

EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES OF JOB EMBEDDEDNESS IN PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Timothy Martin Biesterfeld

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. The theory guiding this study was the job embeddedness theory, which states that people within an organization have links or connections with other stakeholders or activities in the organization and that an employee's professional life must be a good fit with other aspects of their life. I explored educators' experiences of job embeddedness during this study. The central research question asked, "How do educators describe experiences of job embeddedness while teaching in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States?" Twelve educators from a school system in the southeastern United States were interviewed regarding their lived experiences of being an educator in the school system and their experiences of job embeddedness. Data collection took place through an initial questionnaire, an interview, and a journal entry. Following Moustakas' data analysis procedures, I divided questionnaire responses, interview responses, and journal entries into units for meaningful analysis. The themes of this study represented the lived experiences of 12 educators in a parochial school system and their descriptions of job embeddedness. The five themes were as follows: (a) strong relationