin to see a realistic view of their students' lives and the mixture of emotions they internally possess.

Due to the infiltration of anxiety in the lives of teachers and students, anxiety should be a central concept throughout education. Jersild (1955) states that "there is anxiety in the lives of all of us" (p. 8), even though many people assume they are not affected. Similar to how people manage physical pain by addressing the underlying conditions, individuals must also make themselves aware of the conditions surrounding psychological and emotional difficulties. Individuals experiencing anxiety on the surface may appear involved in activities and well balanced. However, internally there may be tension, resentment, and discouragement.

Additionally, individuals who experience anxiety may demand more from themselves and others and long for outside approval.

When teachers face themselves, a difficult struggle may ensue because much of an individual's anxiety results from unresolved problems from their past. When this anxiety is not addressed, it filters down to the lives of students. The reward of self-understanding is the expanse of compassion. Jersild (1955) asserts, "compassion is inextricably linked to acceptance of self and others. It is through compassion that a person experiences the highest peak and the deepest reach in his search for self-understanding" (p. 125).

Anxiety in educators and students should not be ignored, and by confronting anxiety, a realistic view of the human struggle evolves. As a result, teachers can begin to support students and address their own needs and personal development. For teachers to know the people they teach, they must also know the obstacles to learning that exist and recognize how anxiety, stress, and emotions play an important role in their lives and the lives of their students.

### **Emotions of Teacher Stress**

Emotions and stress play a pivotal role in the lives of teachers. Carlyle and Woods (2002) state, "stress is a process in which the personal identity undergoes assault and battery, total anomie and ultimately transformation" (p. 55). Stress is inadequately understood and managed, so a single identifiable cause for stress does not exist. An individual's identity provides intrinsic rewards and allows them to connect with others, but when stress ensues, individuals become detached from society. Teachers who experience stress struggle with a loss of empathy for their students, colleagues, and families; this lack of empathy also inhibits their ability to understand and develop the emotional skills of their students. Stressed teachers may also become unable to provide individuals with professional or personal support. As a result, some teachers feel

ashamed and worry about a permanent label and a perception of weakness that would tarnish their careers. So, they suppress their emotions.

Additionally, some teachers feel that showing emotions is not allowed, and if they do, it demonstrates that the teacher failed. Due to this emotional suppression, teachers and their emotional support systems may not recognize initial signs of stress. As a result, the severity of stress may not be recognized until the teacher's body demonstrates signs of distress. In their work environment, teachers experience school structures which can result in negative emotional climates. Teachers may experience school administrations that use bullying tactics to enforce compliance and, instead of addressing organizational concerns, blame is placed on teachers who feel less supported and respected. Such negative emotional climates produce the ability for teachers to have an onset of stress-related illness and feel burned out, which then permeates their professional and home environments.

Since the effects of stress cannot be compartmentalized, families of teachers are subject to seeing work-related stress enter the home, which can affect family dynamics. Stress within the household may also permeate the professional lives of teachers. As a result, the family unit can become emotionally unstable and result in emotional trauma. Additionally, the home has discontinued being a place for teachers to refresh and release stress. Families of educators have seen their loved one struggle with emotional capabilities like decision-making, empathy, and communication which has damaged the family structure and caused a negative emotional climate in the home.

Given the relentless teaching and planning schedule with minimal time for refreshing the mind and body, many teachers experience a loss of creativity that had been a therapeutic outlet. In addition, Carlyle and Woods (2002) stated, "possible health consequences of the long-term

effects of stress caused . . . teachers further anxiety” (p. 69) which prevents teachers from disengaging their minds. To contend with the continuous strain on the body and the mind, many teachers turn to medications. When a loss of connection with feelings occurs, some people struggle to understand how they are feeling and the effects the emotions can have on their health and decision-making responsibilities. The results may also cause teachers to lose a sense of who they are. With many of the challenges and changes teachers experience when encountering stress, an emotional break down often appears to be unexpected. Carlyle and Woods (2002) found that, at such a point, “extensive support systems are required that provide human and material resources to facilitate the revitalization of emotional, mental and physical health” (p. 89).

Teachers who experience stress sustain changes in their physical and mental conditions, but they are able to recover their mental, emotional, and physical health with time. Carlyle and Woods (2002) assert that “all teachers have an ethical responsibility to care for themselves, to nurture and maintain their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being” (p. 162). To support their recovery process, many teachers increase their physical activity, return to hobbies they once loved, and volunteer to help regain a sense of worth. To better support a family member coping with stress, family roles can be readjusted while time and space can be created for the individual to recover. The recovery process is not typically uninterrupted. Teachers may be required to return to work environments that refuse to grant a gradual return or that show empathy for a short period of time but later insist on teachers resuming daily routines. For any teacher, it is crucial to identify positive elements in their work environment as an important piece to self-renewal. The positive elements offer the opportunity to rebalance emotions and re-establish consistency in the teacher’s life.

Since many teachers experience stress, it has become a public issue because it is socially generated through organizational processes. Positive emotions need to infiltrate teaching, so it is important for schools to share in the responsibility of safeguarding the emotional health of teachers. Furthermore, in order for teachers and administrators to understand emotion and recognize the signs of stress, policy makers should prioritize increasing emotional awareness and make themselves aware of workplace stress. Likewise, for teachers to remain in the profession, they must begin to care for themselves by maintaining their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual competences.

### **Why We Teach Now**

Teaching is a profession that Nieto (2014) asserts involves “reflection, planning, nurturing, dreaming, scheming, imagining, effecting, judging, succeeding, failing, improving, and then figuring it out all over again” (p. 9). In addition, teaching also requires imagination, perseverance, and courage. Even with an abundance of rules and continuous changes in the educational field, people continue to become teachers because teaching is an exciting field and for most, their passion. In the United States, there is a shift in demographics, so children need to prepare for a nation that looks and reacts differently than the one their parents and grandparents experienced as children. They need good teachers to help them navigate new experiences. Students need teachers who are willing to understand students’ backgrounds and positions and help them achieve their dreams by asking questions, listening, and asking more questions. Teachers are needed who demand the best from their students and require them to think instead of being handed answers.

Additionally, teachers work tirelessly to develop lessons that support students’ different learning styles. At the core of teaching is hope. Teachers believe in the promise of education, and

their hope manifests through their optimism towards their students, faith in their abilities, and confidence in their colleagues. Also, students recognize teachers who believe in their abilities and, in turn, view success as a result of effort rather than innate talent. As a result, students who relate success to hard work and effort rather than innate intelligence are more successful in school. Students are the reason that passionate teachers continue to teach.

Teachers face numerous struggles throughout their careers. They may face feelings of isolation or frustration. Teachers may experience doubt and question their choice to become a teacher; but when teachers look within and work to understand themselves and their feelings, they may find their passion for teaching once again. Teaching is not easy, and education is continuously evolving. However, there are good, passionate teachers who continue to teach because they love teaching and their students.

There are many types of teachers and many definitions of a good teacher. Nieto (2003) asserts, teachers are successful or good depending “on the context of their work, the students they teach, their own particular personalities and purposes” (p. 38). However, good teachers could be described as constant learners who often think about teaching and the learning process. In addition, good teachers may often engage in intellectual work and develop an expertise and confidence in their field. Likewise, good teachers should have faith in their abilities while also working diligently to find the right approach, lesson, or book to reach their struggling students. Teachers should work to excite their students and make them want to expand their knowledge, and when this occurs, the joy of learning is passed along. Some people believe being a teacher is easy, but it takes a true professional to connect with their students and notice their needs while also being vulnerable and taking a stance that might not always be popular. In education today, the word love is not often heard, but Nieto (2008) contends, “the most effective teachers ground



their work in love” (p. 129). Working in love demands and expects the best from students and believes students have the ability to engage the world as well as a responsibility to help it evolve. To support the development of love, school environments should be created that help teachers develop community and engage in intellectual work to further promote student learning. Intellectual work means that substantial time and energy is committed to teaching which ultimately allows a teacher to gain an expertise in education.

### **Why Great Teachers Quit**

There are many veteran teachers who have developed support systems and strategies that assist in furthering their teaching careers. Therefore, it is important to begin understanding the reasons that other teachers leave teaching. Farber (2010) asserts that in the United States, decisions surrounding education, especially in relation to teachers, are often “made by those who have never taught a day in their lives, and they simply don’t understand or realize the implications of those actions” (p. 3). Due to these decisions, mandated tests have become a driving force in schools that affect not only the students and teachers, but also the school climate. Teachers become overwhelmed with losing weeks of teaching and administering tests they feel inadequately trained to administer. Many academic programs are meant for a year-long implementation and teachers are forced to speed up instruction, so struggling students rarely see success. Alternatively, students who exceed standards have less opportunity for acceleration because more in-depth learning is not available. At low-performing schools, teaching has become focused on academic drills and memorization for the students to become better test takers; and, therefore, long-term retention of material and critical-thinking skills are not developed. Once the standardized tests are completed, the school climate continues to suffer as schools wait in anticipation for scores to return, knowing that some educational programs and

institutions' livelihoods are dependent on the high scores of their students. New teachers worry about the effects of their students' test scores on future employment, but many veteran teachers understand that test scores are not a reflection of the full potential of every student. Instead of allowing test preparation to consume their classrooms, they integrate it into their teaching.

In addition to meeting the obligations of standardized tests and the instructional needs of every student, teachers must also advocate for students' personal needs and make sure they are fed, clothed, and emotionally balanced. Teachers must communicate with parents, possibly multiple times a week, assess students, participate in professional learning opportunities or requirements, attend meetings, collaborate with colleagues, mentor other staff or student teachers, and complete clerical and custodial duties. Along with experiencing a lack of time in the classroom to complete required duties, the teachers' daily schedule rarely allows time for their basic necessities to be met. For example, teachers eat lunch while completing paperwork, grading student work, or checking and answering emails. Additionally, restroom breaks are not built into a teacher's schedule; often, teachers have students for hours at a time without any opportunity to use the restroom. Therefore, teachers utilize support staff to help provide needed breaks throughout the day. For many teachers, the daily routine is exhausting and depletes their passion because they do not have the time to complete all the requirements, so the workload disrupts their personal and professional lives. Teachers frequently leave work frustrated because they continuously receive new expectations and responsibilities without a reduction of prior tasks. There is a perpetual feeling among teachers of struggling to stay afloat, and veteran teachers have learned that the lack of time and feelings of frustration do not subside with experience. While some teachers have found a balance between work, home, and health, striking

such a balance is always difficult to manage and the schedules teachers maintain do not provide substantial time to care for personal needs.

In order to better support teachers, a schoolwide culture of respect is essential. All staff members should be extended equal respect, and disrespect of other employees should not be tolerated. In addition, educators should have an opportunity to provide feedback to administrators, and an established teacher support system should be in effect to alleviate conflict during difficult situations. Much of schoolwide culture is built on the development of relationships, and while problems cannot be solved overnight, many could be improved and solved over time. Furthermore, for problems in education to be solved, teachers need to say what they see and experience in schools. In order to improve the learning and working environments in schools, the school staff, community members, and lawmakers can listen to each other and work together for the improvement of teachers which ultimately improves students' educational experiences. Through additional communication among all parties, a better understanding of emotion and stress involved in teaching, as well as passion teachers bring to their jobs, will be better understood.

### **Other Relevant Literature**

#### **Emotions as a Response**

Emotion is a state of feelings upon an emotional object and includes actions that have an abrupt onset, peak, and then diminish. An emotional object is a person, thing, or event in which an emotion is connected. Furthermore, emotions are tied to motivation and the relevance of an event which can ultimately control behaviors and thoughts, which can interfere and obstruct motivation towards other goals. Frijda and Mesquita (1998) asserts, "emotions always have to do with a call for action" (p. 274) and represent an individual change when confronted with challenges. For

emotions to evolve, an event or antecedent must occur. After an antecedent occurs and its emotional meaning is processed and connections made, appraisal occurs. Furthermore, events elicit emotions when viewed as relevant, and the type of emotion elicited is dependent upon the possibility of having difficulty coping with a given problem. During the appraisal process, complex information through cognitive processing is used more than perceptual cues. Once an event occurs and the relevance is decided, response components are activated. In response to emotional events, the body experiences physiological changes. The changes which occur strain the body beyond common emotional responses, so the body becomes entangled in turmoil.

To better understand emotions, it is important to understand that there are positive and negative emotions as well as emotions that fuse positive and negative characteristics. Positive emotions are identified as happiness, pride, relief, and love; and at times, gratitude, respect, trust, and admiration may also be included. Negative emotions may include anger, fright, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, jealousy, and disgust while hatred, distrust, disdain, hostility, and revenge are also considered negative emotions. There are also emotions such as hope, compassion, and gratitude which have been identified as mixed emotions.

While much of one's daily routine is without significant emotion, when emotion is aroused, it is often anchored by an aspiration. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) contend that emotion and thought in humans are inseparable. Emotions are aroused by environmental demands, constraints, resources, and the proximity to motives and beliefs. Additionally, positive, negative, and indifferent emotions direct everyday behavior because feelings lead to anxieties or peace of mind as well as a sense of security or insecurity. Furthermore, the ability to maintain emotion determines whether an individual can be successful because successful individuals can manage challenging stress without it resulting in distress. However, emotions are at times difficult to

control and are triggered regardless of desire, and different emotional patterns will occur in individuals which suggest a biological connection. For this reason, when an emotion occurs, individuals will have their own personal reasons for how they feel and react.

Emotion can also be viewed in terms of primary and secondary. Day (2004) asserts, primary emotions are “intrinsic states, natural responses triggered by circumstances or events” while secondary emotions are “socially acquired, inextricably linked to our social and self-development in particular contexts” (p. 36). Emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, and anger are primary emotions; and embarrassment, jealousy, guilt, and pride are secondary emotions. All emotions connect in the processes of reasoning and decision-making, so they must be identified and understood. However, in many aspects of teacher education, emotions are discouraged and withheld so schools can maintain a particular facade. Teaching involves an intensive and extensive use of emotional labor and emotional work. Emotional labor involves smiling on the outside while feeling anything but happy on the inside, which could lead to disengagement from teaching and learning if utilized too frequently. In addition, emotional work entails working with students who possess a variety of motivations, background experiences, and learning capabilities. To help develop and recognize a balance of emotions, teachers should reflect and learn to identify, recognize, discern, and manage their emotions. Additionally, since feelings and emotions are vital to teaching, teachers must develop a sense of identity so they understand the impact of their influences on their teaching.

Furthermore, emotions impact an individual’s well-being, physical health, social interaction, and problem-solving abilities because emotions surround significant events in life and influence how individuals respond during events. In addition, emotions reflect an appraisal of an individual and the environmental relationship which could be beneficial or cause harm.

Additionally, there is no consistency when distinguishing emotion from nonemotion. This inconsistency is due to previous attempts to define emotion and disagreement over variables which generate emotions. Historically, the psychology surrounding emotion in academics has been neglected; however, interest in emotional research is increasing. Understanding emotions and how individuals function in nature is beneficial because it allows an advancement of knowledge towards how individuals overcome challenges and confront opportunities in life as well as how emotions are initially developed, which help individuals survive, harmonize, and flourish.

### **Race and Education**

Diversity in schools in America is increasing while, at the same time, diversity among teachers remains stagnant. While data supports the current teacher workforce is more diverse, there is still a journey ahead to balance the diversity of teachers to the students they teach. Many teachers are white, female, and monolingual, which does not reflect the diversity throughout the United States. In particular, out of the 3.5 million public school teachers, a mere five percent are women of color. In addition, over half of Black teachers work in Title-I schools which are often high-poverty and teach a higher number of racial minority students. Additionally, there is a higher assemblage of African American teachers in the South as well as a higher teacher turnover rate. Those who chose to leave teaching before retirement noted concerns of respect and teaching conditions as reasons for not returning to teach. It is essential that universities work to recruit and retain more African American preservice teachers and educate white preservice teachers in methods to teach African American students and students from other racial backgrounds. In order for this change to occur, it is essential to learn from African American teachers and what they gain from their students. Furthermore, white preservice teachers have

little knowledge or expertise of the African American community, nor do they recognize their held racial biases. Therefore, preservice teachers as well as veteran teachers would benefit from growing through a better understanding of race and equity, engaging in conversations regarding biased views, immersing themselves in their students' communities, and confronting biases. Furthermore, it is essential for the insights of African American teachers to be heard because they have a better understanding of racism and racialized identities their students' experiences. Additionally, African American teachers understand their dreams of equity, and through their narratives, other teachers can gain a better understanding why the dreams of African American teachers have not been fulfilled.

Bettina Love (2019) said, "there is one thing that I know with everything I am: we who are dark want to matter and live, not just to survive but to thrive" (p. 5). Love is an advocate for abolitionist teaching. Abolitionist teaching "is the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re) membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools" (Love, 2019, pp. 5–6). To become an abolitionist teacher, individuals must be willing to matter to themselves and those around them and to fight for justice. The complicated identities of those who are dark are complex and intersect with different cultures, languages, races, genders, religions, and abilities, which allows educators to gain a better sense of their students' backgrounds. Intersectionality also provides educators an opportunity to better understand students' challenges, how multiple identities are managed, and how schools perpetuate injustice. Additionally, if teachers are hesitant to address intersectionality, they will never fully know their students' true identities.

Moreover, there must be a collective struggle to reimagine schools as locations where students can believe the impossible and focus on intersectional justice, antiracism, love, healing, and joy. Love (2019) asserts, abolitionist teaching “is built on the creativity, imagination, boldness, ingenuity, and rebellious spirit and methods of abolitionists to demand and fight for an education system where all students are thriving, not simply surviving” (p. 14). In addition, teachers involved in abolitionist teaching are refusing oppression especially amidst their students through working in solidarity with community groups to address concerns of their students and the communities in which their students live. Furthermore, teachers engaging in abolitionist teaching reimagine and rewrite curriculum, protect and stand with immigrant families, and join pro-immigrant organizations in their communities. For the objectives of abolitionist teaching to come to fruition, educators must employ imagination focused on intersectional justice through working with their students and the community. It is important that educators fight inequalities and the educational survival complex where students work to survive in schools that mimic the surrounding world.

Additionally, the rationalization and normalization of the educational survival complex has forced individuals to believe inadequate funding, school shootings, and racist teachers are acceptable. As a result of abolitionist teaching, there is movement beyond makeshift solutions and a focus on examining the educational survival complex’s root causes. In addition, abolitionist teaching asks for accountability for pain caused to others, a restoration of justice, and a questioning of liberal politics. Furthermore, abolitionist teaching asks for teachers to maintain a level of accountability for all teachers to focus on justice, love, healing, and restoring humanity. However, some teachers leave teaching to look for a way to further impact education outside the classroom because they are mentally, physically, and spiritually exhausted. On the whole, it is



important for schools and their communities to work together and for schools to be sites of healing for teachers. As a result, school systems can build schools that love children, respect student backgrounds and cultures, and train and employ teachers who are willing to grow and learn about their students' lives.

### **Gender and Education**

In the United States, teaching once was considered a profession for men until public schools opened their doors to children from differing social classes and genders. In the late 1880s, the teaching profession consisted majorly of women. However, since the early 1980s, there has been an increase in the number of men becoming classroom teachers. However, the education profession has remained imbalanced with the majority of teachers being female. However, men continue to thrive in classrooms and remain undaunted by stereotypes and their gender minority status. It is also assumed that most male teachers will become administrators at some point in their careers, yet that is not always accurate. Many male teachers find more satisfaction in their interactions with students because they believe there is an immense responsibility to cultivate a student's educational experience.

In addition, teaching is viewed as work for women and does not have a favorable view of the teaching profession or schools which are perceived as oppressive. There are three barriers identified as influential in a desire to pursue teaching as a profession: teachers devalue the experiences of African Americans, labeling and stigmatizing, and disrespect by white parents. Furthermore, because African American males are treated adversely, male teachers experience similar conduct which is why it is believed there are few African American male teachers.

Throughout schools in the United States, it is critical that more African American males are recruited into the teaching profession because they are highly underrepresented. To support

African American males to pursue teaching as a career, several institutions of higher education have implemented innovative programs such as Winston-Salem State University's "Real Men Teach;" "Call Me Mister," a collaborative effort between Clemson University and three historically Black universities; and "Ready to Teach," a program offered at Howard University. Educational research, while limited, demonstrates ethnic minorities and male teachers, yet in schools, many students see custodians, substitute teachers, and coaches who are primarily African American.

In addition, it is believed that African American males are not pursuing teaching because it could be considered selling out to teach curriculum that does not represent Black people fairly or accurately. Additionally, there is not a freedom to pursue topics that would engage and empower students of color and African American males would, therefore have to conform and fit a particular mold, which is something many are unwilling to undertake. Furthermore, males may refuse to teach because they are tired and would be unwilling to deal with the pressure and tension of social categorizing and exclusion. While the number of racial minority teachers has increased, there are often more that exit each year. This is not surprising because the structure of schools is often seen as impeding creativity and intelligence of African American male students and limiting the effectiveness of African American male teachers. Therefore, teaching is often considered oppressive, and due to the educational experiences that develops racial minority students' opinions of school, they are unwilling to consider returning as teachers regardless of pay, status, and benefits to future generations.

However, it is important to recruit more men into the teaching profession. It has been asserted that "male teachers are needed in schools for psychological, social, organizational, and societal reasons" (McGrath et al., 2019). Additionally, the male presence may allow students to

know non-violent males who treat women cordially as well as curtail the idea that teaching is women's work. Furthermore, workplace diversity is important because differing backgrounds among employees lead to innovative solutions by looking at problems in different ways. To support an increase in teacher diversity, educational leaders must address underlying factors that deter men and women from entering the profession such as higher workloads, lower salaries, little support, and minimal respect. Furthermore, the addition and retention of male teachers may improve and challenge stereotypical forms of masculinity. By highlighting forms of masculinity, male teachers demonstrate a caring role which will further promote gender representation in the classroom. By diversifying gender in teaching, students, other educators, and all school stakeholders will benefit from the expertise of male teachers.

### **COVID-19: A New Challenge**

In March of 2020, schools in the United States encountered a challenge unlike current educators had ever experienced. Schools began shutting down due to Coronavirus (COVID-19), an infectious and communicable disease which affected public health throughout the world. Therefore, schools across the United States began closing their doors and transitioning to virtual school to complete the 2019–2020 school year.

Throughout the summer, school districts planned for the 2020–2021 school year, knowing that the continuation of COVID-19 would dictate schools' plans. However, district leaders knew that the upcoming school year would not be "normal" for teachers, students, families, or the community. For instance, the Center for Global Development recommended "five critical dimensions of school reopening and recovery: (1) Engaging communities in reopening plans, (2) Targeting resources to where they are most needed, (3) Getting children back to school, (4) Making environments safe, (5) Recovering learning loss" (Carvalho & Hares,

2020, p. ii). It was suggested that school districts should work to establish public trust, manage fears of the community, and utilize the community to determine effective crisis responses. In addition, evidence showed school districts, when planning, needed to account for underlying risk factors such as attendance, economically disadvantaged students, and student-teacher ratio. School safety was another major concern schools experienced when planning for the 2020-2021 school year in the middle of a pandemic. School systems knew that maintaining health and safety of teachers and students would be more important than ever before. While there is little evidence on the impacts of school health and safety measures during COVID-19, it is important that schools remain equipped with health and hygiene monitoring capabilities. In addition, Carvalho and Hares (2020) suggests the need for psychosocial and emotional support in schools after a crisis and for teacher training programs that emphasize social-emotional well-being to improve learning outcomes and student success following a crisis.

After focusing on student safety, districts had to acknowledge and prepare for the learning loss students would experience due to school closures. When schools close for a long period of time, students experience learning loss, with more pronounced effects among low-income families. As a result of COVID-19, teachers took on the role of instructing parents on assignments and then parents were expected to implement these tasks and instructions with their children at home. As a result, neither the parents nor the teachers were prepared to accomplish the multiple challenges of virtual teaching. As a result of a lack of knowledge regarding virtual teaching, teachers spent extended hours teaching and developing activities to post online which caused extensive stress. Additionally, teachers experienced more stress due to a lack of adequate technology, slow internet connectivity, and limited connection with their students and support from parents.

After returning from quarantine, teachers required coaching to support them when facing new demands because teachers were tasked with supporting students who had not studied or completed assignments for nearly five months. Along with helping their students through learning loss, teachers had to work in an unrealistic environment where student desks were to be three feet or more apart, students were to work behind individual shields, no small group work was to occur, students could not share materials or games, lunch was eaten in the classroom, and masks were to be worn at all times students were not behind a shield. Furthermore, teachers also had to adapt content for students who were face to face and virtually learning all the while knowing that each day could be their last together if the school were to close again.

While no one can predict how COVID-19 will affect schools in the short term or long term, throughout the world school closures due to COVID-19 are affecting students' educations. In addition, COVID-19 has extended student learning gaps and put struggling learners further behind, so teachers will play a vital role in counteracting the effects. Teachers must begin to advocate for each student, especially socioeconomically challenged students. To accomplish this, teachers can provide emotional support to students by communicating openly, inviting family participation, and accepting everyone as a member of the school support community. As a result of COVID-19, there is an opportunity to develop new mindsets between schools and communities in order to work together to support students' learning. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to develop stronger relationships between parents, teachers, and schools. In turn, families have an opportunity to gain insight on the skills teachers utilize to teach their students and for educators to realize that parents can be powerful allies. It will be important as we move forward that all stakeholders work together to overcome the obstacles presented by COVID-19 and to create a learning ecosystem to support children's academic and emotional demands.

## **The Effects of Stress**

Stress is found in challenges and opportunities throughout an individual's life and evolves in two forms that are identified as major life events and daily hassles. Major life events, for example, may include death of a loved one or divorce, while daily hassles may include concerns such as "misplacing or losing things, troublesome neighbors, social obligations, inconsiderate smokers, concerns about money, health, or alcohol" (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994, p. 229). While individuals may experience similar events, their experiences of those events may produce different stress-related outcomes due to differing coping skills. Some forms of coping can do direct harm to the body and can lead to illness, disease, or premature death. In addition, any ailment can be affected by stress emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, sadness, envy, and jealousy and can promote health or illness. These stress emotions are said to influence organ function in the body and generate harmful hormones. Furthermore, the harmful hormones produced by stress emotions can affect the immune system and ultimately result in an infection. Additionally, harmful hormones can produce psychosomatic disorders or stress disorders which occur as a result of stress. Psychosomatic ailments may include gastrointestinal distress such as indigestion, bellyaches and bowel problems. Other noted ailments which are a combination of psychosomatic and genetic origins may include colitis, ulcers, migraines, tension headaches, hypertension, asthma, and skin disorders. As with other illnesses caused by stress emotions, there are continued efforts to study and determine the emotional factors relating to infectious illness, heart disease, and cancer. Additionally, Lazarus, Deese, and Osler (1952) maintain the definitions of stress are inadequate because individuals respond to situations differently, and since behavior is unpredictable, "it is never really possible to define a general stress situation" (p. 294).

Selye (1956) asserts that medically stress is “the rate of wear and tear in the body” (p. 25) or a universal reaction of the body to all requests. Previous stress research was difficult to conduct due to not having measurable indicators for assessment until it was recognized that changes in the structure and chemical composition of the body occur as a result of stress. It was also found that the nervous system and endocrine or hormonal system was important to maintaining steady bodily functions regardless of exposure to stress. Furthermore, the bodily systems help maintain bodily functions regardless of exposure to stressors. Selye (1956) coined the term stressor to reflect the factors which can enact stress upon the body and utilized the term stress to refer to the condition. Stressors are not necessarily pleasant or unpleasant, but the effect is dependent on the intensity of demand placed upon the body. Activities such as chess or hugging can produce stress without negative effects. Stress produces a specific reaction that has a nonspecific cause. When stress becomes damaging or unpleasant, distress occurs which is commonly unpleasant. If stress is left unaddressed, an individual may experience hyperthyroidism, headaches, mental breakdowns, premature aging, excessive obesity, and gastrointestinal problems. Stress cannot and should not be ignored because the effects can cause continuing complications even after the stressor has vanished.

An individual’s work environment creates stress which include three forms of stress such as work overload, ambiguity, and uncertainty. Work overload includes having too much to do in an allotted time period. It also includes individuals experiencing too many interruptions, continuous deadlines, and restructuring of assignments due to other duties. A second category of work stress involves ambiguity. Job ambiguity may include unknown responsibilities or priorities, having little authority, and little productive feedback on job performance. Additionally, uncertainty may cause individual’s stress at work. Uncertainty refers to feelings of

powerlessness, surety of tenure, or reliability of a company's future. While work stress exists, it is essential for individuals to find a comfortable stress level at work in order to avoid feelings of boredom or being fatigued by excessive activity. Additionally, stress is associated with any form of work, but that does not include distress. For example, frustration, an emotional factor, is likely to turn stress into distress or harmful stress. When stress resulting from frustration or unsuccessful struggles occurs, irreversible chemical scars accumulate and enhance aging. Studies have shown that mental tensions, frustrations, insecurity, and aimlessness are among the most damaging stressors because these stressors often result in migraines, ulcers, heart attacks, hypertension, mental disease, suicide, or hopeless unhappiness. In teaching, the complexities of the classroom work environment do not solely affect female teachers. However, there are conflicting results if female teachers have higher levels of stress than male teachers. However, in another study of primary school teachers, 50% male and 50% female, it was found there was no significant difference in the stress level of female teachers when compared to male teachers. For this reason, all teachers should develop an awareness of stressors that encompass their experiences in order to move toward emotional understanding.

In addition to job related stress, race and gender may contribute to higher levels of stress among individuals, which can also lead to health problems. However, research on discrimination and health is limited, but current research demonstrates that race related stressors may cause health problems. Additionally, there is inadequate information on the health effects of stress in African American women due to research focusing on individual racism or direct experiences rather than African American women as a whole. Furthermore, there are numerous challenges to gaining an understanding of African American women's lived experiences because influences



such as race, class, and gender shape how an individual may respond to stressful situations and environments.

### **Teachers and Stress**

Travers and Cooper (1996) asserts a stressor is “something in the environment that acts as a stimulus, and is either physical, psychological or behavioural in nature” (p. 13) and can be isolated into three categories: personal level stressor, interpersonal level stressor, and organizational level stressor. Interpersonal level stressors or external stressors are what individuals commonly associate with stress. This form of stressor relates to external experiences such as classroom management, student behavior, relationships, and expectations of other individuals. Stress can occur due to personal, environmental, or social factors, so attempting to understand how stress originated is essential to supporting teachers. When stress occurs, it does not mean the individual is vulnerable, but rather at a point where extreme emotions are being experienced. If teachers do not confront their sources of stress, it could lend itself to other stressors materializing.

There have been previous studies conducted on teacher stress, but many of the findings have been inconsistent. One of the significant contributors to the inconsistency is that teachers are often unwilling to admit they experience stress because they are concerned about being perceived as weak. There have also been studies which demonstrate a connection between work stress and burnout which has been linked to emotional exhaustion. Using the term burnout, though, suggests that a teacher has an individual problem and conjures up thoughts of weakness and defeat. Diagnosing teachers as burned out has led policy makers to implement policies which likely contribute to teachers feeling more demoralized. Demoralization is not a personal problem because it occurs due to work conditions.

Previous research is not conclusive as to which helping profession experiences a more significant amount of stress. The stress teachers experience is often due to being in a stressful workplace environment but only a percentage of teachers report enduring stress. While it has been acknowledged that stress among teachers is widespread, previous research has concluded that teachers do not suffer from more stress related health conditions than other human service occupations.

Job responsibilities can impact employee well-being causing exhaustion, sleeplessness, and adverse health problems. Teachers are also coping with trauma, whether it be personal or concerning a student. There are numerous students who experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in their lives, and because teachers care deeply about students, they become involved in their lives. As a result of their closeness to students, teachers are also exposed to the trauma of students. Furthermore, while a traumatic experience is not their own, educators may experience Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) when working closely with students. This trauma may be exhibited as symptoms similar to those of their students. STS is also known as compassion fatigue or compassion stress which Figley (1995) defines as “the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event” (p. 21). In addition, STS is natural when one is exposed to knowledge of a traumatic event and the resulting stress of desiring to help the person suffering. Moreover, burnout and STS are different in that burnout occurs gradually while the onset of STS can emerge suddenly. STS symptoms may include blaming others, hopelessness or guilt, sleeplessness, and persistent worrying, to name a few.

Secondary Traumatic Stress research has minimal experiential information or impact statements related to school personnel. Teachers have indicated students in their classrooms experience a range of trauma levels which is resulting in numerous teachers being exposed to

STS because it is a natural consequence of caring for another human. In other words, when STS occurs, one individual has experienced trauma and another individual is affected by the initial person's traumatic experience. Teachers who experience STS or other chronic strain on their emotions discover the effects that may begin to impact their health.

### **Understanding Passion**

When passion occurs, goals become a priority and the pursuit of the established goal and any risks are irrelevant. It has been stated that passions of love are driven by a yearning to be in the immediate vicinity of another individual just as passions of anger are motivated by a knowledge of unpunished misdeeds. However, there are no conclusions regarding the reasons that goals become passions, but it has been noted that the magnitude of preliminary emotions towards a goal could be one justification. Vallerand (personal communication, September 3, 2018) asserts that "passion is a strong inclination toward a specific activity that we love, value, invest time and energy in" (The Ross School, 2018) and is part of one's identity. Most individuals enjoy multiple passions which contribute to increased happiness such as physical and mental well-being, relationships, and increased levels of performance and societal contribution. Individuals who work hard towards a passion will reach excellence, but passions that become encompassing, passions individuals are unable to disassociate, can lead to negative emotion and an increase in anxiety.

According to Vallerand (personal communication, July 1, 2016), the passions people possess can be categorized as harmonious or obsessive (McQuaid, 2016). Harmonious passion occurs when an individual has a strong desire to engage in an activity, but the activity is controllable, so the individual chooses when engagement in the activity occurs. Individuals who possess harmonious passion can disengage, refresh, and rest, which increases positive emotion.

Harmonious passion has a positive association with emotions while actively interacting with the individual's passion. When an individual has multiple passions, they are happier and experience higher levels of harmonious passion, which produces additional energy. In addition, harmonious passion predicts increases in job satisfaction which results in a reduction of burnout symptoms. While both types of passion will precipitate merit, obsessive passion allows an activity to control, alienate, and prevent an individual from participating in other life activities.

Alternately, an individual whose passion becomes obsessive has no control of themselves. Individuals who experience obsessive passion can experience conflict with others along with strain on their health, relationships, and emotions. Individuals who have an obsessive passion will often do anything to reach their goals because it makes them feel alive, so the person's self-esteem is dependent on success. Additionally, individuals with an obsessive passion invest more effort and energy because another piece of their life is failing. So, they become consumed with one interest that consumes a disproportionate amount of space in their lives.

However, having passion does not have to be detrimental. Individuals who experience obsessive passion have only one focus in their lives, which causes more pressure, so it is important to maintain multiple passions to avoid becoming burned out. When an individual is passionate, it is essential for them to take the passion seriously while relinquishing their ego and enjoying the moment.

### **Teaching with Passion**

To be a good teacher, Hargreaves (1998) said teachers must be passionate individuals who connect with their students and are catalysts for creativity, challenge, and joy in the classroom. Emotions are at the heart of teaching and the commitment teachers have to the classroom includes building emotional relationships with students and a desire to develop

tolerant and respectful citizens. In addition, along with emotion-driven classrooms, lesson planning incorporates a teacher's own passions which also engage emotions. As a result, any change in strategies, reform efforts, and teaching and learning standards should embrace the passions of the teachers who work with students. Otherwise, choosing to ignore teachers' emotions in educational reform efforts may affect their ability to relate and communicate with students.

For teachers to be effective in the classroom, they must have a passion for the subjects they teach, their students, and a belief that their teaching can make a difference in the lives they touch. Additionally, teachers translate passions into actions, which incorporates the personal and professional sides of teachers, which allow them to remain hopeful. Day (2004) states, "with good leadership in the school, and an awareness of the need for life-work balance, support from colleagues and others, regular review of purposes, values and practices, and renewal of commitment, it is possible to sustain passion" (p. 20). When people are passionate, energy, determination, commitment, and at times obsession is developed. In addition, passion is a quality possessed by few teachers, even though all good teachers should possess passion for teaching. Good teaching incorporates the enthusiasm and passion that teachers contribute to their classrooms. As the needs of society and students change, teachers' ideals commit them to improvement of their practices in the face of challenging and difficult times. Additionally, teachers will experience strong emotions during their careers, but strong emotions must survive for passion to remain. However, at some point in their careers, teachers may discover their initial passion has turned to frustration, fatigue, routine, or cynicism, but there are also passionate teachers in all aspects of their careers. Day (2004) states, "yet if passion for teaching cannot always be sustained, if we accept that it can die, then, knowing its importance to good teaching,

we must identify ‘what went wrong’ and find ways of rekindling the passion” (p. 133). To maintain passion throughout a school year is daunting, but when passion turns into actions that integrate the mind and emotion, students’ lives are changed. Furthermore, teaching is a journey of hope, so teachers who are passionate remain hopeful about what, how and who they teach.

Teachers who maintain their passion also seek and embrace change in life because passion is a constant search for something new in order to extend knowledge. Phelps and Benson (2012) assert that “teachers who last more than a few years are open to change, engage in professional development, have a learner perspective, reach out to colleagues for support, and engage in self-reflection/examination” (p. 69). There are numerous barriers to maintaining passion, and while barriers exist, passionate teachers continue to devote their time and commit to their students because they believe deeply in the importance of their jobs. Dialogue alone is not enough to solve issues. Instead of individually managing obstacles, teachers need to be supported. Listening to the words of teachers is essential because when they have an opportunity to speak of their experiences, a plea for help can be heard. Furthermore, educational decision-makers need to be open-minded and have a willingness to find a balance between educational improvement and teacher well-being. Although it may appear that negativity permeates all aspects of teaching, hope still exists. Teachers are passionate and powerful individuals who work hard to initiate changes within their students and society. Teachers are willing to go beyond the scope of their job requirements to support their students and provide the best education possible. This has been more evident since the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. In March of 2020, schools were closed without warning and teachers immediately had to learn to teach virtually. Teachers held class meetings and navigated through a new way to teach and communicate with their students.

After a short break, a new school year began. Teachers worked diligently to understand the aspects of virtual teaching and adapt their lessons to reach students they had never physically met. Teachers and students who returned to school were faced with a new normal which included masks, sanitizing stations, touchless water fountains, and eating lunch in the classroom. In addition, teachers were tasked with supporting students as they learned content which was unable to be taught after school closures. Teachers worked diligently to guide their students' learning and emotional needs through the new normal. Even though COVID-19 changed the way schools operate and how teachers work with their students, passionate and dedicated teachers continue to help students maintain a sense of normalcy and continue to excel in their educational endeavors.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The goal of my study was to increase understanding of work-related challenges that affect a teachers' professional and personal life and how teachers maintain their passion for teaching. The theoretical framework guiding my study consisted of a variety of works. The works highlighted the importance of teachers understanding themselves, the work environment, teacher stress, and finding balance in order to maintain a passion for teaching. As a whole, the works demonstrated the importance of teachers' implementations of self-discovery and self-understanding in order to maintain their passion for teaching. Methodologically, I used narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; He, 1999, 2003, 2021a; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion & He, 2008; Clandinin & Caine, 2016; Sharma & Phillion, 2021) to gather the stories of teachers' experiences in the classroom. I also discussed how sharing narratives is beneficial in the reduction of stress (Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker & Chung, 2007). Then, I discuss the Three- Dimensional Framework (Dewey, 1916, 1938) which allows narrative inquirers to use interaction, continuity, and situation when theorizing stories. In addition, I reviewed the selection process for the participants and included an introductory profile of the participants. Next, the field text collection methods are presented which included semi-structured participant interviews, informal conversations, phone and e-mail communication. I then discussed the methods utilized when theorizing the participant stories.

#### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is "the study of the ways humans experience the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2) and a subcategory of qualitative research that incorporates individuals' personal stories. Narrative methods represent lived experiences in order to document life events.



Furthermore, narrative provides an avenue for cultures to pass on their histories to younger and future generations. Therefore, narratives shape the way individuals communicate and experience the world. In addition, narrative is based on the epistemological premise that individuals maintain internal stories they want to share. Like other narrative inquirers, I used stories to tell the narratives of teachers who were passionate about teaching but overwhelmed with additional expectations. In addition, I incorporated my personal experience in relation to the research and actively participated with participants to share the story they desired. Furthermore, in narrative inquiry, researchers develop inquiry methods by “drawing upon what they care about passionately in life” (Phillion & He, 2008, p. 6). Therefore, I utilized my personal experiences to choose my study and then conducted research with other teachers regarding their classroom experiences related to passion. Narrative inquiry has allowed scholars to challenge “what counts as knowledge, whose stories have value, and the place of story in shaping how we view curriculum in relation to the world” (Sharma & Phillion, 2021, p. 16). The teachers in this study were classroom teachers who chose to share their stories with the hope their experiences could make a benefit current and future teachers. The participants also believed their stories held knowledge that would elicit a response from administrators, communities, and other teachers.

In research, narrative is located within multiple disciplines such as art, theology, medicine, education, and curriculum studies. The distinguishing aspect of narrative inquiry in curriculum studies versus other disciplines is the extent to which story and lived educational experiences are explored. Additionally, narrative inquiry is integral to curriculum studies because of the incorporation of stories to discover the meanings of experiences and the desire to understand ways of knowing rather than establishing unequivocal truth. In education, narrative inquiry has been incorporated in research “for exploring the experiences of teachers, students,

and researchers” (Sharma & Phillion, 2021, p. 18) through storytelling. As personal knowledge and storied experiences become common as the focus of inquiry, there is a greater opportunity for the transformation of curriculum studies as well as a greater potential to expand our knowledge regarding teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the incorporation of narrative inquiry in studies of educational experience is increasing due to the view that “education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2) where students and teachers become not only the storytellers, but also the characters in the stories. In addition, teachers’ narratives are perceived as a method to further understanding teaching and learning relationships. The goal of the incorporation of narratives in educational research is to create narratives related to the multitude of experiences of teachers, students, and other educational employees. In addition, the incorporation of storytelling supports in the validation of lived experiences in order to better address those voices often silenced in education.

Since inquiry methods are often personal to narrative researchers, narrative inquiries often incorporate autobiographies because the topics originate from the researcher's experiences. Additionally, many narrative inquirers incorporate a personal, practical and social justification. For this research, I began by creating a personal justification that included details of my relationship and attraction to the research interests. I discussed the loss of two of my students and the experience of a co-worker who was forced out of the teaching profession. Additionally, I included an autobiographical narrative which encouraged me to further understand who I am in relation to the research and who I may be in regard to participants. The autobiography included my growing passion for becoming a teacher and challenges I experienced after becoming a teacher. Narrative inquiry requires reflection, so I chose to meditate on my experiences

throughout the inquiry process. Due to research topic being personalized, I connected the research to larger questions of social significance. Connecting to questions of social significance was important because it allowed me to separate my personal feelings from the goal of the research. While I continued to have personal thoughts and feelings about the research, I was able to separate myself from my participants so their stories could be the focus of the study.

Furthermore, the practical and social justification becomes the *so what* and *who cares* questions of the research. Practical justification includes how the research supports a personal change and extensive deliberation about social justice issues. It also includes an advancement toward thinking differently about the practices of the researcher and other individuals and equality. This process supports the researcher in becoming closer to the experiences of other individuals in order to begin asking questions regarding teaching and social practices. In addition, social or theoretical justification involves relating the study to social and educational issues and thinking about how the research will be utilized by others in the educational field. Social justification can relate to the theoretical where the research aims to locate new knowledge or policy and where research aims to make a social impact.

As an inquirer develops their research justification, the three influences of temporality, sociality, and place should be considered. Temporality refers to the people, places, and events that are in continuous transition in life and have a past, present, and future. The narrative worlds of individuals and society are continuously evolving and unfolding new experiences and meanings. Therefore, it is important in narrative inquiry to understand that people, places, and events are never stagnant and always in transition. Narrative inquiry entails a sense of uncertainty because individuals' lives are "full of uncertainty, incoherence, ambiguity, and dislocatedness" (He, 2003, p. 32) and embedded in stories "evolving from our experiences" (He,

2003, p. 19), so an absolute truth will never exist. Sociality relates to personal and social conditions such as the feelings, hopes, and morals of the participants and the researcher. Regarding social conditions, attention is drawn to existing environmental conditions and factors that merge to construct an individual's circumstances. Additionally, when working with participants, a relationship is built on commonalities and, therefore the researcher is unable to remove themselves from the relationship. At the same time, the places that individuals encounter may also impact their stories. As research transpires, the inquirer works in the space with the participants and themselves. As this relationship continues, a researcher may find themselves grappling with and developing a better understanding of their own stories. Additionally, narrative inquirers attempt to create stories that incorporate the lived world around their participants, but since narrative texts are built around language, a complete reality is never achievable. Although the experiences and stories of individuals are valuable, "relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189), and it is a critical component of my work.

### **Narrative and Stress**

Narrative research has been utilized in previous studies which included stress. Pennebaker and Chung (2007) assert "when individuals talk or write about deeply personal topics, their immediate biological responses are congruent with those seen among people attempting to relax" (p. 9). Additionally, individuals who wrote about emotional topics were less frequently absent from work, and those who wrote or spoke about personally upsetting experiences often saw improvements in mood and well-being. As a result of sharing their experiences, individuals spent less time thinking about the experiences so they could become better listeners and friends. In addition, after sharing their experiences, participants were more likely to talk openly about other secrets they had been keeping. However, less is known about

benefits that are linked to writing. It is believed, though, that by putting emotions and images into words, individuals can change how they assemble their thoughts or contemplate their ideas. Additionally, by addressing an individual's thoughts and feelings, a narrative of experience is more easily developed. This occurs because the construction of stories is a natural process developed to further understand personal experiences and internal feelings. Furthermore, as a result of sharing individual narratives related to challenging experiences, the ensuing distress from the event may begin to diminish. However, Pennebaker (2000) states that, "the mere expression of a trauma is not sufficient to bring about long-term physiological changes" (p. 8) but rather gains in health occur once experiences are translated into words.

As a result, narrative will be utilized in this research as the method to relay participant stories. Since life is infused with many events and experiences, it is natural to question the why, what, and how of an experience in addition to how to confront the outcome of the event. If a major life event is not addressed, it can eventually consume daily thoughts. Narrative provides an opportunity for participants to share stories openly, allowing them to begin to look beyond an experience and work to improve mental and physical health and develop closer connections with those in their lives.

### **Three-Dimensional Framework**

While various analysis methods exist for narrative inquiry, I focused on the three-dimensional space approach for analysis by Clandinin and Connelly. The ideas that guide this approach were developed from John Dewey's philosophy of experience. Dewey asserted that experience may be educative or mis-educative, depending on the effect the experience has on future experiences. An experience may be educative "in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity" (Dewey, 1916, p. 26). The educative process evokes

growth throughout every developmental stage. As individuals actively participate in an activity, they become more familiar with the subject matter and the acquired skills needed to participate. The quality of the experience is then shaped by agreeableness and disagreeableness. For experiences to progress, they should take something previously concluded and alter the quality of experiences that come afterward. Experience is ever moving and influences desire and purpose, but the experience may only be judged on the influence it produces once it is complete. An educative experience produces an increase in instruction and ability, which in turn allows an individual to anticipate and better prepare to confront unwanted consequences and accept those deemed beneficial since it is based on the connections students make through play and work. As a result, those who recognize the importance of educative development consider the specific needs, capabilities, and preferences of children and stray from assuming all children learn similarly because they receive the same instruction. In turn, Dewey (1938) refers to an experience “[that] has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 13) as mis-educative. Mis-educative experiences may produce insensitivity or a lack of responsiveness, which inhibits the possibility of having rich experiences in the future. Internal experiences influence attitude, desire, and purpose but external experiences also affect human activities.

Based on Dewey's philosophy of experience, Clandinin and Connelly developed a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space framework. The framework allows a writer to focus on the personal, social, past, present, future, and place. The approach is not meant to constrain the inquiry, but rather allow researchers to analyze narrative texts while focusing on interaction, continuity, and situation. Interaction refers to the writer's personal experiences including interactions with other individuals throughout the inquiry process. Through the analysis process,

a researcher should reflect on the intentions and points of view expressed or viewed by others. Continuity or temporality encourages the researcher to analyze the text concerning the past experiences of the participant and to analyze current experiences in relation to actions during a recent event or for actions that may appear in the future. In addition, experience is exploratory because it occurs in a personal and social dimension, not just within an individual. The third aspect of narrative analysis regards situation and uses the analysis process to search the participants' life, looking for specific circumstances that may include physical locations, or a sequence of locations recalled in the field text. Through the combination of all parts of the three-dimensional framework, stories of participants are more in depth, thoughtful, and take into consideration numerous aspects of individual lives in the story telling process.

### **Participant Selection**

Participant selection began by creating a list of current educators I knew within the State of Georgia and the counties where they were currently employed. The listed counties were divided into regions (Coastal Plain, Piedmont, Blue Ridge Mountains, Ridge and Valley) which were obtained from the Geographic Regions of Georgia map in the New Georgia Encyclopedia (Usery, 2018). Each of the larger geographic regional areas were further divided based on the Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) state map. RESA has sixteen locations throughout Georgia which “were established for the purpose of sharing services designed to improve the effectiveness of the educational programs of member school systems” (RESAs, 2020). In addition, RESA assists the State Department of Education in promoting its initiatives. Once the original county list was mapped regionally, the school systems in which my acquaintances worked were identified. Using the Georgia School Districts by Locale Type report from the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), each identified school district was classified by

territory type: city, rural, suburb, or town. The goal of each level of the regional, district, and territory classification was to identify teachers from various areas since the State of Georgia is considered in the research instead of one specific location in Georgia.

**Table 3**

*Participant Regional and Territory Locations*

<b>Georgia Region</b>	<b>RESA Region</b>	<b>Territory Type</b>
Coastal Plain	Middle Georgia RESA	City
Coastal Plain/Piedmont	Chattahoochee-Flint RESA/Griffin RESA	City/Suburb
Piedmont	Northeast Georgia RESA	Rural
Coastal Plain	Southwest Georgia RESA	Rural

I first negotiated entry to the relationships with my participants by contacting them and providing explanation of research goals. I maintained communication with the participants throughout the study and worked to make sure they felt their story reflected their ideas and voices. By agreeing to participate in narrative inquiry research, the participants and I made a long-term commitment to work together throughout the research process. For participants in this study, their commitments included multiple meetings and follow up conversations. After I negotiated entry with participants and began to build relationships, we collaborated to gather information which evolved into the participants' narratives. After collecting participants' stories, I used the gathered information to produce stories that represented the experiences of the participants, their identities, and the gained understanding of the participants' experiences. The participants and my experiences throughout the research process were used to create the final narrative.



## **Participant Profiles**

The participants for the study included four currently employed elementary school teachers in the State of Georgia. Most of the participants were acquaintances; however, I had no prior knowledge of the teaching styles, teaching abilities, or challenges each participant experienced in their careers. The participants included two Caucasian females, one African American female, and one African American male, all within the age range of 30–50. The participants' classroom experiences ranged from 5–14 years. Two participants worked in other educational fields prior to becoming classroom teachers, and one participant was previously a classroom teacher and now works in the classroom setting as a support teacher. The fourth teacher had been a homeroom teacher in the same county and school their entire teaching career. However, during the research process, the fourth teacher changed schools and districts. Since the participants were current teachers in Georgia, the names utilized are randomly chosen pseudonyms that each participant asked to use for identification purposes. Further and more detailed participant background information will be presented in Chapter 4.

## **Story Collection Methods**

Field texts collection methods included semi-structured participant interviews, informal conversations, phone and e-mail communication. This study explored the challenges that teachers experienced and how they worked to overcome those challenges for the betterment of Georgia schools. Permission for participation was obtained from each participant before any recordings or notes were taken. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study through the incorporation of encrypted computer files and a password-protected file. Once verbal consent was received from each participant, individual interviews were scheduled based on the participant's time and location request. Once together with participants, informed consents were

reviewed a second time; and once the participants agreed to contribute to the research, an informed consent letter was signed. Participants participated in recorded interviews lasting 45–60 minutes. They were asked open-ended questions, and then guiding or clarifying questions were asked dependent upon the participants' answers. Participants' interviews focused on their experiences with challenges and obstacles in the classroom and how their passion and health have been affected as a result. In addition, participants shared their experiences with teaching during COVID-19, their challenges, and how they grew as teachers. The participants also shared how they maintain their passion for teaching.

For this study, the participant questions were based on the 2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey completed by the American Federation of Teachers in New York. The report demonstrated that schools struggled to provide educators, and by extension students, with healthy and productive school environments. The report included questions on work stress, feelings of respect, job enthusiasm, autonomy in the work environment, harassment and bullying in the workplace, health and well-being, and peer evaluation systems. The report found that the workload, the lack of resources, and the burden of ever-changing expectations took a toll on educators. Based on the survey, questions of teacher stress, passion, health, work environment, and teacher retention were developed.

As interviews were conducted, I took notes on the atmosphere, mood, body language, tone, and expression of participants. Additionally, if the participants' conversations continued after the audio recorder stopped, notes were made on the relevant information as well as the participants' actions during those conversations. When writing field notes, many researchers focus on ideas such as "what you did, notes on what I did with you, notes on what was around us, notes on where we were, notes on feelings, notes on current events, notes on remembrances of

past times" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 82). The goal of these notes was to capture the experiences in the field adequately. After the initial in-person interviews and follow-up conversations, the participants and I had our school year shortened by COVID-19. Due to the changes COVID-19 brought to teachers and their classrooms, participants' second interviews were completed virtually and focused on the effects of COVID-19. These interviews were an additional hour and focused on the effects of COVID-19 on how participants taught, and their passion, as well as how participants changed as a result of COVID-19. Throughout this time, the participants and I also communicated through informal conversations by phone or through e-mail. These conversations provided an opportunity for me to ask clarifying questions from the interview transcripts and allowed participants to ask me questions or provide feedback on their narratives. In addition, I communicated with the participants on a personal level to inquire about their lives and teaching during the pandemic. I did not include any of our conversations during that time in the study, but I felt that communicating with participants, during a difficult time for everyone, was necessary.

During the analysis process, I looked for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132) within and across the participants' experiences and social settings. The commonalities provided support as I began to develop stories related to the participants' past experiences. In narrative inquiry, the relationship between participants and the researcher is also important, so I had to find a balance between multiple voices in the research text. As I wrote, I had to be aware of the chosen texts to incorporate so that the important parts were not silenced, which in turn could have silenced the participants' voices. The multiple interviews and follow-up conversations were used to write the participants' stories.

### Theorizing Stories

Once the initial interviews were completed, I utilized an outside professional to transcribe the interviews. Once returned, I began the process of transitioning the field texts into a research text. To begin, I read through the transcripts, making no notations. I then read the transcripts again and made notes on blocks of text rather than individual lines. During this process, I looked for common words or phrases as well as if the section was a flashback or current piece of the story. In addition, I sorted the field notes, making notations on character, place, scene, character, and feeling. I also reviewed the interview transcripts while incorporating similar notations. Next, I printed copies of each story and cut them a part so the participants' words were isolated. The pieces of the transcripts were then sorted based on chronological order and once again as a summary of the participants' stories. Additionally, I typed any notes I took during the interviews, printed them, and incorporated them while sorting the story pieces. Ultimately, I chose a mixture of chronological and summary to create the research text. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, "there is no one bringing together of the field texts into research texts" (p. 133), so initially, I focused on developing the characters, plot, context, tension, tone, and end point of the stories. Each time I returned to a participant story, I moved text and linked thoughts differently. As texts were shifted, if I was unsure of the meaning of a statement or how to interpret what the participant meant at a particular time, I contacted them by phone or through e-mail. We had informal conversations during those times which allowed the participants to clarify pieces of their stories.

To make the texts form a deeper connection with the reader, I began to think about the larger question of social significance. Why is this story important? What is the participant trying to convey? Again, I moved text to different locations, as if playing Tetris or putting together a

puzzle. It was important for me to not only introduce the participants, but to make sure their voices were clear when reading the stories.

This process was completed once again after the second interview with the willing participants, but instead of an outside source, I created the interview transcripts myself. I chose to separate the COVID-19 stories from the initial research texts because I felt like the significance of the pandemic, prolonged consequences, and repercussions on teachers should be an individual experience. The stories were organized to demonstrate the initial interest for teaching and the path that led each participant to become a teacher. The stories then moved to the participants' experiences as teachers, their challenges, hope for the future of teaching, and why they remain passionate. The individual experiences of teaching during COVID-19, what the participants learned and how they grew as teachers were also included. The stories were then sent to each participant who had the opportunity to edit and make additions to their stories. In all, the participants had at least three opportunities to make edits and additions to their stories. The purpose of this study was to learn more about the methods teachers used to maintain their passion for teaching and ways to keep teachers in the classroom. Each participant shared personal stories of challenges they have experienced in their careers, how they overcame those challenges, how they maintain their passion, and ways to encourage younger teachers to remain in the classroom.

## Ethics

Throughout the narrative research process, I had to consider the validity of the research, which could include “methodological questions about ethics, informed consent, and the role of the researcher” (Sharma & Phillion, 2021, p. 5). In qualitative research, there has been an ongoing debate over the validity and legitimacy of qualitative research, so acknowledging gaps within stories was necessary. When stories are shared, information is excluded from the account, either intentionally or unintentionally. Since life is constantly changing and evolving, events in a narrative may be misremembered or reconstructed experiences by one's memory. A methodological path may be chosen to strengthen the validity of a story so that claims may be documented, or reflexivity may be practiced. Reflexivity involves a prior attempt "to recognize your own assumptions or preconceived ideas" (Josselson, 2013, p. 26) concerning the participants and their accounts. The goal of reflexivity is for a researcher to recognize preexisting opinions or attitudes that may impede an open, trustworthy experience for participants. In this research, I practiced reflexivity. I looked at my autobiography and reflected on my experiences as a teacher. Through this process, I thought about my preexisting expectations and opinions and how those thoughts and feelings might impede my objectification.

In addition, participants' involvement strengthens the credibility of a story and allows participants the opportunity to confirm anonymity. Participants' involvement supports the researcher's selections of events from the field texts and ensures the participants' stories are reflective of their experiences. Additionally, a researcher should never disclose any identifying information about participants, including their names or the names of friends or relatives. Participants should be approached with respect and that includes an understanding that they may withdraw from an interview or the study at any stage. In this research, each participant chose

their own identifying name to be used in their story. Participants were encouraged to participate through reading and editing their stories. Furthermore, participants had the opportunity to decline interviews, which was chosen by one participant with the COVID-19 stories.

In addition to the participants, the inquirer must also be cognizant of relational ethics and not only consider who they are in relation to participants but also who they are in relation to the greater world around them. Before having the ability to fully understand relational ethics, the inquirer must be open to their wakefulness. Wakefulness means having an "alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182). The understanding of wakefulness is used to prevent the reinforcement of the dominant narrative. To begin moving towards wakefulness, many researchers begin their narrative research by self-reflecting to develop their narrative beginnings. When reflecting, researchers identify tensions that may exist between their histories and the subjects they study. For this study, I recounted my autobiographical roots, what led me to teaching, and events that have influenced my teaching career. In addition, before each participant's story, I addressed my personal connection and prior history with each participant and noted my limited experience and knowledge working with and relating to African American and male teachers.

### **Challenges of the Study**

Challenges occurred during this research study. One challenge was the incorporation of qualitative research because there is no minimum sample size that is required. The sample size is fluid and depends on "the answers being sought, theoretical framework, type of data collected, resources and time" (Butina, 2015, p. 192). For this research, a smaller sample size was necessary to devote ample time to each participant. Due to the smaller sample size, all regions,

regional districts, and school districts were not represented in this research inquiry nor were the participants claiming to represent the voice of each individual from their area. To address this challenge, I chose participants located in different regions, school districts, and schools in Georgia. In addition, the small sample size allowed me to choose participants of varying racial identities, genders, and participants with varying educational and professional experiences. While a smaller sample size does not allow a broad range of voices and stories from Georgia, it did allow me to communicate more frequently with each participant, spend more time gathering and analyzing their stories, as well as more time writing each story so each participant received a story they were proud to share.

Due to the amount of information gathered regarding the participants' personal and professional lives, anonymity is another challenge that inquirers experience. Anonymity requires the researcher to maximize "the protection of participants' identities" while "maintaining the value and integrity of the data" (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 617) by replacing participants' names with pseudonyms or disguising locations. By offering anonymity, participants may be inclined to share experiences that may previously have been silenced. However, the researcher must always keep in mind the impact of the participants stories on themselves and other individuals. To further protect participants, they have the right to nullify their participation at any stage in the research process. For this research study, voice recorded interviews incorporated pseudonyms as well as changes in location names. The interview recordings were uploaded to an encrypted drive, and all labels incorporated participant pseudonyms. Prior to meeting with participants, I discussed using pseudonyms and gave each participant the opportunity to choose pseudonyms they felt would best represent themselves.



Another challenge for narrative researchers is neutrality. Before the research study begins, the inquirer often writes an autobiography that expresses their position and experiences with the research topic. When listening to the participants' stories, the interviewer's feelings and preconceptions cannot be neutralized or the field texts may appear biased. Therefore, I must be aware that I may influence the participants through my reactions, body language, race, gender, education, and life experiences. Before beginning the participants' interviews, I wrote my autobiography with a focus on my schooling and teaching experiences. After writing my autobiography, I realized that I had preconceived notions about the experiences I believed I would hear during the participant interviews. I also realized that, due to such bias, there was the possibility that I would guide participants in the expected directions through questioning. Due to my experiences in an elementary classroom as well as the prior non-professional relationships I had with some participants, I realized that remaining neutral through the interview process would be difficult.

While all the participants were elementary school teachers, I was limited in my experience and knowledge relating to racial minority teachers. In this study, the racial and gender minority teachers were an African American female and an African American male. Although the teachers and I may have had similar challenges, I could never fully understand their connection with their students and how they see themselves. For instance, storying "becomes a form of social and political prioritizing" (Goodson, 1995, p. 94) or tells stories in a manner that promotes specific story lines while censoring others. I feared that the African American participants' voices and ideas would be subdued due to my not being a gender minority in teaching, a racial minority, and my lack of understanding and experience in teaching in an inner-city, predominantly African American school. To address this challenge, I asked participants to

review their stories multiple times and make additions or changes so their stories could be told in a way that represented their voices and experiences.

Generally, stories surround teachers in all aspects of their lives, so it is not hard to comprehend that stories are the method in which "teachers and teacher educators most often represent [their] experiences" (Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 33). The research utilized narrative inquiry as a way for participants to reflect and share experiences associated with their teaching careers. However, due to COVID-19 and changes in interview methods, virtual interviews were a challenge. The interviews were challenging because I felt I was unable to make an in depth connection with the participants and their experiences. Therefore, I felt the interviews provided a limited view of the participants' experiences in relation to COVID-19.

### **Story Compilation**

My research was based on the assertion that teachers experience work-related challenges that subsequently cause obstacles which affect their personal and professional lives, as well as their passion for teaching. Narrative inquiry, thus, provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect and narrate their stories to provide a better understanding of their professional lives.

Additionally, by using the three-dimensional space framework when considering how participants became teachers and what relationships, experiences, and prior knowledge shaped their decisions, I gained a greater understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE VOICES OF PASSIONATE TEACHERS

In this chapter, I have presented stories collected from the participant's interviews. Four elementary school teachers in the State of Georgia agreed to participate in interviews regarding their passion for teaching and how they remained in the profession despite professional and personal challenges they have experienced. Three of the teachers are full-time, fifth-grade classroom teachers and one teacher works in multiple classrooms in grades 3–5 as a support teacher. The participants have been teaching five or more years in the Georgia public school system. Participants are from regions throughout Georgia, but their experiences do not necessarily represent all teachers of a particular region or the state. The stories are personal accounts of experiences in teaching. Participants chose to share their stories in order to bring awareness to the challenges teachers experience because the participants are passionate about teaching and advocating for change to support teacher retention. After initial contact with each participant, interview locations, dates, and times were selected by each participant. The first interviews were conducted as face-to-face interviews with each participant and follow-up questioning and communication via email was completed. Abby and Nick preferred to meet on a weekday after school while Passion and Anna's interviews were held on a weekend. In order to help my participants feel more comfortable, I traveled to a meeting location of their choosing. Each interview was recorded while I took additional notes throughout my time with each participant. Due to COVID-19, the second interview with each participant was held virtually. Abby chose not to participate in the COVID-19 interviews. Participants chose how they preferred to virtually meet and additional questions and consent was provided to each participant prior to the meeting. Following each meeting, I further communicated with participants to ask

clarifying questions before sending each participant their story. Participants had an opportunity to read their stories and change or clarify information. Table 4 presents an overview of the teaching and educational background information for each participant along with their regional location in Georgia.

**Table 4**

*Participant Overview Information*

Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Number of Schools	Highest Degree Level	Current Grade/Subject Area(s) Taught	Regional Location in Georgia
Abby	6	2	B.S.	5 <sup>th</sup> grade ELA	Southwest Georgia
Nick	7	1	B.S. Early Childhood Education	5 <sup>th</sup> grade Math	Middle Georgia
Passion	15	2	M.Ed. Teacher Leadership	5 <sup>th</sup> grade Math & Science	Chattahoochee-Flint/Griffin
Anna	11	2	Ed.S Curriculum & Instruction	3-5 Support Teacher	Northeast Georgia

The stories begin with the two participants who had previous careers before becoming classroom teachers. Following, are the stories of two participant who began teaching immediately out of college. One remains in the classroom as a homeroom teacher and the other began classroom teaching out of college and has since transitioned to a classroom support position. Prior to the participants' stories, a brief introduction from my point of view was included. The introductions were composed based upon field notes gathered through the interview process and included observations I made throughout my time with each participant in

addition to occupational background information provided by each participant. Prior to the participants' stories, a quote and words describing the educators are presented. The quote was from the initial interview transcript as one that I felt summarized each participants' story while the words that describe each educator were words they provided. The participants' stories begin with early memories of their desire to become a teacher, professional experiences, and concerns for the future of teaching. Each participant reviewed their story and had the opportunity to make changes and additions. Ultimately, the goal of the interviews and subsequent stories was to illustrate the lives of teachers who remain passionate despite daily challenges and the effects of those challenges on their professional and personal lives.

### **Negotiating Research with Abby**

On a sunny late afternoon, after driving to Abby's school and parking, I messaged her so we could meet, and she could usher me to her classroom. We had been introduced by a friend, and this was our first face to face meeting. As I waited nervously for Abby, I carefully watched each person exiting the school, looking for the outfit she described to me on the phone. Once Abby walked out, she waved with a big smile, and while I was still nervous, she made me feel at ease, like an old friend. We walked through the school down several hallways until we reached her classroom. Abby sat in a student desk across from me, blond hair pulled back in a ponytail, surrounded by the quietness of her recently bustling classroom. She laughed and smiled as she eagerly spoke of her students. Abby emphasized her love for her students and as she did, her eyes lit up and began to twinkle. Her voice was confident and calm, but when she told the stories of struggling students, her voice became stern, and her eyes became tearful. As participation continued, Abby was welcoming and open about the challenges she continued to experience in her classroom and experiences. Abby, a Caucasian female in her mid-40s, has been teaching for

six years in Georgia. She taught one year of Special Education and five years of English Language Arts. Prior to beginning her teaching career, Abby worked in speech pathology for twelve years. Abby works in a Title I school and is a fifth grade ELA teacher.

**In Abby's Words:**

*"These kids are worth it. They're worth it."*

ABBY

the Loving, Unrelenting, Enthusiastic Teacher

I knew from a very young age I wanted to work with some sort of special needs or with children. In middle school, I had a friend in my school that had high functioning Asperger's. I just connected with him. I was good with him. My teachers had me kind of mentor him and I knew I wanted to work in some sort of field where I could help people that needed help. I've always been a servant at heart and it just kind of fit. Originally when I was in college, I of course along with 20,000 other people decided I was going to be pre-med for five minutes. I then realized, no, that is definitely not it and swapped over and knew I wanted to go into education. It was a speech pathology friend of mine, a lady who was older, who kind of encouraged me to go that route. She said that way you can work in different areas, not just a school system, but you're also working with kids with special needs. So, speech pathology kind of just is where I ended up and I worked with pediatric speech pathology for fifteen years.

I worked in a private clinic, I had a private clinic, and I worked in a school district. About five years ago my brother-in-law who was the assistant principal at the high school asked me if I would consider coming back into the school system. I was pretty burnt out of private practice. He said the position they had open was in special education as a co-teacher. So, I said absolutely because I knew I had a teacher certification but come to find out I did not have a special ed.

certification and a speech pathology certification would not work. So, I went through the TAPP [Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy] program here at RESA [Regional Educational Service Agency] and within two years I got my certification in special education. Since then, I have added on a certification, so I've got my speech pathology, special ed., consultative and now I'm also a reading specialist certified. I started teaching ninth grade reading which encompassed all ninth graders, including the special ed. kids. Then they transferred me to fifth grade, and I am now the fifth grade ELA [English Language Arts] teacher for all hundred and ten fifth graders here including our special education program as well.

I work at a Title I school. There's a lot of educational choice in our county. Our county has a private school which is a lower cost private school so a lot of our families in this county chose to send their children there. It has really, really good reviews, so to speak. It's got a great reputation. So, a lot of families sacrifice a lot to put their kids in that school. There's also a charter school in our county that also takes a lot of our kids who choose to go to the charter school route. We also have a city within our county that has its own school district and kids can also opt to go there even if they live in our city, they can go to the next city over. There's that school also, so basically, our county school is for a lack of a better word, what's left.

We have pervasive poverty. We have over 35% of our kids are followed by or served by CASA [Court Appointed Social Services] that are in some sort of foster situation or living with grandparents or living in single parent homes who struggle significantly. Basically, it's a child who's followed by DFCS [Division of Family & Children Services] whether there's been a complaint of abuse or neglect or they're in foster homes. A lot of our kids, I would say of the hundred and ten I teach, probably twenty-five are fosters. There are certain guidelines that the foster parents have to follow with discipline and having enough authority. My sister is a foster

parent so I'm very familiar with the foster care system. So, that also brings in challenges because a lot of our children who are in foster homes bring their own set of problems and issues because of what the situation they've been forced into and also a lot of them tend to know there's not much you can do. "I'm kind of untouchable," so we deal with that attitude as well. It's a county school that struggles as far as our student's family dynamics and their socio-economic status. So, that brings its own unique set of challenges because we do have a very, very few number of students here who I would say live above the poverty level, very few. And most of those would be teacher kids.

A lot of my kids haven't been given really an innocence of childhood so their life experiences while very limited in other ways. They've been exposed to a lot of very grown-up situations and very grown-up things that make them want to act like they're older when their brains aren't. And we forget that here sometimes. I have to remember that even though I teach in a middle school, I'm teaching elementary kids. Some of my fifth graders are way bigger than I am, but I have to remember that they are ten years old. Even though they look, dress, act and talk like they are much, much older they're still babies. We expect these fifth graders to act like seventh graders and there's a huge difference between fifth and seventh grade. When they're in a middle school situation they feel like they're older and they want to act. So, it makes it challenging because you have some that want to be babies and want to go outside and play and others that, "Oh, I'm way too cool for that, I'm in middle school."

Our kids, my kids, my fifth graders, there's no playground here. There is no recess here. Fifth grade is still elementary school, and we have no playground, and we have no recess. So, it's definitely a unique situation for sure. We just have to be so much more creative as far as trying to have some way that these kids can get out energy without being able to take them and say you



have twenty minutes to run wild on the playground. That's hard. That's really hard because I have a lot of kids who were born with drug and alcohol addictions, and they have so many special needs that result from that. They have so much built-up energy. I have boys who, if they don't get some energy out, they're going to get in a fight. They have to move. That puts me in a unique position of having to make sure I have movement in class every single day and it also just makes it more fun. We read novels a lot. I'll take them outside to read and we sit, you know, or we run down and back and then you read five more pages and then we run. I have to implement some sort of movement into the day because being in a middle school that recess, outdoor time is taken away. So, we have that challenge of having to build that into our lessons because we don't have a special time for that.

The kids I teach, I'm teaching them to speak in a way that outside of the forty-five minutes they're with me, they're not hearing it because the dialect and the grammar that a lot of my kids are around at home is horrific. They're being untaught what we're teaching here. That is a huge stress on me when I know that my kids are being tested with the same tests that an affluent kid, who has private tutors and well-educated parents, and my kids are being held up to those kids. That puts a lot more on me because I'm starting over under water. I'm starting out way behind. Way behind! That's where I don't think expectations should be the same because I'm gonna be far behind because my kids don't have the same background that other kids do. If you put a kid who's been given everything and they have every experience and you put them beside a child who's not had an experience, and has parents who are in their own world, doing their own thing all the time, there's no fair way to gage or compare the intelligence of those two children.

The expectations that are there for students sometimes it's not feasible for kids like ours. I have kids who've never been out of town, who've never been to the beach, they've never been to the mountains, they've never ridden in a boat, they have such limited experiences. So, when you start giving standardized tests that pull passages from experiences that most children would have, I don't teach most children. I teach *my* children. A lot of times they do not have the experiences that would give them the vocabulary to be able to answer questions that a kid that has a lot more experiences could answer and it's not because my kid is dumb. It's not because my kid is inferior. It's because my kid hasn't experienced what yours has. I think that hurts our rural kids some when you're seeing what comes down from the state and you know that most kids' experiences are at a whole different level than my kids are. We have to create experiences inside of four walls that most kids do on the weekend. I try to create a campfire atmosphere and show them that inside of a classroom or we try to show them things using the computer and the Promethean Board. We try to create a beach setting because a lot of my kids the only experiences they really have are here in town and football. The football and basketball game. That's really their experience. If you have to read two passages on air travel and compare and contrast them and you've got a kid that's never been on a plane, never seen a plane, they're gonna have a much harder time than someone who's flown around with their parents and has traveled in different places. It's gonna be harder for a child to make up a creative story about a trip to some foreign place if they have no idea what a foreign place looks like or a city, a big city. They have no idea what Atlanta looks like. How could they be expected to write the same creative story that someone who's been there can? I don't know because experience leads to greater intelligence and greater test scores. It just does. I certainly wouldn't want my kids' expectations necessarily

to be less than somebody else and them to feel less than, but there's got to be some way that we can test intelligence without it being linked to things that are out of their control.

That's kind of where I feel my calling is in education is not just teaching but is helping students know that there is a normal outside of their own normal. Not that my normal is great or anything, but it is a whole lot more productive than a lot of my kids have ever been around so that's what keeps my passion going. It is when I have a kid who four years, after I taught them, calls me on the phone to tell me that he just got a football offer to play for college or I had a student one time, who was taken to the University of Georgia on a recruitment day, and he was e-mailing me the pictures and telling me all about it. I was happy that he had me, too, but it broke my heart because I thought, I'm the person that he's sending pictures to. It's a teacher, not—his mother is deceased, his father is in prison and he's sending it to his teacher, and it broke my heart; but I was so glad to be a person for him because who else would he have?

My kids. My kids. I don't teach my students I teach *my* kids. When I hear teachers talking about the kids, we're gonna get this year or that one there's no hope for, that's the one I want. I want the bad boys. I want the ones that everybody else has given up on because I believe that they're going to be here in the future too and somebody's got to believe in them. And I've seen so many kids now over the years of working, I mean, back in speech with younger ones that are grown now, and I see how some do. A lot fall through the cracks and a lot of the kids that I've taught are in prison, but I've seen some that break that mold and they do great things and they're—they're worth it. It's not fair that my kids here have situations that my kids at home do not have and it breaks my heart when I hear some of the stories that my kids have. It's not fair and they need somebody that's gonna fight for them. Our kids need somebody in their corner.

I had one student one time who is now 19 and in prison, but when he was in the ninth grade at 16 years old, I was told immediately don't try to mess with him. He's going to shut you down. A lot of gang activity in his family, he has legal issues, he had an ankle monitor, he doesn't do authority. So, I saw the first day, I was co-teaching, I walk into his biology classroom and he was refusing to do what the teacher said so I thought, you know, I get along with teenagers and I basically walked over to him and I tried to encourage. He told me to 'f off' and that was one of my first days there. So, I started trying to develop a relationship with this kid. I would walk over and if I saw him pick up a pencil, I would put a post-it note on his desk, "I'm so proud of you." "Your shoes are awesome." Just stupid little things like that and he kind of bonded with me that way and he didn't care about his education, he really didn't. He could not care less, but it got to the point that he cared about me enough that I'd say, if you would do this, man you'd make me look good. And I started realizing these kids, they care so much more about having a relationship with an adult and having somebody that cares than they did about doing school.

So, that same kid, one day I heard him really smart off, cussing at our secretary and I lost it on him. I walked in and I put my finger in his face and I said, "you better back down off of her" and he put his finger right in my face and we had words. I lost my temper with him. He lost his temper with me. I turned around and I saw a girl standing behind him. He was just trying to impress her, and he handled it horribly. I handled it horribly. I walked into him the next period and I saw his cheeks just blowing up. He was so angry that his person had lost it on him. He was about to take a test and I called him outside and he wouldn't even look at me. I told him, I said, "um, I need to apologize to you. I just handled that so wrong. I should not have lost my temper" and he looked up and he had tears. I mean, this big old, probably 300-pound ball of anger and he

had tears and he's like, "I'm sorry too." And later on in the year he told me, he said, "I've never had an adult apologize to me for anything." That means more to me than teaching him how to read, you know. In his home, you just do what I told you to because I told you to. And he didn't realize there were adults that would even admit being wrong or say that they have a problem too. A lot of our kids have never had somebody tell them that they're worthy, or that they matter. I can't lose the passion for it because of what I see come out of it.

I've seen teachers who have been teaching for twenty and thirty years that have no business in a classroom anymore. They're burnt out and they seem like they don't like kids. I can't stand to see that. I understand it because you get to a point. I think a lot of teachers after so many years, they get to a point where they just shut themselves off to the personal aspect of teaching and to the fact that these are kids. And it affects their ability to teach because they're no longer relating to kids. They're just teaching to get the years in to get out. I see stress impacting people and just kind of shutting down to the joy that there still is in teaching. These are our future whether you like it or not, whether you like what you see or not. They're our future and I think sometimes people get jaded after so many years and they stop with the personal aspect of teaching, and it just becomes robotic. I've heard sometimes the way teachers who have been here, in my opinion, too long, the way they'll speak to kids. There's no respect, but I've seen enough situations and I know that's stress related. I know that they have been in the stressful job for so long and they're just waiting on that time to be able to retire.

I had a teacher friend of mine who was one of the ones very close to retirement age. She had to take off more time than she was there because she said she absolutely could not handle it. It was when we were teaching ninth grade together and she was used to teaching seniors and when they swapped her to ninth grade, she had to be out all the time because she has MS

[Multiple Sclerosis] and it would flare. The stress would cause flare ups. She had to be out of work so much to the point that they finally had to change her, and they had to put her back teaching the college students. She had to teach college English because she said that she absolutely could not handle the stress of the super energetic, always fighting ninth graders.

When I flipped from ninth to fifth, I had no idea what a fifth-grade classroom was like. I had no idea that fifth graders were so energetic and that they talk so much. It would have been nice to have had some sort of forewarning. Basically, it was here they are, good luck and I had to figure that out. I really didn't have anybody to sit down and say, okay, talk me through what the differences are between fifth graders and ninth graders, so I kind of had to figure that out. Most of your education comes the first week you actually teach. The first year you're just trying to figure out if you can do this. You're trying to figure out classroom management, you're trying to figure out time management, you're trying to figure out grading because learning about it in school and actually doing it is a whole different ballgame.

As a high school teacher, I'm pretty laid back and it was more of a, the kids did what I asked them to just because they liked me. In fifth grade you can't really do that. They have to have a why, they have to do something, and they really have to have a hard and fast guidelines and rules. Once I got in here, I go okay, I've got to readjust completely. I have a whole lot more procedures and a whole lot more rules than I was used to in high school. They have to have those rules set out or they will run all over you. I didn't know that at first, so I had to do a lot of back tracking. I wanted to come in as the sweet happy teacher like I was in high school and these kids' kind of realized quickly we're gonna try to run all over her. She's sweet. It was pretty stressful because I had to flip my classroom management style to we've got to get all these procedures down, I mean, hard and fast and tight before I can really be super fun, sweet.

I had to write our lesson plans as well. When I took over fifth grade ELA there were no plans. I'd never taught fifth grade ELA before. I taught ninth grade and then I came there from special education, came there from speech pathology. So, I basically had to teach myself the curriculum. When I came over here there were no textbooks given. There was nothing. It was here are the state of Georgia standards. Teach them. And I wrote over the summer between when I swapped from ninth to fifth grade. I spent the whole summer working on the first three months of plans and then from there I basically just built it. I had a pacing guide that I had borrowed from another district, so I knew the standards I was going to teach and around what time. But I didn't know how these kids learned in fifth grade, so I didn't go all the way through the hundred and fifty to start out with because I didn't know how the plans would go. So, I did three months and after that I would take about five weeks at a time, and I would write them out as I went. It took months to get it and I was responsible for writing a hundred and fifty lesson plans and come up with curriculum, come up with the novels to study and come up with everything, the assessments, everything. I really had to teach myself how to teach fifth grade that first year and I'm still tweaking it. When I started at the high school, I had a mentor who was assigned to me that was there to answer questions and she was wonderful. I did not when I came to the middle school because I think at that point, they're like, ah, you're so experienced we'll just throw you to the wolves.

In my school district and in my school, we have no planning period. Our planning period is gone, and we have no free lunch, we are on duty from the time we walk in the door until they get on the bus. There is no planning period and we have working lunch. We eat with our kids. I did have a planning period when I was at the high school, but since I've been here there's not one. But we get out earlier than we used to. Our kids leave at 2:30 and we don't leave until 3:30

so technically our planning time is that hour, but it's usually meetings or parent meetings, faculty meetings, 504 meetings, special ed. meetings. Also, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 to 6:00 we turn around and go straight to our after-school program. So those two days are shot as far as doing anything after working hours and so our planning time, it's on our own time.

We have a great group here at school of our fifth-grade team and our instructional coach who is basically our assistant principal over the fifth grade, and we are all dealing with the same issues. We're dealing with the same kids. We use each other as support. We have a system where I can send a kid out with a note with a code on it if I ever need a break and our administrators will come in here in a second. We have a group text with our fifth-grade team that at night, in the mornings, on weekends, we send each other crazy things when we know that it's a super stressful time. We send each other goofy messages. We handle it with humor. We vent to each other a lot, but we have each other's backs too. If I know a fight broke out in another classroom and I know that teacher is especially sensitive, we can go in and say send your class down here with my class for a little while. Go take ten minutes to calm down or get yourself together because that can throw you. Fights can throw you. I lean on my co-workers who are in the exact same boat.

Having a community, a network of friends that you work with and with your students, that makes you want to come back and schools need to do more of that. They need to do more comradery building and team building exercises and things to keep their teachers happy and to keep some joy. My administrators are good. They'll throw random parties, we'll have a baby shower for someone, or we'll do some crazy, goofy game at a faculty meeting. We need more of that. Teachers need to hear encouragement. We hear so much discouragement of how bad these test scores are and how bad our kids are and how bad our district is doing. We need to hear the good, too. We need to hear the stories of the kid that just blew the test out of the water, or the



kids that was in trouble all the time and now they've turned it around because of what someone taught them. We need to hear more 'at a boys' as a profession. Teachers are dogged everywhere. They are dogged in the media; they're dogged everywhere and if we're gonna keep teachers they have to start feeling like they're heard and that they're important and that they're valuable.

Our administrators are great about encouragement. It was not so much when I was in the high school, and I hear other schools like maybe in our elementary or primary feeling the same way. Feeling like they're always in trouble kind of. I think administrators need to be diligent in making sure that their teachers feel appreciated just like we have to make our students feel appreciated. We've got to point out what they do well, administrators and the people that are making the decisions of all of the things that teachers have to do. Board members, superintendent, things like that. They're the ones that need to recognize teachers too for things that we do well. And as a state, I think when you keep throwing down mandates from the state of different testing guidelines and more and more that teachers are required to do. It basically sends a message that we don't trust what you're doing.

My administrators are very, very supportive. Matter of fact, I think sometimes we push ourselves more than they're expecting us to. I think a lot of what's expected from us comes from the board. Comes from higher up. Our administrators, they know we have more on us than we should. They know that we are overloaded, and our administrators here are wonderful at helping. If they know that I cancelled a doctor's appointment they would fuss at me and they would say you take off, you go do it, we'll cover you. Sometimes we put more pressure on ourselves because we know how hard it is to get somebody to walk in and do what we do. Not that we're the only one that can do it, but we have systems in place and procedures in place and when you

have a sub, as great as they are coming in, it's not you and it's going to throw the next day a little bit so sometimes we put that on ourselves.

Teachers are in a unique place where they can't just take off and go to the doctor and so that gets postponed. That gets put off. That gets put off a lot because I can't just say, sure, make an appointment Thursday afternoon at 2:30 because I'm having these headaches. I can't. It has to be Thanksgiving break or Christmas break. That makes it challenging when you're not feeling well, sometimes it's easier to just come to work not feeling well because I'm still gonna have to work, get everything for the substitute. Then, I'm gonna have so much work when I get back trying to get back in line. I do not have the time, so it stresses you. Stress, of course, and anxiety that comes along with teaching a hundred and ten children a day who you're responsible for regardless if you have them only for forty-five minutes a day and there's twenty other kids in the room. I'm still responsible for them learning these standards and that's stressful as I'm sure many other jobs are.

I could tell that kids' behaviors were getting on my nerves more than they should and I knew it wasn't the kids' fault. I mean, the behavior was their fault, but I knew it wasn't the kids' fault. When I'm thinking in the back of my mind, I've got to put in all these exit tickets, I've got to plan out, print out all these plans, I've got two days to get all these grades done, and I'm teaching ELA which means when I give a writing assignment, I have to grade it a hundred and ten times. That takes forever. You're pressured to get these grades in within 48 hours, or the parents are gonna be upset. I'm thinking about all this grading I have to do while I'm teaching, and kids are acting up. I could just tell it was getting on my nerves more than it really should and I don't think it's fair for my workload to impact the kids. I can make myself push that down. I've told kids before, like "guys I'm sorry if I seem a little—" I'm very honest with my kids. That's

one of my teaching philosophies is honesty in a relationship because with my kids, if they don't think I love them, they're not going to listen to me. They're not. So, I'm really honest with them. If I feel like I'm snappy one day, I'll apologize. I'll say, "y'all, forgive me, I'm in a bad mood today" and kids will say, "you can't tell. You seem happy. You still smile and well, you still love us" and so I think I'm pretty good at faking it. But there have been times that maybe a kid will ask me a question and my mind may be somewhere and I'll have to say, "I'm sorry what?" My focus sometimes may be a bit askew from stress, but for the most part, I think I handle that pretty well.

When you [primary researcher] called I thought it was funny because I said I was just making an appointment to see if I could get on some sort of anxiety medicine to kind of help with that. It's kind of a standing joke here at the school that so many teachers take anxiety medication. I made an appointment twice and I cancelled them both. One time we had a parent that showed up after and there was no way I could get out of meeting with a parent. And then we ended up having a called faculty meeting that lasted too long the next time, so I had to cancel it again. It's kind of a joke that 3:30 is our time off, that it's 7:15 to 3:30 because I never leave before five and I'm here 'til six in our afterschool program two days a week. I'm just mentally exhausted because our kids here, they have a lot of issues outside of education that's pretty mentally draining. I've gained weight, not a tremendous amount, but I have gained enough that it's noticeable to me. I don't feel as good. I think a lot of that is because I am on my feet and going ninety to nothing all day so when I walk in the door I'm done.

I could also tell when I got home it's hard to even find the energy to help my kids with their homework, make supper, get laundry done. My brain is toast. I was a little snippy with my daughter when she needed something and it's because I still have four hours' worth of work to

do and you're wanting me to stop and make you something different for dinner because you don't like what we have. I would go home and vent about things whether it was students or whether it was about some new things that was being thrown on us by the board that we were responsible for doing, that was unpaid. My husband's great about listening to me, but he knew it wasn't good for me and he finally said, "you have to have a cut off. You have to just, at some point, stop talking work so much and say I'm done with it and be home." He's pointed out to me before, too, like I think you're being a little snappier, you're irritated about work issues. He's good at pointing things out like that. He had to intervene.

We've got to make it fun. We have to. Just like a teacher I cannot expect my kids to want to come in here and learn day after day and do work if there's no joy in it. I can't and that's one of my biggest issues with some teachers that want to drill and kill and do it because I said so. I don't want to come to work when it's not fun and they're not gonna want to sit here and learn if it's not fun. Although education is an unbelievably stressful field to be in, it is so valuable, and it is so worth it. Our kids are worth it. Our future is worth it. I heard somebody say a while back, you know, I may not be a doctor, I may not be a lawyer but there are doctors and lawyers because of us. I think if we can figure out how to get society to realize how valuable teachers are, the teaching profession will have a better chance of coming back strong when we start realizing the value that our teachers do have because we do so much more than teach. We're teaching, we're raising kids too. And doing a lot more than teachers two generations ago ever, ever would have had to do.

Teachers have got to stop being micromanaged all the time. We are professionals. My thing is don't hire a teacher if you don't trust that they're qualified to do their job. I look at other professions and you hire a doctor because you believe in them and you interview them and you

make sure they're the right fit, but then they're not followed into that office room to make sure that they're taking your temperature correctly and make sure that you've looked in their throat correctly. I feel like a lot of times that's what happens to teachers. We're trained to do this, but yet, we're so micromanaged. Now fill out this document to prove that you did this and then tell me how you did this and then put it on this form and put it on this form and put it on this form. We're having to double and triple, and quadruple do things just to prove that we've done what you hired us to do. That's discouraging to teachers in general.

It becomes a time killer and that's where it takes away the joy of teaching. It's causing teachers to leave because we feel so micromanaged and feel so mistrusted sometimes. It takes so much of our time to do all these things that are required that it keeps you from being able to really prepare to teach. You know, you go into education thinking I'm going to make all these fun games to teach this and I'm going to do all these wonderful things, but then in reality you don't have the time. You don't have the time to plan out the things that you want to teach because you're having to fill out the forms that are showing that I am teaching. I'd get very frustrated when I want my time to be spent teaching kids, but my time is having to be spent being micromanaged and proving things because other teachers may not be doing what they're supposed to be doing. So, it impacts those of us that are doing it. I think the micromanagement of teachers is what's causing teachers to bail. We've got to bring the joy back in teaching.

### **Abby: Preliminary Reflections**

Abby's students live in poverty and try to act like adults even though they are children. Her students also have a lot of energy with no way to expend it, so Abby often prepares lessons that incorporate movement and outside activities. Because of their home environment, many of Abby's students do not have adults at home to support their learning needs, so they are

significantly behind other students with more supportive home environments. Although Abby's students are living in difficult situations, they are expected to meet the same state standards as other students. Abby continues to be the support system for many of her former students. While Abby was a dedicated teacher and mentor to many students, she also struggled with an abundance of additional work assignments. The additional work, along with the struggles of her students, caused Abby's stress level to increase, but her co-workers and administration were there to support and encourage her during difficult days

### **Negotiating Research with Nick**

After work one cool, fall evening as the sun set, the quickly diminishing daylight made it difficult to clearly note house numbers or other surroundings as I searched for Nick's driveway. After driving up and down the street a couple of times looking for the address on my phone, I turned up the driveway to Nick's home. I was not completely confident in my decision until Nick opened the door with a big smile and waved. Nick and I first met eleven years ago when he was a custodian at the school in which I work. He then moved on to become a paraprofessional at the same school. Nick and I were colleagues and worked together on committees and events at the school. Through that time, I was aware Nick was pursuing a degree in education, but since obtaining his degree, he began working in a different school district, so we have had minimal contact. As with many friends, Nick and I maintained contact through a social media connection along with occasional encounters at public events. As Nick and I walked in the house, his children were settling into a bedroom to watch television together so we could talk in the kitchen which also opened into the family room. Nick still wearing his work clothes, his tall, thin frame appeared tense as we spoke. Nick and I sat diagonally from each other at the kitchen table. His nervousness surprised me because the individual I knew always appeared to be calm, collected,

and confident. He smiled as we faced each other and the interview began, his voice, at times, shaky and hesitant. As a participant, Nick remained short with his answers and closed off at times. I always felt like there was more he wanted to convey, but he was either too nervous or did not want to appear not in control. Nick, an African American male in his late 30s has been teaching for seven years in Georgia. All seven years teaching have been in the same school district and the same school. Nick has however pursued teaching positions in other counties during this time where he has experienced racial and gender stereotyping comments from other educators. Prior to beginning his teaching career, Nick was a custodian, substitute teacher, and paraprofessional while he worked towards earning his degree in education. Nick works in a Title I school as a fifth-grade math teacher.

**In Nick's Words:**

*“The culture of school is so important to students learning and if the culture is not good at the school, there's not going to be a lot of learning going on.”*

NICK

the Engaging, Fun, Likeable Teacher

I've always wanted to be a teacher, even when I was in middle school, high school. I just knew that education was my calling, my passion, mostly because I saw teachers that I had that I said to myself, I wouldn't do that. I want to be a different teacher than some of the teachers that I had. So, I guess you could say bad teachers' kind of played a role in me becoming an educator because I wanted to be a better teacher than some of the ones that I had. Prior to becoming a teacher, I was a substitute teacher for a couple of years, and I worked as a custodian while attending school. I've also worked at a school where I was a paraprofessional. I did those jobs probably four or five years and then I got my degree to become a teacher.

I work in a county that the economic situation is not the greatest. My school is predominately African American, probably 90%. Everybody gets free lunch, not a lot of parent involvement, high crime rate in the actual district so that plays a role in some of the kids that we do get. We have a very high transient population. Kids or families moving from one side of the county to the other just based off of what apartment complex is running a free or three-month program or whatever they do over there, so it's nothing for us to get new students all the time.

I'm a fifth-grade teacher. This year I'm only teaching math. In previous years I've taught all subjects. I'm also the math lead at our school so I have to attend district wide meetings and trainings for math and come back and relay that information to our staff. I am over the Leader In Me program at our school and all the different types of things that we have to implement. That's a district wide initiative that everybody has to implement. I'm also on the PBIS team. It's Positive Behavior Intervention which is basically our reward system for rewarding students for positive behavior that they show during the school day. If a student is written up by a teacher or a staff member, they're sent to the office for whatever the behavior may be. And so being part of the PBIS team I get to look at that data. This year we expect our ODRs [office disciplinary referrals] to be way lower than last year because we have a new administration in place. Our numbers last year were high, very high. We have seen our numbers drop from August, September, October, just comparing them to last year.

Last year we had 600 plus ODRs and that's not an exaggeration. And they're legit. They're not teachers just writing kids up, they're legit. A lot of those were bus referrals because our county can't keep bus drivers and a lot of our kids, they ride the bus. We have kids that carpool, but the majority of our kids ride the bus. There's no bus monitor so you got 50 kids on a bus going to a neighborhood and we get a lot of write-ups from our bus referrals. You have



fights and so you add all those together. It falls back on teachers because a child being written up on the bus several times, eventually we have to have to suspend them off the bus. If they get suspended off the bus, they're not coming to school. And if they're not coming to school, they're not learning. And so, they're not here and their parents are saying well, they're suspended off the bus, I don't have a ride, I don't have a car to get them there. So, sometimes they'll make the effort, they may bring a cab to school, or Uber to school. We see that all the time. It just makes it very difficult to do your job and do it and be happy doing it.

Expectations are not necessarily feasible based off of our environment, based off of our culture, our school. I think sometimes the district wants all of these things done. They want our kids to be reading on grade level, they want our kids to be on grade level when it comes to math. We have kids come in sometimes in fifth grade that are BR. BR is beginning reader. So, we have students that come in and they're at that level. We have students that are kindergarten, first, second, third grade reading level and the district has made it aware that they want every child reading on grade level. There's no way. If you have one or two kids in your class that are BR, you can work with those one or two. When you have six or seven that are BR and then you have another eight or nine that their Lexile, or reading level, is four or five hundred, you've got maybe one or two that are on grade level, it's very difficult to move those kids where they need to be. On top of that, they've got to be on grade level in math and normally 75–85% of our kids come to us and they're not where they need to be and maybe that's not necessarily a very accurate number, but it's high. It's constant and so when we see that and then we take our STAR test, we take our unit assessments and things like that, and our numbers are not where either our admin. Want them to be or the district. It comes back on us, so we're constantly stressed and trying to figure out our next move to try to get to where we need to be with our kids and you add behavior

on top of that, it's very, very difficult. It puts a lot of stress on me as a teacher in the classroom because I know what's expected of me and I also know where my kids are so there's a lot of pressure there and I put a lot of pressure on myself because I want to not necessarily be the best teacher ever, but I want to be the best teacher for my kids. So, it puts a lot of stress on you.

Teachers get burnt out, tired, the politics, constantly feeling like you are asked to do things that are not within the things that you feel like you need to be doing. Which I don't feel that may be the best practice or things that they may think are good for one school may not be good for the other school. But they're holding us on the same playing field. I mean, they want the same results and I understand why, there's just sometimes that's not feasible, so you get burnt out easily. I mean, it's so easy as a teacher to get burnt out. I think having smaller classroom sizes and a mental health person available on campuses, it's huge especially where I'm at. We have kids going through things adults shouldn't even have to go through. As a teacher that takes a toll on you because you're having to play that role of either mom, dad, whoever and we only have one counselor and she's overwhelmed.

I see myself in so many of the kids that come through our school. And I know that if it were not for certain teachers that were in my life, that I probably wouldn't be a teacher today. So, I just try to see myself in another kid and just make sure that I'm giving them the proper education that they deserve because a lot of times the things that they're going through, that they're dealing with, is not their fault. I have to realize that, and I have to understand that. I get along well with all of my students because I relate well to the students. I've been in that position of some of my students, being in fifth grade. I can remember being in fifth grade and I can just see myself in some of my students so I can relate to a lot of things that they may be going through, or they may have going on. Sometimes I just have to stop and realize and think, you

know, I chose this profession. Seeing that child go from a BR to a 200 Lexile might not mean much to the average person but that's a big deal, that's a huge deal. It's just very difficult when they get in fifth grade, when they're that low, to sometimes get them to where they need to be. Now, that's not saying that we don't move some kids because we move all of them to some degree, but when they're that low, it's a challenge.

One of the challenges as a male teacher in an elementary school, at the beginning of the school year, you're getting new students and new parents and things like that. It's rare to see male teachers in the elementary school so I don't necessarily think that I'm taken serious and some parents might not be comfortable, especially if they have a daughter in elementary school. Just until they get to know you. My classroom doesn't look like a male teacher in an elementary school. Usually people always say, did your wife decorate your classroom? I'm like no, I did. Just because I want to be taken serious by my students as a male teacher, so I try to make things fun. We have a theme, I'm going to go with the theme, everything is going to evolve around that. We do fun things in the classroom, we're gonna work in groups. I try to have a very engaging environment. My standards are going to be posted, my learning targets are going to be posted, we're gonna work in groups. The work is going to be rigorous, but also fun and challenging. I keep a very professional environment and the culture in my classroom is fun.

Also, when you show that you're capable and you show that you can lead it's always expected of you more like you're called on to do almost everything. So that's a challenge because I'm always being asked to do things and I have a hard time saying no. And then, just being a male, I feel I'm asked to do more than others. Sometimes I don't mind, then there are times, like now, she [female teachers] can do the job just as good as I can. It wears you down. There's a high level of stress because it's just a constant. You're always thinking about the next

thing that you have to do on top of everything else that is being put on your plate and added to that level of stress. I try not to let it bother me. I try not to even show it, but sometimes, it takes its toll. I think me, being a man, my breaking point is a lot stronger. I think men handle things a lot different than women. I think we keep those things inside a lot more than women do. As the female teachers, they'll let it all out and, at some point, they have a breaking point. There are teachers that I know that they're on medicine when they weren't on medicine before. I'm not, but it takes a toll on you so it can wear you down physically, it can wear you down mentally and you have to have a strong mind to be a teacher today.

It can affect how you look at students, it can affect how you respond to students, react to students. How you teach. I've seen teachers where they've just had it up to their necks and they're going off on students. It probably had nothing to do with the students. They're just stressed, lesson plans are due, grades are due, you didn't respond to the e-mail, you've got this going on, that going on and so all of those things combined can have teachers just react. Maybe in a negative way sometimes with students, or not even put forth the necessary effort to educate their kids on a daily basis just because you're tired, you're worn out so your lesson plans may lack.

I have to catch myself at times because the high ups are pushing us so, of course, naturally we're gonna want to push our kids. So, I have to catch myself. I'm not fussing at the kids. I just want them to understand the importance of them being able to read on grade level, them being able to know their multiplication facts. If you don't know your multiplication facts, you're not going to be able to do fifth grade math, that's just everything we do. There's some type of multiplication or division involved in it. And so, I'm trying to give the importance of all that through them so sometimes I'm pretty sure they see my anxiety when I'm teaching.

Personally, it affects me even though I hate to admit that. There are times, I've put out so much in that school day that when I come home my kids—"dad will you help me with my homework?" "Daddy, will you help me study?" And honestly, I have no energy to do it and I'm like can we do it later? So, I think it [stress] effects my relationship with my younger kids because I have a fifth grader, same grade that I teach, and I have a second grader. So, it effects the relationship there and I think they realize it because they've said things such as, "you don't ever want to help us," or whatever the case may be. And especially on Fridays. I don't ever want to do anything. I'm drained, I'm tired, I don't want to go anywhere. I just want to come home, get something to eat, and get in bed during the school year. And that affects the marriage because my wife, she's like, "it's Friday, let's go do stuff" and I'm just tired. You put out so much during the week that it's just draining. I chose to have kids and they need me so I just got to have a balance there where I know I can go hard here. I can give them all here, but at the same time I know my kids may have something coming up that I need to be available for, so I try to make sure that I schedule things properly, making sure that I'm meeting deadlines so that I'm not having to stay late at work and things like that.

I don't think teachers are ready to deal with the classroom when teachers come out of college. I know I wasn't ready. I thought I was until I stepped foot in a classroom, and I was like, what have I got myself into. So, I think they need more time in the classroom, while in college, having student teachers teach, student teach at a low performing school or high poverty type school. Once a teacher is hired, they have new staff orientation and then they'll go through like a day or two training of these are the things that you need to know and do. Definitely not enough time because you've got so many things thrown at you at one time. You don't have enough time to take all that in. You start a new job; you've got to get your classroom ready. It's just not

enough time. When I started my first year in the district, the mentoring program was not a very strong program. Six years in we've come a long way. Our new teachers are definitely getting that mentorship that they need. Not where it needs to be, but they're getting some of what they need. When you're in that mentoring program you start to build relationships. You start to trust your colleagues. You're more likely to ask for help, you're more likely to receive help. If you could be consistent with it, it will definitely get to where it needs to be, or a new teacher will get to where they need to be. It may take a little bit more time than we would like just based off of who that teacher is coming out of college. We need to do a better job at recruiting teachers earlier and then grooming them for our system.

When I was a first-year teacher, I had thirty-two kids and I taught math and I had no idea what I was doing. None. I mean I was just turning in circles. I didn't know who to turn to for what. Part of the reason for that was because our school had a high turnover so there was no continuity there with the administration, and no expectations. I'm learning firsthand. The culture at our school was not very good these past three or four years, we've gotten a new principal in. We still have the same AP [assistant principal] this year, and you can just see the difference in the teachers because we have clear expectations. So, when we have those clear expectations, we know what's expected of us and we're being held accountable and in the past we've not been held accountable and so we get lazy. We know nothings probably going to happen and at the end of the day the kids suffer.

I just think that having a school that has a culture that is positive, that is engaging, fun, can help in all aspects because my stress level has decreased a lot just because I know lesson plans are due, there's no ifs, ands, buts about it. I've got to have them submitted. I know that I'm expected to be in my classroom teaching every day. I know that we're going to be implementing

PBIS activities, Leader In Me activities and they're going to be fun for the kids and the kids look forward to them. So, it's making my life easier because the kids are trying to behave. They're trying. They're not where they need to be, just because we haven't set those expectations and held them accountable in the past, too, so they're learning. Any glimpse of success that we can have with the child is a win so the success of the students', that's rewarding for me.

### **Nick's COVID-19 Experience**

This year I taught both virtual and face to face students, simultaneously. I had to meet the needs of both sets of students while also keeping them challenged and engaged, which was a struggle at first. Both my students and I had to find our way and discover how to maneuver our classroom and lessons. Expectations were different on every level, and we had to learn how to collaborate as a class while at the same time taking ownership in our individual learning and progress. COVID-19 made me rediscover my students as individuals and no longer see them as just my students, but as people. I was invited into their homes daily and had an up close and personal visual of the challenges they were facing daily. Many of my students struggle in so many ways, and Covid forced them to be strong, brave, and resilient. They faced challenges that would have broken many adults, but most of my students rose to the occasion and showed me a level of maturity I would have never believed they had or imagined.

Personally, I had to learn balance, patience, and flexibility in ways I never have before. I also had to learn to let some things go. I had to learn to give my best daily and realize that my best was good enough. I slowed down both at work and at home, and I took time to reconnect with not only my family, but with myself. And, by rediscovering myself and practicing self-care, I was able to reprioritize things and become stronger. This has been a positive action for both me and my students. Now, I can model for them that it is okay to take time for yourself. And, not

only is it okay, but it is essential for a happy, productive, and balanced life. I was reminded we are human BEINGS, not human DOERS, and sometimes it's okay to just BE.

As a result of COVID-19, I have absolutely changed as a teacher. Covid taught me that education is important but taking care of meeting the needs of the whole child is even more important. My students and I survived the pandemic together. We had good days and we had bad, but we made it. They had my back and I had theirs, and that is something none of us will EVER forget! I became more aware of how important life is and I learned not to take anything or anyone for granted. The little things became important like being able to fist bump my students, eating lunch with them, and seeing their faces. COVID-19 made me realize that academics are important but humanizing our children is more important. Due to what I learned, this upcoming year, I will be focusing on making sure that I remember that my students are human, and they are kids.

### **Nick: Preliminary Reflections**

Nick's path to becoming a teacher provided him the opportunity to see other aspects of the teaching profession before becoming a classroom teacher. Nick works in an area where behavior referrals are numerous. His students are held to the same expectations and given the same programs to incorporate as other schools in the county. The schools have a vastly different student population. Due to demanding and unrealistic expectations, Nick believed teachers could easily become burned out. In addition to frustrations of impractical expectations for students, Nick also experienced increased expectations because of his gender. He was expected to manage incidents and take care of specific needs in the school. He also had to help parents become comfortable with having a male teacher in the classroom. During COVID-19, Nick experienced teaching virtually and gained better insight of his students' home lives. He learned to appreciate



his students, recognized that teaching the whole child is essential to learning, and appreciated his own life more. Nick also thought new teachers needed more support so they would have a better opportunity to stay longer in the classroom instead of having an experience like his where he felt constantly overwhelmed.

### **Negotiating Research with Passion**

On a bright Sunday afternoon, Passion walked up the walkway to my parent's home, where we greeted each other with a smile and a long hug. Passion and I met twenty-three years ago as high school freshmen, and since graduation, we kept up with each other's lives through social media. While I knew Passion was a teacher, I did not know the details of her life inside or outside of the classroom. Like many friends I follow on social media, my knowledge is limited to what they choose to publish and there is usually very little depth to the façade displayed. As we walked inside the house and sat at the breakfast table across from each other, Passion and I talked of years past. In the quiet house, her voice filled the air with delight. She was relaxed, hair pulled back, but confident and alive with energy. This was the first time we had seen each other in person since high school. We talked about band and old friends. We talked about family and marriage. After officially beginning the interview, the excitement and enthusiasm Passion exhibited as we reminisced did not lessen. As Passion spoke, she was also very animated, matter of fact, and honest. Her voice comfortable and confident, she told story after story as we sat together, drawing me in and leaving me awestruck. I was amazed at Passion's ability to endure each hardship in her life and career while maintaining optimism for a brighter future. After our initial interview, Passion decided it was time for a change in her career. She left the school she began her career at and moved to have a fresh start and perspective. Throughout our communication, Passion remained optimistic about teaching, but she knew it was time for her to

make a change for herself. Even so, as the time came for her to leave her initial teaching position, Passion struggled with leaving the students that depended on her so frequently. Passion, an African American female in her late 30's, has been teaching for fifteen years in Georgia. All fifteen years had initially been in the same school district and the same school. Passion worked in a Title I school and was a fifth grade Math and Science teacher. A month after our initial interview, in the middle of her fourteenth year, Passion moved to a new city, new school district, and a new school. Passion believed it was time for her to have a fresh start in a new location and at a different school where she hoped to continue to grow as an educator and touch the lives of all the students who passed through her classroom door. I followed up with Passion after her move and she remained positive and full of excitement for a new beginning and opportunity to continue teaching. Little did she know COVID-19 would soon provide another challenge as she settled into a new life.

**In Passion's Words:**

*“Despite the challenges, the stresses, the paperwork and all of the stuff that comes with it, if you get all that out of the way, teaching is in your heart, and I want people to realize that. Teachers are doing this because it's in their heart.”*

PASSION

the Fun, Crazy, Out of the Box Teacher

My experiences all started when I was in high school. I had a teacher, and we were doing a social studies project and we were talking about working or jobs or something to that nature. I wanted to work at McDonald's at that time and he said that I was living in this really big bubble. I was never gonna go anywhere in my life and do anything and from that moment I'm like, that's not what the job of a teacher is supposed to do. You're supposed to inspire kids to want to reach

their goals. And at that time if that was my goal, then you should have been able to do that. So, I started thinking in my head, okay, I think I want to be a teacher so I can make sure that kids don't hear the stuff that I hear. That on top of the fact that my mom was an educator and I saw the things that she instilled in me was about what teachers are for. To inspire, to be there, to teach our children, not just the academic stuff, but to teach our kids and not since I was little, since maybe high school I wanted to be a teacher.

Then, I went to college and decided that I wasn't going to do teaching because at the time my friends weren't pursuing education. A lot of education classes were eight o'clock in the morning and coming into college, I didn't want to do eight o'clock in the morning classes. So, I didn't do education that time just because my friends at the time weren't doing it. Then I got a new group of friends who were all in education and I was like, oh, we have our own little building over here, have our own little food court, so let me do education again. Let me get back to where I was trying to go to. I had tried my major in everything else and finally my dad was like you just do general studies, just to do something because I'm tired of paying for college. You need to get out. And I was like, you know what, I'm going to go do teaching. So, I did sign language and speech pathology, studied all of those and I wound up doing elementary ed. and special ed. and getting a dual degree. That kind of started off into the teaching career and led me to getting into elementary ed. so, it was a rocky road. I was there and then left and came back. I think those experiences have encouraged me to continue to stay the road and remember why I wanted to be a teacher in the first place and that was to inspire and motivate our kids. Not just with math and science and reading. Those are important things, but I want to tell them [students] about life skills as well.

Our county, we have a large number of schools at all levels. So, we have small classes all the way up to kind of huge classes. The primary demographics, it depends on the area of the school. Fifty percent of our schools are Title I schools where we receive free reduced lunch. They're getting funds from the state. We do have a lot of free or reduced lunch. I don't know the exact percentage of races in our school district. I think it kind of pretty much depends on the area that the school is located. At my particular school it is predominantly Black. We may have one percent white. I think that might be it, but we're a neighborhood type school where most of the kids at our school, their grandparents came to our school and their parents and their uncles and aunties so, we're what we consider a neighborhood school. And we've been there for a very long time.

Our superintendent is trying to combine some schools to make a K8 school because the schools that aren't Title I, the district is having to pay for their lights and all their water and stuff. The state is not helping so we're costing the district a lot of money. So, he wants to do K8 schools to put enough people in the school so the state will take care of the bills. He has gotten one school built. It's a fine arts school so he can get some money put into that building. He's combining elementary schools coming up is what his hope is to try and help with the funding because our school district, I guess we don't receive a lot of money. All of our elementary schools are all Title I schools. We have a couple of middle schools and two or three high schools, I think, that are Title I schools who are getting those funds from the state to help that school. According to them [county officials] we're broke all the time, but I don't know where it's going. It's not going to the schoolbooks. Our books are outdated.

So, he [superintendent] wants to do K8 schools so that he can put enough people in the school so the state will take care of the bills, per se. I'm not really sure if it's going to be a good

idea. They took Pre-K out of little daycares and Childcare Networks and put them into the schools and so there are only four places. So, if you're not in one of those areas you're responsible for trying to get your child to that Pre-K. So, you're thinking having four-year-olds in the same building as ten and eleven-year-olds. Right now, it's a problem because our little babies are getting run over. They're seeing things that the bigger kids are doing that I don't think my four-year-old should be exposed to. I think as far as exposing our kids to some of the things and the behaviors that they see, that wouldn't necessarily be a good idea to put the Pre-K kids with the big kids.

I think I like the middle school idea being separate from elementary because when I left fifth grade, I felt like I was growing up. I had to leave the elementary school and it's like, hey, I'm big now. I'm a big girl. I'm in middle school. And then when you leave middle school, high school is the next level, but if you're putting them all there you only really get two buildings. You've got to go from this elementary school for eight years and then you finally go on to high school. So, I'm not really sure if you're ready to just go right on into high school like that. So, I just think mentally it was better for me to understand that I'm a little bit older than elementary kids now. I don't need to act like that. We haven't gotten one yet here yet. That's his plan, but I don't know if anyone's going to vote on that.

My county is a good county. We're working on building up support in the county. Right now, I don't feel that the teachers have enough support from the county. In aspects, our county is one of those whatever is passing by at the time, we're gonna jump on that. We've jumped from Cornerstone to all these other different initiatives and every time something new comes up, we're wanting to jump on that band wagon and not leave enough time to see if it's working. So, we'll just implement this at one school and see if it works. When it doesn't work, let's throw that

out and try something else. Well, this county does this so let's see if it works over here. I feel like our county is kind of all over the place. It's kind of like an ADHD [Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder] child. We're just everywhere. I think that has trickled down to schools.

Some of our schools in our county are feeling the lack there, of support. We have a lot of schools who have over 50% SPED [special education] population now because they want to say that the kids are behind when they can't learn because they have so many emotional behaviors going on. My school particular now has a BSP [behavior support program] so we have kids who are in that program who have some extreme emotional disorders who are not able to cope in a regular classroom right now. These are kids have their own classroom. They are not included in the regular classroom. It's most of our kids who are elopers. They run out of buildings, they curse, they fight; they're just not ready emotionally for a general ed. classroom. Once they get their behaviors under control, they go into what we call a transition class. In that transitional class, they're learning how a general ed. classroom is supposed to run. Over 60% of our students are SPED at my school and it's low all the way around. But as far as the education part, they want to put all these different initiatives onto teachers and the school itself suffers. So, our principal says creepy scores but the CCRPI [College and Career Ready Performance Index] scores they're low across because the district is looking at our scores as a whole compared to the state as opposed to looking at the school and what we can do to help the individual school. CCRPI are scores that the state bases the school on based on what the kids test. And the school kind of is rated a failing school or passing school based on the Georgia Milestones test that they take for third, fourth and fifth grade in elementary schools. The third and fifth graders are the ones that have the higher weight because they have to pass it to go to the next grade. And our

score is right now based off of how many passing, who are actually reading at the correct Lexile level for their grade level and for math how many are passing. They have to have a certain percentage that they have to pass for math. So, the more that you have that are not meeting, your creepy score kind of goes down. The more that you have meet or exceed, your creepy score goes up. It's kind of like a report card. Like if you get a 70 or below, you're pretty much failing and that's what a failing creepy score is. If 70% of your students are failing or 60% of your students are failing. And, of course, on the higher end you're doing okay if you're in the seventies, if you're at eighties and nineties then you're doing really well. All we want to do at the district level is look at, well as a district we're doing good. Well, what about the individual schools because a lot of times there are some schools that carry the whole district because they don't have the same problems as the other schools do. So, I think it's a trending effect whenever the schools are focused on scores which forget the children and they suffer and then, of course, and that causes the teachers to suffer as well.

I think the state is putting some pressures on the counties, on different school districts in the counties. Not as much as the counties are putting on the different schools and not as much as the principals are putting on the teachers. So, I think the teachers are getting the pressure from the principals, from the school districts, from the superintendent to the state. Because we're at the end, so we're feeling the blunt from everybody because the state just wants every county to do well, in which everybody does. And so, they're gonna make sure, what are we doing in these other counties that are working so we can make this one county better. And then that one county that is not doing so good, what are we doing in this one school so we can make the rest of the county better. Well, what is this principal asking this school? What are you doing so I can make my school better? So, on top of what we're already doing, you see another school that's doing

something you want to add to what we're doing. It's all for general purpose, to make it look good, to say we're successful with our kids, but you're not really looking at the amount of stuff that the teacher's already have to deal with. You're just looking at it from, I need my school to look good, I need my school to do this, so my teachers have to do this. And so, I think it's pressure from each level. It's just more pressure when it gets to the teacher level because we've gotten all the pressure from the other parts of it.

If you don't have a supportive admin. department then you're gonna lose the passion. You're gonna lose the umph to want to keep doing what you're doing. And then that's when you have to start motivating yourself. And that's what I'm kind of experiencing at this moment. We're still trying to figure this out, talking amongst ourselves, as far as discipline and the stresses of a classroom, when we have thirty kids in the classroom. I don't feel as though the administration that I previously had was very supportive of the things that were going on in the classroom. We have students who have been hitting teachers and that one student is still in the building. There's nothing happening and now it's getting to the point where parents are getting involved because now this child has put ranch dressing in another child's hair, threw her lunch away and done all these other things and nothing has happened to this child. They just want to say, oh, let's just put her in a 504 plan or let's get her FBA [Functional Behavior Assessment] and that's not addressing the issue. We have a policy in place where you're supposed to write them up. We write them up, they have three classroom write-ups and once you get three, your fourth one you have to go to the office and so we send them to the office. We feel like there's no support so why do we continue to do. Why should I fuss at you about standing in the hallway correctly when you're not going to do it because I said do it? If I keep telling you okay, there's got to be a consequence, and so when I give you the consequence your consequence is you want



to go to the office because for one you're getting out of the classwork or admin. will send them to another classroom. I don't even understand how that's a time out, go to a kindergarten classroom. You're in fifth grade, why would you go to a kindergarten classroom? There's nothing in that kindergarten classroom that you're gonna do, you know, you're just gonna sit there and look at little kids. Some students become helper for the day. We'll see them walking around doing errands for the principal or they're getting ice cream in the cafeteria or they're doing something to get out of the classwork. So, some of your other kids see that and that adds more stress and so you're writing more people up and then you start feeling like why am I going to write you up when nothing is really happening. So, it's kind of very depressing when you don't have that admin. support. That makes you feel like you're not doing anything when you don't have the support. Like you're fighting by yourself and so it makes you even more tired and not wanting to be there when you're getting blamed for stuff.

That's another thing that admin. seems to like to do. They like to blame you. Well, you know, this fight happened, well, where were you? I was teaching. I can't be in five places at one time. And so, I just feel like it's so much pressure that admin. has on teachers that where is your accountability? What are you doing to help the situation? On the flip side, I have been in a situation where my principal was very supportive and those three years, I would say out of the fourteen, were the best three years that I had because she took nothing. If you were interrupting learning, you had the problem, and I was going to deal with you. Your parent had to come get you. We had to sit down and talk. There was something going on and she was like, "my suspension rate might be high in the beginning of the year, but by December the kids will know that I don't take any mess from them, and we won't have any problems for the rest of the year"

and that was her thing. August, September, October were our highest suspension rates, but we got to the end of the year where we didn't suspend too many kids.

So, if we don't have support from our academic dean and our principal, then the stress of a teacher becomes increased. Now you're dealing with the kids who didn't cause the behavior problems, seeing that these ones with behavior problems were not getting in trouble, so they wound up testing the waters too. And so now, you have a whole class of kids who like to get in trouble, and they know nothing is gonna happen. And the kids do, they really do know there isn't anything, because I've had a couple students say, "you know, you need to stop fighting" and she was like "why, for what? I'm just fighting. He got moved to another classroom and I'm right in here doing my classwork. They ain't going to do anything about it." I was just like, wow, the kids, they know. And so, if you don't have that support from the head, it's gonna be rough. And I think the same thing from the chief academic officers, which are the principals to the principal. It's who they report to. If they don't support the principal, then she feels like her hands are tied, or he feels like his hands are tied and they're not getting the support. If my administrator feels that way, like she's not getting the support she needs as well, which is tiring her out, which in turn makes us tired. Because if she is feeling like she doesn't care either, support starts at the top. If we feel like we're getting the support, it's gonna show.

If people from the district would understand. I just think that sometimes they get out of the classroom, and they've been out for so long and I think they think that the classroom is still the same as it was when they came out, but it's not. It's completely changed. And I just want you to come and not forget what you had to do in this classroom. Don't completely take yourself out because you're in this nice little four-corner office now and you're not in this four-corner classroom. Come back and see what we're having to do. See the amount of stuff on top of

teaching them how to read on top of teaching all of this stuff that they're not getting at home. Nowadays our parents are becoming younger and younger, and grandparents are raising our kids and so grandparents do it their way. If someone from the district level and even the state level would just come in and not come in to say we're going to try to take over your school, that's been a lot, of course, going around at my school. They [teachers] just think that the state, because of our CCRPI scores being so low, the state is gonna come in and take over the school and now we're gonna have all these professional developments. I have professionally developed out. I think they have given me every professional development that they have come up with and I have taken that, and I have tried it and it has not worked or it has worked, and we keep doing it. Then they want to take you to another one and tell you to do this. Well, we haven't even got this perfected yet, now they want us to do something different.

I think if they actually came in and saw the amount of stuff that we do as teachers in the classroom, I think they would kinda understand and can take away some of this stuff. Some of this stuff I think that we're doing, it has to be some kind of responsibility of the parents at home. We cannot do it all. Let's really look at this time. I really don't have 50 minutes of planning because none of the specials are on your hallway. You have to walk down the hallway and if you're not following the rules you have to stop, remind them about the rules, so that takes another few minutes to get there and so there's your time. Or now we have, where if I drop my kids off at specials the first five minutes, I have to stay with them to make sure they're not misbehaving. Then when you drop your kids off for specials, you get called to an IEP [Individualized Education Plan] meeting or you have to sit down and do a grade level meeting and as soon as you sit down to do a grade level meeting, they call you because your kids are cutting up. You have to go over here and monitor them. Then I have to be there five minutes

early to pick them up. So, my 50 minutes has now cut into 40 minutes. It's all over, but according to the people in the district, all they see is that you have 40–50 minutes of planning.

But I think if they come in and see us in action and watch us and really look at what we're doing and not there to just check off some boxes on a TKES [Teacher Keys Effectiveness System] score then I think it would be like, that's a lot of stuff for her to have to do on top of teaching. When do you actually get teaching done? Probably like five minutes of the day. So, I think if they actually came in on a day that was just like a pop-up visit and just see what we have to go through and experience a day like what we deal with, I think they would be a little bit more understanding. I would hope they would be a little bit more understanding to say, "hey, let me see if I can take some of that off of the teachers" and if they could actually see it. But I don't know if they'll actually come because now, you know, when you get the titles, you get excited.

I've been in the school district now, this is fourteenth year, and all fourteen years have been at the same school. I am currently a fifth-grade math and science teacher, so I teach math first, science second and then I have two rotations, so I switch classes twice. We have approximately sixty students in the fifth grade. I have thirty-one in my homeroom, and I have twenty-nine or so in the other homeroom. I am the inclusion teacher which means that I have many students in my class who are receiving special education services. The number has actually increased the last couple of weeks, so I think I'm at twelve students in my homeroom class so twelve of thirty who have special ed. services. I'm kind of teaching that as well. When the SPED teacher has to go and get pulled for something else, I am the SPED teacher and the general ed. teacher. And sometimes, I'm the specials teacher. I have to do a little music, art, and P.E. with them too when they don't show up. So, we have to wear, as elementary teachers, a lot of different hats. Counseling and all of that as well.

To help with my stress, which I feel like most teachers have the same stress I have, I would just need to feel supported. I need to know that you have my back. That is this paperwork may not be done to what they want, but you're standing up saying hey, my teacher has to teach. Is there someone from the district that can come in, from their office, and come into this classroom and take off some of this extra paperwork that my teacher has to do because she is here to teach and get these kids ready, not only for the Georgia Milestones test, but just for society whether they want to go to college or trade school or just go straight into the work force. We have to get these kids ready. In elementary, we're like the foundation of the house. Whatever they learn here, they build upon in middle school and high school. So, if they don't get a good foundation then their house is not gonna last long. And so, we always tell our kids that whole little analogy about we're the house. We're the foundation and the big bad wolf is gonna come and blow your house down if you don't have a good foundation, so you really need to get it here or you're gonna struggle throughout middle school and high school.

The stress can affect your passion simply because you're tired and you don't want to keep going. It's like one of the teachers said to me the other day, insanity is doing the same thing over and over, thinking you're going to get a different result. I think stress is nine out of ten times affective on all teachers because we're not just stressed from the students or just a teaching aspect. I think we're stressed from all of the paperwork that comes with it. Most of the teachers that I've talked to and some of my co-workers and friends who are teachers want to just teach. That is what we signed up for, to teach. Whatever it is subject or area, content area that we chose, we want to teach. Now you've added in all of this extra stuff on top of just teaching and I feel like teaching is at the bottom of the pile and you just keep putting everything else on there and then say, hey, you didn't teach. Well, you asked me to do these 50 other things, you put on

top of teaching so I can't pull the teaching. It's kind of like Jenga. I'm scared to pull the little teaching tab because everything else is going to fall over. We keep coming everyday thinking, okay, today's going to be different, nope, not today. Maybe tomorrow is gonna be different. And so, it affects us, but somehow, we keep pushing through. We fuss, we argue, we come to each other. I think that's what building relationships, not only with the kids, but with the teachers in your profession, having somebody to go and talk to and say, girl, I'm tired, I can't do this anymore, you know, yes you can, you got it, come on. Five more minutes, and school will be over in five more minutes and you're like, whoo, we made it through one day and we're just taking it one day at a time.

It does cause some other stresses. I think because teachers have that passion to educate and not just teach. And so, I would love for it to not be like that, but I don't know. I'm still trying to come up with a way to fix it. One of my co-workers and I said that we were going to make us a movie, so people see into true teaching. This is what teaching is, this stuff you see on TV with the cute little teachers and the classrooms, that's not teaching. That is movie made teaching. The real in the battlefield kind of teaching, we need y'all to see what we go through on a regular basis, because I really do feel like the teaching profession as a whole is not as respected anymore as it used to be. And I think that's because people aren't seeing the amount of work that it is into teaching.

Some days you have to put on your teaching hat and your observational hat at the same time. What I typically have to do in my classroom because I have a co-teacher in my class because my class is inclusion, what we do is one teach, one observe on the days that I need to get the data. So, while I'm teaching, she's observing and so she's in the back of the classroom or in a corner somewhere at her desk and she's writing down, tallying the observation for me. And then

other times we have another SPED para that comes in. She will do the observing when we're doing parallel teaching where my co-teacher is teaching and then I'm teaching and we don't have time to document together, so the SPED para comes in and she's doing the observation. So, we kind of have to work as a team to get it done because if it doesn't get done it's still gonna come back to the teacher that you didn't get this done. It's not six weeks of complete data so you've got to start all over and that little document is not a one-page document. That adds more stress on it because now, oh well, we're not fixing this behavior. Now, I've got to go watch it again for six more weeks. So, here we are twelve weeks in and this child's not fixed anything about the behavior which is just more frustrating.

Teachers are not able to just teach anymore. They're not a lot of graduates coming out in the education field. We're going through that now trying to find some teachers in our school. We still have a sub that's been there since August because we can't find a teacher to replace them because I think they have just lost respect for the field. They've talked to other teachers or seen the amount of stress that other teachers are going through, and they just don't want to do that. And so, it pushes a lot of people away from the profession.

What drew me to teaching was the fun I had. My first year teaching we went to visit the Ron Clark Academy. I know that Ron Clark Academy is this big vision for some other people because we don't necessarily have that type of school here but seeing the enthusiasm in those teachers and the excitement with the kids, that made me want my kids to feel that same way about when they come to my classroom. I want them to be excited when they come to my class and for teachers would see the excitement and the joy that the kids have coming into the classroom and the fun aspects of learning. Learning doesn't necessarily have to be a lecture type learning. My classroom has never been me stand up in front of the class with my marker or my

little book open and they're just following along as I read or listening to me lecture about something. It's been more hands on. A couple of times, I took all the chairs out of my classroom. All they had was desks because we moved around the entire day, and we were going from here to here. We were moving and busy and building and moving, doing stuff and they didn't even realize they weren't sitting down. You know, for almost a whole hour, we were up around, moving and they didn't even realize it, so they were engaged in what they were doing and learning.

My passion—they're my kids. Seeing my kids come in and knowing the home life that they come from, a lot of times, I'm probably the only smile they see. I'm the only hug they get and that's what keeps me going because I got that from both of my parents. I grew up in a two-parent home, but the majority of my kids in my room only have one parent and a lot of those one parent homes, it's the grandparent. Neither one of them are in there. I just had two instances where one of my kids, her mother was killed. She was leaving a boyfriend and he didn't want her to go so he killed her. And the little girl came, and she was writing her note and she was like, "you know I always had my mother, but now you'll just take my mother's spot." And I was like, wait a minute, that's a lot of responsibility, but just knowing that this little girl looks up to me like her mother. Another student, her mother got into some trouble and was locked up and she was like, "I hope my mom gets out for Christmas. I don't know what I'm gonna do without my mom." At ten years old you're going through this and I'm my age and I haven't even experienced any of this stuff that they're going through. I have kids who come in and their hungry because they're not eating at home. They come to me, "I know you've got crackers. Let me get some goldfish or something in your drawer" and they go, and they get it. We have kids who come in who don't have running water at their homes and so I have talked to my church.



Some other teachers, we've gotten together and paid a water bill before. So, the passion doesn't come from the curriculum. It comes from the kids and so they keep me going because if I don't do it, who's gonna do it for them? There are other good teachers out there, I do believe that, but I'm not them. I'm me and the only way that I can keep going is because I have the passion for those kids. And they deserve the same thing as any other student in this county, regardless if you come from the wealthy side of town or not the wealthy side of town. It does not matter. You deserve the same kind of education that everybody else is awarded, so the kids keep me going.

The stress can begin to affect you personally. When I started teaching, I was actually about maybe a 125 pounds, and nothing was wrong. I was healthy. I had no problems with my blood pressure. The same doctor I had when I was a hundred and twenty something pounds is the same doctor I have now, and she can tell you over the 14 years my body has changed completely. On top of that, I have had a child, but I can't get that child weight off, no matter what they've done. They've sent me to the doctor. They've sent me to the gym. I had a whole special person that could work on this, and nothing came. I felt kind of bad when the gym dismissed me from the program because they were like we're not going to keep taking your money because we're not helping you. This is something other than just wanting to lose weight. There's something really wrong with what's going on. So, because of my stress and my hormones that are going on in my body, my body is gaining weight and then it loses it and then it gains and then it loses. My doctor has asked me to come out of the teacher profession several times because it has done a lot for my body, health wise and mentally. They have put me on Prozac because they think that I'm depressed because I'm just not happy with what's going on with what I am seeing in my profession. So, before this, I was fine and had nothing wrong. Even the first, I would say three

years, four years of teaching I think I was okay and then it started to come when I had my first panic attack and since then it has been, not downhill but downhill.

A couple of years ago my father passed and right after that it was a very difficult, depression type of stage and coming to work was adding to that depression because I couldn't find that joy in teaching that I had. I began to have panic attacks. My first panic attack was at school, and I went to the doctor and they gave me some medicine for my panic attacks and told me this is how you're going to cope with it. They blamed it all on your father just died, so you'll get over it. Over the years it still became an issue. I started having more panic attacks during class and adding to that. My doctor said that now since my dad's been gone for, at the time, like five years it was no longer that issue. Now, we're thinking about maybe it's your job; it's stresses at your jobs. And he upped my doses of medicine at that time. Then about four years ago, I was diagnosed with high blood pressure because of an incident at work. I don't know what was going on. I think I must have been fussing at a child about something and my head was hurting, the room started spinning. I just did not feel like myself. I felt like I was gonna pass out and they took my blood pressure, and it was like stroke range and so they immediately sent me to the emergency room. I was put on high blood pressure medicine, and I've been on that since five years ago.

Just recently, I was put on insulin for my diabetes. I would call it that that caused stress from diabetes. The eating habits that I was now having to do because lunch is only once a day at school, and I don't get a duty-free lunch so I am trying to eat whatever I can that's going to fill me up so I don't get hungry anymore. I found myself eating starches all day long and that caused me to become a Type II diabetic. And I found that out because I actually passed out at work, and they were taking my blood pressure. My blood pressure was okay, but they were like something

else must be wrong, so they took my sugar, and my sugar levels were like 500. So, I was in the hospital for about a week until they kind of got my sugar levels back down, my glucose levels back down to where they need to be, and they put me on three different insulin and a pill, so it's been a year. I've come off of two of the insulins. I'm still on just one. I still take my pills every day. I still have to take my sugar, prick my little hand, stab myself with needles all the time, just to keep it up. Now I'm on a strict type of diabetic diet where, of course, at lunch I can't have them fix my lunch so now I have to take my own lunch to school and I still only get like fifteen minutes to really scarf that down, so once again I'm still hungry. So now, I have to take little snacks because I can't have starches that'll fill me up at lunch because of the time constraints. About four weeks ago I actually went to the doctor because I could not figure out why I couldn't keep anything down and she says that I have a stomach ulcer which is related to stress. So, when I eat citrus or have something red it hurts my stomach. I get this hard, painful cramp in my stomach and then next thing you know I'm just throwing up everything. I can't keep anything down. And you never know when it's going to come. I can probably eat some pizza today and be fine for a couple of days, but then four days down the road all of a sudden, I'm throwing up everything. It's like I ate that three weeks ago, but it doesn't matter. Whenever my body feels tense or stress, my stomach just knots up.

The medical changes have affected my life. My daughter is worried all the time that something's going to be wrong with Mommy. She's sick, she can't do this. I've missed several performances of hers at school because I'm just exhausted and I'm tired, I can't go. Or my sugars too high and I'm at the hospital. I find myself, because of the stresses at work, I find myself not being the supportive parent. I'm taking those same stresses out on my child because I'm at work and it's like do this, stop talking, stop talking, stop talking and then I come home

and you're talking and I'm like would you stop talking. So, I feel like I'm taking out a lot of those stresses that I have at work, I'm taking them out on my child and she's getting it for no reason. It doesn't matter what she does, she can just come in and mama let me tell you about my day. I don't even want to hear about it right now because I'm so exhausted from my own day. So, I feel that has affected my being a mother. We do have our issues because I'm so tired I come home and go to sleep, and I miss out on doing homework with her. Luckily, she has that passion to want to learn that she's pretty much been teaching herself because I'm so exhausted by the time I get home. My insulin and my diabetes medicine really makes me exhausted. Once I take it, I'm almost asleep. Especially when I take my anxiety medicine. In about twenty minutes, I'm out. And so, because of the strength they had to give me so I can maintain going through the rest of the day, it has affected me in my personal life. Not just my child, with my family. I don't want to go out to functions all the time. I would much rather just sit at my house and in the dark. I like sitting in the dark just calm because I don't get that peace, rarely. And so just sitting there and doing that, it's just calming, to just sit there.

I have seen a counselor and she's given a couple of different ways to manage my stress. The first thing that she told me was to tell people no. I have not yet mastered that concept yet. I'm still working on that. Even when I have a whole lot of things going on, I'm still like, yeah, if you ask me, I'm gonna do it. Either way I'm gonna do it no matter what is going on in my life, so I continue to add more things on my plate professional wise at work. I'm practicing the power of no. She's also given me a stress ball to kind of use to kind of calm myself down. Some methods of counting, the kind of usual stuff. I like to color and so I have bought several adult coloring books and I color just to kind of take my mind off of things. That sitting in the dark when it's just quiet, no TV, brings me down and calms me down so I'm not so hyper or just

feeling so stressed. Puzzles. I like to do the Sudoku puzzles and things like that. Something that's challenging my mind, so it's not focused on this. And then eventually I'll be like, okay, I can get back to work now because my mind is much better. I don't like the things that happened, but it happened and so we're dealing with it. But all of that has been related to something in the teaching field.

In the beginning I tried not to let it affect me personally, or professionally. I knew I still had a job to do and of course I was passionate about teaching. I just wanted to teach. I'm the out of the box teacher. I'm not gonna do the typical standing in front of you on the board type of thing. I mean I will stand in my chair; I will stand on the kid's chairs; we'll all get up. Whoever's speaking, okay, you get the mike today and you stand up and all attention is on you. I have a spotlight in my room where they feel like they're on spotlight, you know. It's never a dull moment in my classroom unless I'm just not feeling good. But it's never a dull moment. It's always something active and fun and engaging and that's just the kind of person I am. I try to let my personality be my teaching. It does have an effect on me personally because now I am scared to talk too loud to my kids because if I talk loud, I'm scared my blood pressures gonna get high. I have to constantly snack in front of them and I don't like to eat while I'm trying to teach because I can't take my sugar or if my sugar gets too low, I start feeling a little shaky and I can't stand up in front of the class. I can't do the group work and the projects that I want to do. I'm more of a hands-on type teacher and I'm not able to do that stuff because I'm weak or I'm just exhausted, or I'm hurting from my stomach, or something like that. So, I'm not able to be the best professional teacher that I can be when I'm going through these particular things, and so I push really hard on the days that I feel great because I never know what the next day is going to bring.

If we want the current teachers to stay in the profession, we have to allow them to be them. Stop trying to make these cookie cutter teachers. I'm not gonna be like the lady that was before me. I'm not gonna be like that. Let me be me. As long as I'm in the guidelines of meeting what the state says that I'm supposed to meet, as long as I'm highly qualified, I'm going to my professional developments, I'm implementing what you have put in place, then let me teach the way I teach because I know these kids. Not that you don't, but I'm with them every day. I know their ins and outs and so let me be me and teach the way I need to teach. I think if teachers had that freedom to do that, a lot of them would stay. From my retired friends, they left because the amount of paperwork stuff that they kept wanting you to do on top of making you fit in this box and you can't fit teachers all in one box. If we were all in one box, we would all learn the same way and it would be a really boring place. So, stop trying to put us all in one box and I think it will look more appealing to people that are on the outside to want to come in and on the inside to want to stay to make them feel welcome, to make them feel like they are appreciated. That doesn't mean you need to buy us something for the whole teacher appreciation week. Just say Happy Teacher Appreciation or put a little note on my desk, "I appreciate you doing this" or "I know it's small but thank you." Just those little things that can be implemented any day, every day when I come in. Thank you, give me a hug, or something instead of you're five minutes late. It's like what? I just got here and it kind of ruins your whole day. And so, you have to know that teachers talk to other people, and they have friends that are not teachers who they express their feelings to and it's like, I just hate this because of this. I think if they could see things differently and see that we are a very important profession, then I think they would stay. It's for the kids.

I enjoy seeing the kids come back. They've graduated high school and they come back and I'm like oh, look at him, he's all grown. And the other kids are like who is that? I'm like this

is going to be you in the future. That's the joy part of it and I hate that some people don't like to see that, but I wait for that part, when kids are coming back. And they come back, they really do, especially the ones you didn't think would come. That's what makes it all worth it, to see those kids come back and say I graduated top of my class or something. I think if some people would come back and allow us to just put the passion back into teaching and to not have to teach in this little square box that you think we should be and we're not cookie cutters. Just let us be us.

### **Passion's COVID-19 Experience**

[After our initial interview, Passion moved and began working in a new county and teaching at a new school.] I have started a new job in a new district. I am loving it. I feel better supported by administrators and teachers. I notice that behaviors are the same, but it's the dynamic of the team that helps you deal with it. In the beginning I felt overwhelmed. On March 13, 2020, I never thought I would have to dive right into digital/virtual learning. It opened my eyes to more of the technology world, communicating with parents, and online platforms. The biggest challenge I faced was helping parents with the technology and getting all students online when they don't have access. Getting two weeks' worth of work together in one day is a lot. After that, I began to feel better with teaching online because I was able to be creative. I wasn't bound by the rigid classroom strategies that are not always engaging for kids. Also, working from home and being a mother was different. I felt like the teaching never stopped. I taught her before but now I felt like I was the only teacher she had. Her teacher didn't send much work or have assignments to do, so I was giving her work after teaching her the lesson. I have learned that I'm stronger than I thought I was. I also learned that I prefer to use technology in my class more. I love online teaching now and I can be creative, engaging, and fun. I feel that I'm not stuck in a box. This experience has inspired me to be the teacher I wanted to be.

[Later, Passion reflected on her 20-21 school year.] This year I taught both virtual and in-person, so it has been like no other. Covid has not changed the way I teach, but it has enhanced the possibilities in the classroom. Because of Covid, I learned new ways to engage my students so that I can do in-person or virtual. For instance, I use more technology in the classroom which provides more engagement opportunities for my students. My students have more of an opportunity to learn through play instead of learning through outdated textbooks. This year has also made me really re-evaluate the methods I use to teach. I compared last year before Covid to this year and I feel like I learned and grew as a teacher. I learned that I could teach online and still have students understand the content. I realized I was able to adapt and adjust but not miss a beat with my teaching. All these many challenges this year has made me more open-minded and I learned that some students can learn online, and others need to be in brick and mortar [school building]. I think this year has made me a better teacher, with more strategies or ways to meet all the students' needs from my gifted student to my student with disabilities.

I always believed that teachers were more than just teachers to some of their students and that idea was confirmed this year. I saw so many students struggle day to day with keeping up, not seeing their friends, not being able to play with anyone, wearing a mask all day, dealing with Covid, dealing with death of a parent due to Covid and these situations has made me more compassionate. Before Covid, I knew that some kids had issues at home, but now that I was open to their houses, it was more than I thought. I feel like I want to do more social emotional things in class so I can motivate and inspire kids that they can do it. That was the most difficult and most rewarding part of teaching during Covid, realizing that your students, your babies, needed more than what curriculum you can teach them. They needed attention, they needed love, they



needed “I care,” they needed, “You are smart.” They needed a passionate person that happened to be a teacher.

During this school year, stress was a profoundly serious thing for me for a while. I felt like I was going to have a nervous breakdown some days. However, I have always been passionate about teaching and Covid has not changed that passion for teaching. Having to teach in a hybrid-model and both in-person and virtual was a lot, but it added the passion for building relationships and bonds with my students. I always thought that was important, but now it’s even more important. However, some days I was so tired after work that I came home and slept. I realized that the stress had caused my energy levels to decrease, so in some classes that got the best of me and others, they just received the best I had. It was a low moment in teaching for me.

So, to help myself get out of the slump, I began to exercise. I would walk around my building during breaks, after work, and before work. These walks would help me ease my mind and just focus on the good. If I were in the classroom and I felt stressed, I would just take a break from teaching, and the students and I would do a brain break. The brain breaks are not just for students, we need them as well. I also did some journaling to think about the positive things that happened that day. I wrote the negative things just so I could reflect on how to make it better. Most of my journals focused on the positive. I also joined with my best friend, who is an educator, who created a business that focuses on the self-care aspect of life. We have workshops and trainings to promote the importance of self-care. Teaching has always been about the whole child, and before Covid that was just words to me, and now it is more action. I have more passion and drive to teach that whole child.

**Passion: Preliminary Reflections**

Passion worked in a community where she felt her school and students were neglected because their scores on state testing did not support the county having a positive image in the community. However, the school demographics for the community were vastly different. In order to better support her student and the school, Passion felt a supportive administration which sets expectations and maintains them throughout the year is essential. Passion also believed district administrators needed to visit struggling schools for a better perspective of students and the surrounding community. In addition, Passion felt the unrealistic expectations of teachers and the unrelenting pressure to increase test scores caused her to have increased stress which resulted in numerous health problems. However, Passion has not allowed her health problems to control her life. She has adapted and continues to teach and work hard for the success of her students. During COVID-19, Passion continued to develop as a teacher by working with students online and through the implementation various programs. In addition, Passion learned the importance of daily exercise to help balance her health and stress at work and improve her personal growth.

**Negotiating Research with Anna**

Anna and I hugged as she entered my in-law's home one cold Saturday afternoon. We met through our spouses ten years ago, and since that time had occasional visits when we were in close proximity. While I knew Anna was a teacher, we normally had brief work conversations with little detail, so I had little knowledge of her classroom and teaching experiences. We walked out to the screened porch and sat across from each other, our backs against the arm rests of the wicker couch. Anna's straight, shoulder length brown hair framed her face as she covered her lap with a blanket. Throughout the interview, Anna was soft spoken, timid, and her voice trembled as she spoke especially recalling times, she felt her family was neglected because of her job.

While I sympathized with Anna, I could only imagine how she felt since I do not have children of my own. As I handed her a tissue, I wished I could tell her she was a good mom and I understood, but I didn't understand. After the interview concluded and the recorder stopped, Anna and I continued to talk and catch up, but it led back to Anna's story. After the recorder stopped, I could almost see Anna's petite body relinquish its tension. She became more at ease and open when talking. Through our continued conversation, Anna shared more thoughts, experiences, and stories which I was able to document through field notes. Through our conversations, I was able to observe the love of a teacher for her students and the love of a mother for her family. While Anna, like numerous other teachers, was concerned about her students and their well-being, she also provided an additional perspective concerning the love and internal conflict of a parent. Throughout our conversations and interviews, Anna remained concerned about the well-being of her family and her students. She hoped that she would eventually be able to find a balance between the two loves in her life. Anna, a Caucasian female in her mid-30s, has been teaching for eleven years in Georgia. Anna previously taught in a larger school district in Georgia and then moved to a small school district to be closer to home. This change in districts provided Anna additional knowledge for comparison and understanding of teachers in other school districts. Anna does not teach in a Title I school. She works as a support teacher for grades 3-5.

**In Anna's Words:**

*"I've gone from being single to married to having a family. It just changes your perspective on teaching."*

ANNA

the Engaging Teacher

I remember when I was really young, probably eight or nine, playing school at my house. As long as I can remember I wanted to be a teacher. My mom was a teacher, and I grew up, basically in a school and I really didn't want to do anything else. There was a time I wanted to be a nurse, but then I quickly went back to education. I realized I didn't want to do all the gory stuff that is involved with nursing. I got a degree in Early Childhood Education and then pursued a master's and specialist degree in the educational field.

I work in a smaller county. There's some ethnic diversity, but it's mostly Caucasian. The population is mostly middle-class make-up and at my school we have about 1,000 students. I previously worked in a much larger and much more ethnically diverse school system. In the larger district there were clusters of schools. Clusters are different groups of schools from the elementary, middle, and high school level that had a common goal and theme. It was very structured in their expectations, while the new, smaller county is less hands on. I changed districts because of proximity to home. It wasn't really about the size of the district. I just wanted to be closer to home. In the smaller school system, it feels more personable, but having a county that is more hands off provided more of a learning curve to independence. I've seen the superintendent a lot more. I've seen the county district people a lot more. They are in the schools more frequently in my current district than in my previous district.

I serve as a support teacher, so I push into the different classrooms. Depending on the data, I may work with math or reading and even science and social studies. I have the independence to adjust my schedule in order to provide more support to specific groups of students in their area of need. Previously, I was a homeroom teacher for nine years. I have taught lower and upper elementary grades. Years 1-5 were not as difficult, but 7-9 I struggled to remain in the profession, and I was at my breaking point. I think I was more stressed as a homeroom

teacher. Ailments have been flaring up when I've been the support teacher too. There are a lot of different stresses I've had to deal with. I don't talk to parents as much this year. I still have some communication with parents, but overall, I don't have to do as much parent communication. I don't have as much paperwork as the homeroom teacher. I have different kinds of responsibilities, but I feel like there is more stress in dealing with co-workers and initiatives rather than paperwork and parents. But the effect of my stress on students and how much I can give my students is the same as when I was a homeroom teacher because I feel like no matter which role you're in, you're still teaching.

I think that first year you're just trying to figure out everything. As much preparation as teachers have, it's a different ballgame when you get into the actual teaching, and you have your own classroom as opposed to student teaching or doing a practicum. So, I think that first year is really just figuring out a lot of things and the second and third and fourth year is when you are able to know what questions you need to ask and know what things you need to work on. That's when I think a strong effective mentor program would really help those teachers, in the years after their first year, after they have had some experience with their own classroom and know now what they need to work on and where they're struggling. The teachers that are mentors though are already being asked to do so much that they're not able to effectively help their mentees which is obviously not going to be good for anybody.

Previously, I was feeling very burnt out and knew I needed to make a change for this year, or I was going to have to change to a different career. I think it's been really hard, especially the longer I teach. I think the expectations on teachers are getting more and more, and with less and less time, to do what we need to do. I think there's a lot of good teachers out there and know what they need to do but a lot of time is taken up with other things. I strive to be

engaging when I teach. I feel like when the students are engaged in what they're doing and you're presenting the material in a way that's engaging for them they forget that they're learning.

I've noticed a difference in stress between districts just because of the expectations. I always had a good team that I worked with, that was willing to share, always willing to help each other in my previous district. We did a lot of collaboration and I've found in the smaller district that's just not the case. Since I've been in the new district, I don't feel there's as much collaboration, as much willingness to work together. I don't know if it's just the different teams I've worked with, or if it is the district and just kind of their expectations for the level of differentiation and individuality they're looking for with lessons. I think the expectations are different in the smaller district. I know there's a lot of push for using things that are not already created so you feel like you're constantly having to come up with new things or amazing things. we've also had a lot of new initiatives and different tools brought to the table that we can use, but that also brings a lot of stress of learning new things to help with the curriculum.

I think ultimately teachers just want to teach students and that's why teachers do what they do. When they feel like they're not able to teach, whether it be discipline issues or lack of training, lack of support and those things. I think that's when the frustration and the stress and the burn out comes in. I think if teachers are feeling stress or having health concerns, if they're out sick and not at the school, that's not going to be helpful to the students. I even know some teachers will take a personal day as a mental health day, to refresh and renew. A lot of times with all the other pressures, lesson plans and the things that are most essential to teaching and planning, gets done quickly just to get it done because there's so many other things that are weighing on the teachers that they need to get done on their checklist. I think it's sad that the most essential things sometimes just get done in a timely manner so that we can move on to other

things. So, the teacher will not have the best lessons prepared for the students and then student performance will be affected.

Some days I feel like I'm just trying to check the boxes off for that day and just trying to get through the day so I can take care of myself physically which is not the attitude you want as a teacher. You want to be your best for your students and give them your all. I go in and usually I'm pulling a small group or sometimes I'm teaching whole group to model lessons for teachers. Sometimes, I'll just take five minutes just to regroup, get it together, maybe go get some medicine to help whatever ailment between classes because my schedule is pretty back, to back, to back. It helps to just go in with a fresh mind for the next group of kids. I don't feel like homeroom teachers can do that as much. With my schedule I go in different classrooms so I have a little bit of flexibility, but when they have their kids, they can't just walk out if they need a moment. They can always find someone if it's necessary or I've found that I'll be that person sometimes for them. They'll say, can I just run to the restroom for a minute. So, I've been glad that I could help them sense I've been there, and I know how it is. I think teachers are getting better at recognizing when they do need that moment during the day and using support or next-door teachers just to take a minute to breathe. It is important to find ways to alleviate the stress, whether you're a veteran teacher or a first-year teacher and just have that time to do the things you know you need to do that would be best for your students.

I constantly hear, we don't feel supported. We don't feel like this is being handled the right way. I have one of my co-teachers, I believe it's her fourth year, and she has faced particular challenges this year with not feeling supported with discipline issues and she was honestly thinking about looking at a career change this year, which is very disheartening that soon into your career. Sometimes you don't have the freedom to be professional and make

decisions that you know are best for your students because you're feeling forced to do other things you've been asked to. I think we've really got to get back to the essentials with teaching. I think there's a lot of things being asked of teachers that could be cut out or things that could be streamlined. I know a lot of meetings that we're asked or not what certain teachers need. I often find it's ironic that the expectation is to differentiate for the students but then teachers don't get the same respect. Not all teachers need the same things as far as professional development or areas of need. I think we really have to get back to the essentials and give the time for planning of lessons and being able to look at data with your students and differentiating for their needs. I think we'd see a lot more teacher effectiveness when giving the teachers time to do what they know how to do and really treating them as professionals. That way it would free up time for them personally which would obviously make them a better teacher professionally if they're feeling like they have a good work life balance and they're not constantly needing to be working for things for school.

I think at the district level, more awareness of what's actually happening in schools is needed to support administration. I have mentioned that our district staff do visit our school, but I don't know if they really see the day to day of what's going on. I think the district having more awareness of the reality of what's going on in the classrooms and the discipline issues would help school administration. Hopefully then they could find a way to support the administrators at the local school level which would hopefully trickle down to the teachers. I think administration is feeling stressed too. There is a lot of pressure from the district to have high test scores and the expectations between what the district is looking for versus what maybe administration knows that their teachers need, that's a struggle too. So, I feel like administration has a lot that they're dealing with and maybe sometimes can't devote the time to support the teachers the way they



need to be or that they're trying to keep the image of the school so that maybe things are handled different ways just to make sure everything seems like it's going well.

I think it can quickly lead to burn out. I've seen teachers that haven't even been teaching very long that are very discouraged and wanting to look for other careers. It's just not what they thought it was going to be and the expectations are so high. There is a large amount of time at school that's spent in meetings or doing paperwork. There's just not the time during the day to get the essentials done and the things that really are the core of teaching are pushed to the waste side. Sometimes, I feel like I should have stayed after school and worked on something, but I chose to leave and go home and do some self-care instead, which obviously affected the next day or planning for my students in the future. In my current role, a lot of times, I don't get to meet with teachers I support and collaborate as much as I want to. Sometimes I don't get to plan with other teachers until at the end of the week so then over the weekend I have to work on plans for the next week just because there's not a time during the week to do that. A lot of times teachers feel like they need to take things home so they can have a great lesson prepared for their students. What should be personal time is devoted to planning for teachers because they are so passionate about what they do and they want to do the best for their students, that they forfeit their personal time to prepare for their class.

When you're single and you're a teacher you can devote a lot of time to teaching and you don't feel that stress. You don't feel that guilty conscience that you're not spending time with your husband or your child. Although friends and family are important too, but it's not that constant feeling of being torn between your career and your family. I feel like it changes a little bit when you get married. Your priorities shift a little bit and then again when you have a child. what has changed me as a teacher and the hours I choose devote to my career. I think it's brought

more stress in a way because I want to still be that teacher that can devote as much time as needed to feel fully prepared for my students. Trying to find a balance between wanting to give what you feel like you need to give to your family, but then also still wanting to be successful in your career and do what's best for your students, it's just not always reality. I feel like it's the same no matter where you teach. Most teachers I know want to give as much time as they need to their career, but also want to give time to their family and friends, so I think every teacher struggles with that no matter what situation they're in or what stage of their life they're in. I think your perspective changes just a little bit when you're single versus having a spouse or having a family.

Since being in a supporting role, I've taken less home this year, but I try to help co-teachers by grading some of their papers. I try to leave at a certain time and leave work at school. If I have to bring things home, I make sure that I wait until at least after my child has gone to bed to do that work so I don't feel guilty as a mom. I've tried to do things like work in the car. I feel like I can maximize my time when I work in the car. Then I can spend more time with my family when we are at home. It can be stressful because you want to give your husband your all and your child your all and you feel guilty if you're not doing that. It can be stressful because you're trying to get a balance between work and you want to do your best there and you want to be the best wife, best mom, and it's just hard when you're tired. Being tired and stressed affects your work performance because there's been several days when I've woken up with a headache and it's attributed to the TMJ [temporomandibular joint] in my jaw and then go into work.

Obviously, it's going to be hard to teach and be on your best game for teaching when you're feeling that way. With the physical ailments, you feel like you need to take care of yourself first which gives less time to your career and family which adds to the struggle of finding balance.

There's been some days when I come home with that same problem and have had to go to sleep or go lay down for a little bit which means I can't be with my family. Trying to exercise and take care of myself, that's a whole other piece of the puzzle. I tend to not be able to lose weight during the school year but have no problem during breaks or in the summer.

I've struggled anxiety and depression since high school. Since I started teaching, I had to go back and get medications readjusted. I was feeling a lot of anxiety coming on and I felt like I needed to stay on medication for personal and career reasons. I really attribute that to teaching and stress. If teachers are tired or overworked, they're not thinking clearly or doing the best things for their students which is going to affect student performance. When teachers are not feeling well, that'll make them less patient. More teachers are refusing to take things home or do work at home, but it is concerning. If teachers begin to refuse to take things home and there is less time to plan and accomplish things at work, when will it get done and how will that effect their teaching and the student's learning? I knew I needed a position not in a homeroom. I had done that for several years. I just felt burnt out and like I needed a change. So, I pursued other options. If you focus on the kids as much as possible, if you remember why you started teaching and try to push everything else aside, it can help you ignite your passion again. I think one of the keys is being with family and knowing that it will be okay because you'll be able to be a better teacher if you've gotten that time with your family and feel like you're having a balance with your life.

### **Anna's COVID-19 Experience**

Having to teach digitally all year, I almost completely lost my passion for teaching. It was very stressful trying to collaborate with a team that were all teaching in person, then having to take the lesson plans we created as a team and translate them into digital plans. I spent A LOT

of extra time creating digital activities and working on my digital classroom. The students have also needed a lot more remediation than before the pandemic. They were lacking the foundational skills that they once had as they are moving through the grades. It is very evident which skills were taught digitally at the end of last year, especially math skills. For instance, the third-grade students were taught fractions digitally at the beginning of the pandemic. When they got to fractions in fourth grade, they were having a really hard time even with the basic vocabulary of numerator and denominator.

When teaching digitally or hybrid, I had to rethink how I am going to teach certain topics. For example, teaching students how to use a protractor while they were learning digitally was quite a challenge. I had to think about the best way to introduce the concept and also allow the students to practice. This was often different than how my in-person colleagues were going to teach the concept. I also had to think about how I could possibly get the students some supplies that they needed at home to do different lessons. I would make packets for the students to come pick up with supplies they would need to do the projects or lesson. It caused me to have to plan ahead a lot more than usual. Also, a lot of extra work individually packaging the supplies, reminding parents to come pick them up, and then even delivering supplies to some students whose parents would not respond to messages or never came to pick up the supplies. I didn't want the students to be affected by not having the materials.

I have learned a lot about teaching digitally over the past year. Before teaching digitally during the pandemic, I was not the most tech savvy teacher. I was forced to learn a lot about the digital platforms and programs I was using to teach the students. Also, I had to be able to help students navigate the tools and programs through the computer screen, so I learned a whole new vocabulary and way of teaching. I consider myself a very patient person, but my amount of

patience and flexibility was increased dramatically after teaching digitally for a year. Almost daily, no matter how well I planned, we would always run in to some kind of problem we would have to work through. We faced everything from technical difficulties to power outages, to problems with the internet with severe weather. I really had to give up a lot of control that I liked to have in the classroom because every day was somewhat unpredictable.

Also, I felt like I had a lot less time to spend with my family due to all the extra work. I spent at least four to five hours on the weekend working on digital plans for the next week. I felt a lot of animosity toward my colleagues that were not having to put in the same time or effort as myself. Also, I felt that I was not rested after the weekend, therefore, I felt very tired and didn't have a lot of energy or enthusiasm to give my students during the week. Everything that was so easy for my colleagues seemed like three extra steps for me or so much more extra time.

Although our county tried to support the digital teachers, often the support or instruction came too late. We had already figured out how to use a program or platform before the training came along. Also, I felt a lot of pressure to perform and teach at the same level as my colleagues who were teaching in person which added stress to the year. I wanted to quit several times during the year because I felt so burnt out.

It was very hard finding a work life balance which brought more frustration. I was so tired sometimes at the end of the day, I felt like I did not have enough energy to be a good wife or mother. As the year went on, I tried to limit the time I spent working at home. I found shortcuts I could take to reduce the amount of time I was spending working on the weekends. Also, I limited the time I spent at night working on schoolwork. I would limit myself to an hour or an hour and a half at night and then turn my computer off regardless of if everything got done. I would try to find premade digital activities through different resources in order to reduce the

amount of time I spent making my own activities. I would even pay for resources with my own money in order to save time making the resources. This allowed more time to spend with my family. The biggest step I have taken to try to reduce my stress is consistently working out each day. I try to make time for myself even when we have a lot going on as a family. By working out, my whole mindset changed.

### **Anna: Preliminary Reflections**

Anna began her career working in a large county, and then after several years, transferred to a smaller district to be close to home. Anna's insight on the similarities and differences between the counties' expectations and support of teachers was unique. Anna felt stress due to high levels of required work which interfered with spending time with her family. Therefore, that lack of time prompted Anna to implement strategies at work so she would have more time in the evening to spend with her family. During COVID-19, Anna again started working numerous extra hours at home, so she had to readdress her time management and learn new methods to reduce time for class preparation. As a result of COVID-19 adjustments, Anna developed as a teacher and learned that her health is important in remaining passionate about teaching.

### **Collective Voices**

While their stories are personal and unique, the topics shared in the stories of Abby, Nick, Passion, and Anna are not unlike other teachers in Georgia and possibly teachers elsewhere in the country. The voices of these teachers represent an ongoing struggle that many teachers in classrooms across the United States experience each day. The field of education as well as the world around us is continuously changing, and classroom teachers know better than anyone how those changes affect their students and themselves. The intent of each participant's story is to

continue a conversation that previously began with former educators as well as to keep the voices and concerns of current educators in the spotlight.

## CHAPTER 5

### INQUIRY REFLECTIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the five findings evolved from my dissertation research: (1) Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they build personal and working relationships with their students. (2) Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they work in a positive school environment where teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and community members support one another. (3) Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they maintain a healthy lifestyle and find ways to reduce their stress. (4) Teachers remain passionate and relentless when they continue to learn and grow and further support their students even in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic. (5) Teachers would remain in the classroom for longer periods of time if they felt supported, heard, and cared about with the intent to make a difference in the lives of children, which was the reason why they chose to teach. The findings suggested that teachers remained passionate about teaching when they built personal and working relationships with their students and had supportive relationships with administrators, colleagues, and politicians where all individuals worked to support each other in a positive school environment. Additionally, the findings suggested teachers remain passionate about teaching when they maintained a healthy lifestyle and found ways to reduce their stress and when they continued to learn and grow and further support their students, which encouraged them to remain in the classroom for longer periods of time.

Theoretically, I draw upon an array of works such as *teaching towards freedom* (Ayers, 2004, 2010, 2016), *teachers as intellectuals* (Giroux, 1988a, 1988b; Giroux & McLaren, 1988), *the courage to teach* (Palmer, 2007), *when teachers face themselves* (Jersild, 1955), *emotions of teacher stress* (Carlyle & Woods, 2002), *why we teach now* (Nieto, 2003, 2008, 2014), and *why*



*great teachers quit* (Farber, 2010). Additional literature explores emotions as a response (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994; Frijda & Mesquita, 1998; Day, 2004), race and education (Love, 2019), gender and education (McGrath, Bhana, Van Bergen, & Moosa, 2019), COVID-19: A new challenge (Carvalho & Hares, 2020), the effects of stress (Lazarus, Deese, & Osler, 1952; Selye, 1956; Lazarus and Lazarus, 1994), teachers and stress (Figley, 1995; Travers and Cooper, 1996), understanding passion (R. Vallerand, personal communication, July 1, 2016, September 3, 2018), teaching with passion (Hargreaves, 1998; Day, 2004; Phelps & Benson, 2012).

The literature helped me gain an understanding of the emotions and stress teachers experience while continuing to teach with passion. Furthermore, the literature provided an understanding of how race and gender affect teaching and passion. The participant interviews were completed to show challenges experienced in the classroom and how those challenges transferred to teachers' personal lives and affected teacher passion in their professional lives. The interviews also demonstrated the passion teachers maintain through challenging times and their hopes to make teaching a better profession for future teachers. Additionally, the interviews demonstrated that teachers could keep their passion for teaching with support and a willingness to continuously grow and learn as professionals.

Methodologically, I used narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; He, 1999, 2003, 2021a; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion & He, 2008; Clandinin & Caine, 2016; Sharma & Phillion, 2021) to gather the stories of teachers' experiences in the classroom. I also discussed how sharing narratives is beneficial in the reduction of stress (Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker & Chung, 2007). Then, I discuss the Three-Dimensional Framework (Dewey, 1916, 1938) which allows narrative inquirers to use interaction, continuity, and situation when theorizing stories. During the research I collected stories from participants through interviews, informal

conversations, email communication, written notes. After theorizing the interviews and field notes, I began to develop the research texts.

My research intended to answer the following questions: (1) How does teachers' stress that is related to challenges and obstacles affect their passion for teaching? (2) How does stress affect teachers' health and their ability to teach? (3) What daily challenges and obstacles have teachers experienced in the work environment, and how are those challenges and obstacles managed? (4) What are the suggestions for decreasing teachers' stress and increasing teacher retention? (5) How has COVID-19 affected the way teachers teach? (6) In what ways has COVID-19 affected teachers' passion for teaching? (7) What steps have teachers taken to reduce their stress? (8) How have teachers changed as a result of COVID-19?

After hearing the stories shared by my participants, I found that teachers remain passionate about teaching when they build personal and working relationships with their students (**Finding 1**). Abby, Nick, Passion, and Anna asserted that teachers need to gain an understanding of their students. This is similar to the work of Ayers (2004) who stated that, teachers must "become students of their students" (p. 42). After working with her students, Abby realized they were at a disadvantage in life because many of them had no life experiences outside their community. To support her students, Abby strived to provide as many life experiences as possible in her classroom so they would have better opportunities to succeed in fifth grade and in their lives in the future. Passion emersed herself in the neighborhood school community and told the stories about two of her students who were struggling with life at home. Passion worked with the students during their difficult times and became a parent figure to the students. Additionally, Passion and Abby both spoke of going out of their way to help students in need. Passion provided snacks for hungry students and worked with other teachers to pay a bill at a student's

home. Abby became the cheerleader for some of her students when they sent her pictures from their college visits. Nick understood the neighborhoods his students came from and the struggles they had entering to fifth grade at a beginning reader level. He knew from the first day he would have to work hard to help his students learn to read. Anna taught virtually and realized her students would need further hands-on support, so she developed lessons and created bags of supplies for students to use at home during virtual lessons.

Furthermore, Abby, Nick, and Passion shared how the home lives and communities of their students became a disadvantage to succeeding in state testing requirements. Ayers (2016) stated, “test results typically correlate with income and educational levels of families, which means they are first and foremost a measure of zip codes and a test of class backgrounds” (p. 22). Abby described her community as having a lot of educational choice. Families had opportunities to send their children to a private school, charter school, city school, or county school. Abby also described the pervasive poverty that surrounds the community and the abundance of children living in single parent homes or being followed by DFCS. Nick described his county as having an economic situation that was not the greatest. Nick’s school had little parent involvement and 100% free lunch. Nick also discussed the community’s high crime rate and high transient population. Due to these circumstances, the students do not remain at the school for long and those students who do enroll are far behind in their requirements. Nick, therefore, said that expectations were not feasible based on the environment, the culture, or the school. Passion also experienced a struggle with her neighborhood school meeting the standards mandated by the state. Passion described her student population as predominantly Black and about 60% special education. The school has also been labeled as a failing school by the state based on standardized test scores. However, Passion also discussed her students who were being raised by

grandparents, have little food, no water, and have lost parents to violence. Yet, in a county where pockets of wealth exist, Passion did not think her students were receiving the same opportunities as other students in the community.

Abby, Nick, and Passion experienced many hardships with their students, but they never lost hope or gave up on their belief that their students could succeed. This is similar to Ayers (2016) who asserted, “curriculum, teaching, and education are arenas of struggle as well as hope” (p. 93). Abby saw her students struggle on a daily basis to remain organized, focused, and at times to remain a child. However, Abby never let her students give up. She created lessons that allowed time for her students to be outside and learn while incorporating exercise. Abby also created experiences within her classroom. Through the creation of a campfire atmosphere, a beach, or virtual field trips, Abby worked to provide her students hope far beyond the four walls of her classroom. Nick also provided his struggling students with hope. Nick worked diligently to provide his students with strategies for behavior improvement so he could help them focus on learning to read. Since his students did not always stay the entire year, Nick worked every moment to help his students improve. Passion had hope that her school would begin to receive the support they were lacking from the district level. She voiced her concerns about the stress her administrators experienced which then trickled down to the classroom teachers. Passion also expressed her desire for district level administrators to return to the classroom for a visit in order to remember being a classroom teacher. Passion’s hope was that by everyone working to understand each other better, the school’s that had struggling students would receive the support needed to help their students succeed.

Through the stories of difficulties in their students’ lives, I realized the teachers were longing for support and each had their own personal form of support they saw as essential to

maintaining teacher passion. Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they work in a positive school environment where teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and community members support one another (**Finding 2**). All four participants spoke of the need and appreciation for support. Abby, Passion, and Nick talked about the support of school or district administration. Christopher Day (2004) stated, “with good leadership in the school, and an awareness of the need for life-work balance, support from colleagues and others, regular review of purposes, values and practices, and renewal of commitment, it is possible to sustain passion” (p. 20). Each participant experienced differences in their administrators’ leadership styles, but all emphasized the importance of administrators following through with expectations, building a positive school culture, and supporting their teachers. Passion challenged district administrators to visit her school and see what she experienced each day in order to remember what it was like to be a teacher. She said that once upper-level administrators went in their four-corner office, they forgot what it was previously like in their four-corner classroom.

Abby, Passion, and Anna also spoke of the support of their co-workers. This is similar to the work of Carlyle and Woods (2002) who stated that “extensive support systems are required that provide human and material resources to facilitate the revitalization of emotional, mental and physical health” (p. 89). Abby and Passion had positive experiences with their co-workers who provided support through difficult days, while Anna had both positive and negative experiences with co-workers’ support. Anna said that having the support of co-workers made things easier so teachers could work smarter, not harder. In addition, Abby and Anna discussed the support of their home lives. Abby’s husband held her accountable when he noticed her mood and reactions towards their children were changing, and Anna spoke of developing a work-life

balance so teachers have time to care for themselves and spend time with their families without work interference.

Abby and Passion also talked about experiences with former students and the enjoyment of seeing them succeed long after leaving their classrooms. This idea is similar to Palmer (2007) who stated, “the imprint of good teachers remains long after the facts they gave us have faded” (p. 22). Abby shared her experience of receiving a phone call from a former student to let her know he received an offer to play football at the University of Georgia. On his recruitment visit, the student emailed Abby pictures and was excited to share his experiences. Passion experienced former students visiting her classroom after graduating high school. She uses that time to impress upon current students that their futures could hold similar successes. Passion said that to see those kids come back, especially the ones she didn’t think would come, makes it all worthwhile.

Teachers remain passionate about teaching when they maintain a healthy lifestyle and find ways to reduce their stress (**Finding 3**). Abby, Passion, and Anna experienced health problems they associated with work related stress. Abby and Anna demonstrated mild stress related symptoms while Passion’s symptoms were more severe. This is similar to the work of Carlyle and Woods (2002) who stated, “possible health consequences of the long-term effects of stress caused . . . teachers further anxiety” (p. 69). Abby began experiencing changes in her emotions which resulted in feeling irritable and being short with her students. She also noticed a decline in her physical and mental energy levels which affected her home life. However, Abby felt pressure to stay at work, cancel doctor’s appointments, and suppress her feelings so her students would not know she was having a difficult day. Anna struggled with exhaustion, anxiety, and guilt. In particular, she discussed the frustration with working all day, returning home exhausted, and then continuing to do schoolwork in the evening. After having a child, this

work cycle increased the anxiety and guilt Anna felt. She began to realize that she had to find a balance between work and home in order to be a good teacher, mother, and wife. Passion's experience with stress was multi-layered. Passion began with an inability to lose weight followed by a bout with panic attacks. Passion said she struggled during this time to find joy in teaching. Years later, while still experiencing panic attacks, Passion was diagnosed with high blood pressure followed by diabetes, and most recently stomach ulcers. The medical changes have affected Passion's life and her doctor has encouraged her to leave the teaching profession. Throughout her experiences with health problems, Passion admitted she was scared her blood pressure might get too high which could cause further medical problems, so on the days she felt great, she pushed herself really hard so she could be present for her students.

To support Passion with her stress and anxiety, she saw a counselor, incorporated using a stress ball, counting, solving puzzles, and even coloring. Passion works to find ways to calm herself and relax her mind. Furthermore, Passion and Anna were reinvigorated when they began to consistently incorporate exercise in their days. Carlyle and Woods (2002) furthered this idea by stating, "all teachers have an ethical responsibility to care for themselves, to nurture and maintain their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual well-being" (p. 162). Passion and Anna discovered an increase in exercise was especially beneficial while teaching during COVID-19. When working with students virtually, Passion incorporated brain breaks and had the students get up, move, and dance while she joined along. Passion also began journaling; and when writing, she focused on the positive aspects of her day. In addition, Passion joined a business that worked to empower people to inspire change and focus on self-care. Anna began to workout daily, and she also found that consistent exercise was beneficial and helped her find a balance. Anna also found that making time for herself to refresh was beneficial while teaching

during COVID-19. In addition, Anna limited the time she spent working at home. Furthermore, Nick said that teaching during COVID-19 caused him to slow down at work and home. He took time to reconnect with his family and himself. Through this experience, Nick said he rediscovered himself and began practicing self-care. Nick saw his changes as an opportunity to be a model for his students, that it was okay to take time for yourself which was essential for a happy, productive, and balanced life.

As a result of COVID-19, many teachers not only changed personally, but they also grew as teachers. Teachers remain passionate and relentless when they continue to learn and grow and further support their students even in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic (**Finding 4**). Passion taught virtually and in person, Anna taught fully online, and Nick simultaneously taught virtually and face to face with students. This affirms what Phelps and Benson (2012) found in their research that “teachers who last more than a few years are open to change, engage in professional development, have a learner perspective, reach out to colleagues for support, and engage in self-reflection/examination” (p. 69). Passion and Nick did not experience changes in their passion for teaching, but they did experience changes in how they viewed their students, which helped them develop more passion. Passion experienced an increase in her passion in relation to building relationships and bonds with her students. Nick rediscovered his students as individuals as a result of teaching during COVID-19. He spoke of being invited into his students’ homes during virtual learning and gaining an up close and personal visual of the daily challenges his students faced. Ultimately, the participants agreed they were better teachers and learned from their experiences during the pandemic. Nieto (2014) asserted, to become a better teacher, there should be “reflection, planning, nurturing, dreaming, scheming, imagining, effecting, judging, succeeding, failing, improving, and then figuring it out all over again” (p. 9). The pandemic not



only helped participants be open to change and have a learner's perspective, but also made teachers directly face previous challenges by reflecting, planning, succeeding, and failing in the process. Passion and Anna experienced challenges with using technology, but the challenges during COVID-19 led to an increase in their use of technology and they felt they had improved their knowledge and comfort level with teaching through technology. Passion thought she learned and grew as a teacher by gaining confidence in teaching online and being more adaptable and open-minded. She gained more strategies to meet her students' needs while also increasing her compassion for students who were struggling day to day to keep up. Anna became a better technology savvy teacher due to continuously navigating her students through troubleshooting programs and computer problems. She also said she gained more patience and flexibility due to addressing numerous virtual problems that were unexpected. Teaching during COVID-19 helped Nick learn to put more trust in his students and provide them opportunities to take ownership of their individual learning in order to progress. Nick said he and his students worked together to find their way and discovered how to maneuver their classroom and lessons so the students remained challenged and engaged.

Though there are numerous challenges in teaching, the participants believed that passion for teaching could remain. The participants also asserted that with support and changes in education, teachers would remain in the classroom for longer periods of time if they felt supported, heard, and cared about with the intent to make a difference in the lives of children, which was their objective when they chose to teach (**Finding 5**). Each participant truly loved teaching and saw it as a passion, yet they believed more could be done to help maintain their passions. Giroux (1988b) asserted that teachers "are the object of educational reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by

experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life” (p. 1870). He also stated that, “teachers as intellectuals will need to reconsider and, possibly, transform the fundamental nature of the conditions under which they work” (Giroux, 1988a, p. 315). Abby, Nick, Passion, and Anna expressed similar ideas to Giroux in their stories. Abby shared that she had to write lesson plans without guidance or previous knowledge of the grade level standards. Abby also ate lunch while monitoring students and receiving no daily time for planning. After school is her allotted planning time, but many afternoons, meetings are scheduled for teachers to attend. In addition, Abby shared her struggle with managing the numerous expectations placed on teachers. She said that some days she thinks about exit tickets, planning, completing grades, posting grades, and developing writing assignments for students. Abby also discussed the micromanaging of teachers and the requirements to complete multiple documents to prove she is teaching. Nick shared his experiences as a male elementary school teacher. He said that he is expected to lead and he is asked to participate in numerous activities and committees at his school. He said there is a constant level of stress because he is always thinking about the next thing he has to do in addition to teaching. Nick said that when the school culture is positive, it helps all aspects of his stress level. Passion stated that if district leaders would come see the amount of responsibilities teachers have, they would understand and reduce the workload. She stated that on paper she has 50 minutes of planning a day, but when all is said and done, 50 minutes becomes 40 minutes. Passion said she is stressed from all the paperwork that comes with teaching which appears to be the least important task on the list. Passion compared the extra responsibilities to Jenga. She said she is afraid to pull the little teaching tab because everything else is going to fall over, yet everyday she returns thinking something will be different. Anna discussed her experiences with district administration’s expectations to continuously create new lessons and activities. She said

that at times, the teacher checklist weighs so heavily on teachers, the most essential things sometimes are completed quickly in order to move to the next task. Anna also said that providing teachers more time at school to complete tasks would allow teachers more time at home with their families, which ultimately would make them better teachers.

Many teachers like Abby, Nick, Passion, and Anna want to be heard. They remain in the classroom and remain optimistic that future teachers can have better classroom experiences. The participants are not willing to give up on their passion or the pursuit to support other teachers. This is similar to the work of Day (2004), “yet if passion for teaching cannot always be sustained, if we accept that it can die, then, knowing its importance to good teaching, we must identify ‘what went wrong’ and find ways of rekindling the passion” (p. 133). To keep educators in the profession, Abby believed teachers need less micromanaging and more trust to do their jobs appropriately. Abby also thought teaching needed to be fun again because if there is no joy, how could students be expected to want to come and learn? Nick and Anna asserted a change in mentor programs would better support new teachers. Nick thought mentor programs helped build relationships and trust. Through building trust among new teachers, there is a higher probability they will ask for and receive help from co-workers. Nick contended these relationships could not be built in a year, so mentor programs should be expanded. Anna agreed, saying strong effective mentor programs would help new teachers. Passion believed that new teachers should have the opportunity to be themselves rather than being created into cookie cutter teachers. When teachers were forced to conform, there was a trickle-down effect in the community, and those considering becoming teachers chose a different path because teachers were not seen as important professionals. Therefore, it is important that new teachers hear positivity about teaching, are

given longer periods of support when beginning teaching, and feel trusted to be professionals in their careers.

The stories of Abby, Nick, Passion, and Anna demonstrate how teachers could be affected by challenges in the work environment, while maintaining enthusiasm, dedication, and passion for teaching. The participants are dedicated to their students and wanted each student to succeed no matter their home environment, socioeconomic level, or ability level. In fact, the participants were willing to sacrifice their time, and often their health, for the betterment of their students' futures.

The participants' stories help me to critically reflect on my own challenges and lingering emotions. I continue to be a work in progress, and my passion wanes at times. I, however, continue my teaching journey because of the students I support and hopefully inspire. Like the participants, my journey has not been easy. We continue to teach because we keep our hopes that we can make a difference not only in the lives of our students, but also in the lives of future educators.

It is important to know that support, challenges, health, and growth are related. If teachers are supported, they are better equipped to address challenges which occur. The challenges, thus, are not as overwhelming because teachers understand that they have the support of their school administration, district administration, parents, and community. When teachers feel supported, they are less likely to experience work related stress which prevents future health concerns. In addition, when teachers feel supported, they can experience growth within themselves as teachers and individuals. As teachers, a strong support system and healthier lifestyle can increase passion and encourage further career growth. In addition, teachers would have more time for

planning with co-workers and completing work requirements. Therefore, they would be able to spend more time at home resting, recovering, and spending time with their families.

As I reflect upon my dissertation research project, I have recognized some limitations and challenges. One limitation of this study was sample size. The participants were four elementary school teachers currently teaching in the state of Georgia. Due to the small number of participants, sample size could be viewed as problematic. While I am aware that a smaller sample size would not represent the experiences of Georgia teachers as a whole, a smaller sample size provided an opportunity for more personalized, concentrated interviews. Additionally, the small sample size assisted in analysis because I was able to spend more time reading, understanding, and telling the stories of the participants. Furthermore, having the ability to focus on fewer narratives provided an opportunity to considerably dissect field texts which allowed the opportunity to understand each participant on a deeper level. However, due to the smaller number of participants, diversity was limited. If more participants were included, additional male teachers and teachers with differing cultural backgrounds could participate. In addition, a larger sample size would allow for teachers in middle grades, high school, and higher education to participate and provide stories from their perspectives. Further, as a result of COVID-19, the ability to connect with participants face to face was limited. Due to this, there was limited time and opportunity to gather COVID-19 stories from each participant. Additionally, Abby chose not to participate in telling her COVID-19 story, so there was less information to analyze to support the themes. In addition, the primary researcher was the sole individual reviewing participant interview transcripts. Without the guidance and suggestions of other researchers, interpretations and theme choices were solely the responsibility of the primary researcher. As a result, there is a limited view of each participant's story and different themes

may be discovered by an individual who had taught in similar school settings, was male, or an individual with a differing cultural background.

Further, my study has some implications for pre-service teachers, novice teachers, veteran teachers, administrators, politicians, and school community advocates. Pre-service teachers can utilize the stories to gain a better perspective of their chosen field. The stories are not intended to frighten anyone away from becoming a teacher. The goal of sharing the stories is to allow insight into the lives of teachers, instead of relying on the romanticized or Hollywood view of teachers. Through honest communication, pre-service teachers can use the stories of novice teachers to become aware of classroom experiences, become aware of signs of stress, and learn how to ask for support from other teachers.

Consequently, the participants' stories may support novice and veteran teachers who think they are alone in their teaching experiences. Many teachers, including myself, have felt completely alone in their teaching journey. The participants' stories can be utilized to provide encouragement and inspiration. If these teachers can overcome and still teach with immense passion, there becomes hope for other teachers to survive their difficult days.

Additionally, as leaders who teachers depend on to make decisions for the betterment of education, administrators and politicians can utilize this study to gain a better perspective of the teachers who need their help. Decisions are made at multiple levels, and many of those making the decisions have not been in a classroom in many years and some have never been an educator. As a result, policies and programs are passed and implemented that are ineffective and developmentally inappropriate. The teachers and students in classrooms are the individuals who begin to suffer. The stories of the participants provide a clear view of the many struggles which are currently in today's schools. These stories can be used as a beginning to reconnect with

teachers, open the lines of communication to the classroom, and listen to those asking for support.

Schools are part of a larger community, and for this reason, school community advocates can utilize this study to learn more about the challenges teachers in their community may experience. In a parent meeting, we had a parent ask a group of teachers, “So, what do you actually do anyway?” It was clear from this statement that many community members do not fully understand the expectations of teachers, much less the professional and personal challenges they experience. The participants’ stories provide insight into the sadness and frustration teachers feel when they are unable to provide for their students. The stories provide an opportunity for community members to understand that teaching is not confined to the classroom once the students leave. A teacher’s job is never done.

When looking for participants for this study, I considered gender, ethnicity, and location. I was able to provide a small sample size for this study, but there remains a need for additional research, especially with male teachers and teachers of differing cultural backgrounds. In addition, this study focused on elementary school teachers, so further research is needed among teachers at the Pre-K, middle school, and high school level as well as higher education.

Not long after conducting initial participant interviews, COVID-19 swept across the United States. Schools were instantly changed and thus, the demands on teachers and their desire to support students at a distance became a new challenge. Due to this, additional research is needed to determine how COVID-19 changed the way teachers supported their students and to better understand how teachers’ responsibilities have shifted during this time. Furthermore, addition COVID-19 research will be needed to understand the experiences of new teachers and the challenges they experienced preparing for a new career, classroom, and students during a

pandemic. Additionally, research will be needed regarding the effects of the pandemic on teachers' professional and personal lives, and the effects of a lock-down, virtual teaching, COVID-19 testing, quarantine, school safety measures, sick family members, and alleviating student fear.

The goal of this study was to present stories of Georgia educators to further understand the work-related challenges teachers experience and the effect those challenges have on a teacher's professional and personal life. This journey began by reflecting on my own classroom experiences and the struggle to understand the personal changes I experienced after becoming a teacher. Then, I had the opportunity to interview four educators who shared their personal stories and experiences. Each participant was aware their personal stories would be revealed, but they chose to share them because of the love and passion they have for their students and the teaching profession.

Each participant had stories which resonated with me, but many of their experiences were unfamiliar to me. I connected with Abby's drive to support her struggling students, but I had never experienced a student connecting with me during a college visit or reaching out to me as a parental figure. I understood Passion's struggle with medical concerns, but I had never experienced the long-term health effects. I related to Nick's longing for a better school climate, but I had never experienced an abundance of students living in poverty. And, I sympathized with Anna's desire to balance her work and home life, but I had never experienced coming home to my own children and struggling to provide time they deserved and required.

The stories of teaching during COVID-19 were different from my own experiences. All of the participants had experienced teaching virtually at a point during the pandemic. For me, teaching remained face to face, and while I did not experience the daily challenges of distance



technology implementation, I experienced challenges with social distancing, sanitization, and mask wearing. I was, of course, changed to an extent by my experiences, but for the most part, my school tried to keep schedules and school life as normal as possible. Besides a few minor changes, there was little that was extremely different in the everyday experience of teaching during COVID-19. The experiences of Passion, Anna, and Nick were eye-opening for me in regard to the different experiences teachers had with teaching during the pandemic.

This study demonstrated that some Georgia teachers experienced stress related to challenges at work, which could present as health problems. However, teachers who remained in the classroom discovered strategies to assist in stress relief and self-care, which ultimately supported the teachers in remaining passionate. All four participants experienced stress while only three sought medical advice to reduce stress. Additionally, all four participants saw their work lives and home lives affected by challenges experienced at work. Furthermore, all participants experienced challenges while teaching during COVID-19, as well as re-discovery of their passion for teaching or self-care. This study also demonstrated that teaching is a challenging journey. However, if an individual teacher strives to have a balance between work and home, practices self-care, and learns to manage stress, that teacher can remain in the classroom and continue to teach with passion.

During this research, I came to understand that my story of health concerns and my desire to work hard for my students was shared by other teachers. My personal story is unique to me, but I found myself feeling less alone in my teaching journey. It took courage for participants to tell their stories, and the numerous obstacles they conquered were inspiring. Participants told their stories without hesitation since they believed their experiences would support current and future educators. In addition, these experiences could provide opportunity for

administrators, parents, and community members to become better informed and aware of teachers' experiences in the classroom.

Ultimately, participants wanted to offer their stories with the hope of improving the professional and work environment of classroom teachers. Listening to and learning from the stories from my participants help dive into the emotional, intellectual, moral, and physical aspects of teaching to sustain passion for teaching (e.g., Ayers, 2004, 2016a, b; He, 2016, 2021; Nieto, 2003, 2008; Palmer, 2007; Schubert, 2009) to invigorate the teaching profession. In addition, the participants hoped that by sharing their stories, they could make a difference in the lives of future teachers. The participants sought to provide guidance for teacher education programs to improve teacher preparation and student teaching experiences. The participants thought that by improving pre-service teaching experiences, new teachers would be more prepared to recognize challenges and ask for support from veteran teachers. In turn, veteran teachers would provide guidance for new teachers which could help in teacher retention. Additionally, the participants believed that new teachers would benefit from an extended mentor program developed jointly by state and local educational representatives. The participants agreed that an extended mentor program would provide further support for new teachers and be an additional method to support in the retention of new teachers in Georgia.

## EPILOGUE

Since the beginning of this study, the deaths of Ryan and Justin have continued to influence my life. When working with current students, I try to connect with them and let them know I love them. In addition, I make sure no day goes by without me saying how proud I am of their hard work. If something were to happen to one of them or myself, I do not want them to ever wonder if they were cared about by their teacher. Almost a year after their deaths, I helped create the Ryan and Justin Moore Memorial Award where a fifth grade student at my school who excels in the Arts program is honored. As for Ryan and Justin's cousin who survived the accident, he finished elementary school and is now in middle school and doing well. Any time I see his mom, I always ask about "my boy" and she says he is doing good.

Tyler continues in his new profession and remains passionate after eight years in his current position. While we will never know the impact he could have had on other students, Tyler and I take his experience in teaching as a learning experience. There are times we think about the mistreatment from the school system and the lack of support offered. After hearing the stories of my participants and their emphasis on teacher support, I also wonder how Tyler's teaching experience may have changed if he encountered supportive administrators who were willing to work with him and support him through a difficult and life-changing period in his life. As a result of his experience, I work with other teachers to offer advice so another teacher is not lost as a result of not being supported.

Further, the effects of teaching and living during COVID-19 have continued to impact my life. We are now in our second year of maintaining classroom normalcy during a pandemic. Students continue to miss weeks of school and teachers continue to teach and reteach their standards. Classes continue to wear masks, social distance, continuously sanitize, and eat lunch

in their rooms. Teachers and students have family members who are sick, on ventilators, and some who have passed away due to COVID-19, but school life continues. While I wish I could say I see the end and know what the future holds, I cannot. I am still living in the unknown each day, waiting and wondering if I will be the next to test positive. However, life and learning cannot stop, even in the midst of a pandemic, so we continue forward. I teach my students each day, behind a mask, but make sure they hear positive words and compliments each day. And, even though it requires sanitizing more times than I can count, I make sure my students receive a hug to remind them that they are cared for and loved.

The memories of Ryan and Justin, the lack of support Tyler experienced, the experience of teaching during COVID-19, in addition to participant stories have made me more aware of the challenges teachers experience in their careers. However, the negative aspects of teaching often become the focus rather than simply a learning experience. For me, each challenge I have experienced in my career has made me a better person and a better teacher for my current and future students. I noticed similar thoughts in the stories of my participants. Each of us continues to teach, learn, and grow as people and teachers. We faced challenges and overcame barriers that we chose not to let define us but rather motivate us to improve ourselves, and others in our lives.

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## APPENDIX A

## PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT I

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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**DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, & READING****CURRICULUM STUDIES**

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**Informed Consent****Teaching with Passion and Compassion in an Era of Fear, Injustice, and Political Uncertainty: A Narrative****Inquiry into Elementary Teachers Experiences in Georgia**

My name is Erin Scroggs. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University.

I am the principle investigator of a research project titled: "Teaching with Passion and Compassion in an Era of Fear, Injustice, and Political Uncertainty: A Narrative Inquiry into Elementary Teachers Experiences in Georgia." The purpose of this research is to explore the factors which led current elementary school teachers in Georgia to be successful and remain in the classroom even though fear, injustice, and political uncertainty surrounds them. The narratives will explore the participant's backgrounds before teaching, daily challenges and obstacles in teaching, and strategies to diminish stress related to perceived challenges and obstacles. You are among the current elementary

educators in Georgia that have faced and overcome challenges and obstacles while continuing to have passion for teaching. **Study objectives include:** (1) How a teacher's stress, related to challenges and obstacles in the classroom, affects a teacher's passion for teaching. (2) How stress affect a teacher's health and ability to teach. (3) What daily challenges and obstacles teachers experience in the work environment and how those challenges and obstacles are managed. (4) Suggestions for aiding in decreasing teacher stress and increasing teacher retention.

I am requesting your participation in this study. These research activities will begin November 2019 and continue through March 2020.

During November and December 2019, you will be asked to attend one individual face-to-face and/or Skype or FaceTime meeting (approximately 1 hour per participant) with the principal investigator. During this meeting, an individual interview will take place for each participant to share narratives focusing on:

1. How does a teacher's stress, related to challenges and obstacles in the classroom, affect a teacher's passion for teaching?
2. How does stress affect a teacher's health and ability to teach?
3. What daily challenges and obstacles have teachers experienced in the work environment and how were those challenges and obstacles managed?
4. What are suggestions for aiding in decreasing teacher stress and increase teacher retention?

Beginning January 2020, the principal investigator will send interview transcripts for participant review. The principal investigator will then follow up with a phone call(s) to make sure the transcript was received and clarify participant questions. Follow up meetings or phone call(s) will be scheduled as needed. All meeting locations will be agreed upon by you and the principal investigator to ensure safety of both individuals.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to respond to any questions that you do not choose to answer. You may stop your participation in the research process at any point in the research process and for any reason. I will use pseudonyms or initials instead of real names to protect your privacy. The digital recording of the interviews and any notes taken by me during the interview or during a conversation pertaining to

the research, will be stored in a password protected file in Dropbox. My research advisor, Dr. Ming Fang He, and I are the only individuals who will have access to this material. The material will be stored for three years before being shredded. You will not be identified by name in any information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

The risks involved in this study are minimal and are no greater than risk associated with daily life experiences. Possible risks might include unpleasant memories associated with recalling negative experiences in teaching, learning, researching, and life. You are not required to share any information that makes you feel uncomfortable and you may stop participation in the study at any point during the research. If you choose to discontinue participation in the study, you will not be penalized in any way. All information will be treated confidentially. There is one exception to confidentiality that is important to understand. In certain research studies, it is my ethical responsibility to report situations of child or elder abuse, child or elder neglect, or any life-threatening situation to appropriate authorities. However, I am not seeking this type of information in the study nor will you be asked questions about these issues.

You may benefit and contribute from participation in this study through the following: (1) you may provide suggestions and encouragement for teachers to persevere and remain in the teaching profession as well as improving the ability of inexperienced teachers to reduce work-related stress; (2) you may encourage an improved understanding of teachers' experiences and to what degree political decisions affect teachers in the classroom; (3) you may provide opportunity for district and school administrators to gain insight into feeling dimensions related to stress and the manner in which teachers would like to have support; (4) you may provide parents, students, and school communities with an insider's view of teacher classroom experiences as well as professional expectations and requirements. This knowledge can support acquisition and better understanding of services teachers provide in their school and to their community.

You have the right to ask questions and to have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact Erin Scroggs at 334-728-1726. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-5465.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H20077.

**Title of Project:**

Teaching with Passion and Compassion in an Era of Fear, Injustice, and Political Uncertainty: A Narrative Inquiry into Elementary Teachers Experiences in Georgia

**Principal Investigator: Erin P. Scroggs**, Graduate Student Curriculum Studies Program, (334) 728-1726, es04566@georgiasouthern.edu

**Research Advisor: Dr. Ming Fang He**, Professor of Curriculum Studies, mfhe@georgiasouthern.edu

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_

Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## APPENDIX B

## PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT II

COLLEGE OF EDUCATIONDEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, & READINGCURRICULUM STUDIES**Informed Consent****Teaching with Passion and Compassion in an Era of Fear, Injustice, and Political Uncertainty: A Narrative****Inquiry into Elementary Teachers Experiences in Georgia**

My name is Erin Scroggs. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University.

I am the Principal Investigator of a research project titled: “Teaching with Passion and Compassion in an Era of Fear, Injustice, and Political Uncertainty: A Narrative Inquiry into Elementary Teachers Experiences in Georgia.”

The purpose of this research is to explore the factors which led current elementary school teachers in Georgia to be successful and remain in the classroom even though fear, injustice, and political uncertainty surrounds them. The narratives will explore the participant’s backgrounds before teaching, daily challenges and obstacles in teaching, and strategies to diminish stress related to perceived challenges and obstacles. You are among the current elementary educators in Georgia that have faced and overcome challenges and obstacles while continuing to have passion for teaching. **Study objectives include:** (1) How a teacher’s stress, related to challenges and obstacles in the classroom, affects a teacher’s passion for teaching. (2) How stress affect a teacher’s health and ability to teach. (3) What daily challenges and obstacles teachers experience in the work environment and how those challenges and obstacles are



managed. (4) How COVID-19 affected the way teachers teach and their passion for teaching. (5) Suggestions for aiding in decreasing teacher stress and increasing teacher retention

I am requesting your participation in this study. These research activities will begin November 2019 and continue through August 2021.

During May 2021, you will be asked to attend one virtual meeting (approximately 1 hour per participant) with the principal investigator. The first interviews were conducted face to face, after initial IRB approval. Due to COVID-19, subsequent interviews will occur virtually. During this meeting, an individual interview will take place for each participant to share narratives focusing on:

1. How does a teacher's stress, related to challenges and obstacles in the classroom, affect a teacher's passion for teaching?
2. How does stress affect a teacher's health and ability to teach?
3. What daily challenges and obstacles have teachers experienced in the work environment and how were those challenges and obstacles managed?
4. What are suggestions for aiding in decreasing teacher stress and increase teacher retention?
5. How has COVID-19 affected the way teachers teach?
6. In what ways has COVID-19 affected teachers' passion for teaching?
7. What steps have teachers taken to reduce their stress?
8. How have teachers changed as a result of COVID-19?

(The first 4 questions were a focus in the first interview which was conducted face to face. The second interview will focus on the last 4 questions related to COVID-19. These will be virtual interviews.)

Beginning June 2021, the principal investigator will send interview transcripts for participant review. The principal investigator will then follow up with a phone call(s) to make sure the transcript was received and clarify participant questions. Follow up meetings or phone call(s) will be scheduled as needed. All meeting locations will be agreed upon by you and the principal investigator to ensure safety of both individuals.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to respond to any questions that you do not choose to answer. You may stop your participation in the research process at any point in the research process and for any reason. I will use pseudonyms or initials instead of real names to protect your privacy. The digital recording of the interviews and any notes taken by me during the interview or during a conversation pertaining to the research, will be stored in a password protected file in Dropbox. My research advisor, Dr. Ming Fang He, and I are the only individuals who will have access to this material. The material will be stored for three years before being shredded. You will not be identified by name in any information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

The risks involved in this study are minimal and are no greater than risk associated with daily life experiences. Possible risks might include unpleasant memories associated with recalling negative experiences in teaching, learning, researching, and life. You are not required to share any information that makes you feel uncomfortable, and you may stop participation in the study at any point during the research. If you choose to discontinue participation in the study, you will not be penalized in any way. All information will be treated confidentially. There is one exception to confidentiality that is important to understand. In certain research studies, it is my ethical responsibility to report situations of child or elder abuse, child or elder neglect, or any life-threatening situation to appropriate authorities. However, I am not seeking this type of information in the study, nor will you be asked questions about these issues.

You may benefit and contribute from participation in this study through the following: (1) you may provide suggestions and encouragement for teachers to persevere and remain in the teaching profession as well as improving the ability of inexperienced teachers to reduce work related stress; (2) you may encourage an improved understanding of teachers' experiences and to what degree political decisions affect teachers in the classroom; (3) you may provide opportunity for district and school administrators to gain insight into feeling dimensions related to stress and the manner in which teachers would like to have support; (4) you may provide parents, students, and school communities with an insider's view of teacher classroom experiences as well as professional expectations and requirements. This knowledge can support acquisition and better understanding of services teachers provide in their school and to their community.

You have the right to ask questions and to have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact Erin Scroggs at 334-728-1726. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-5465.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H20077.

**Title of Project:**

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**Research Advisor: Dr. Ming Fang He**, Professor of Curriculum Studies, mfhe@georgiasouthern.edu

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Participant Signature Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

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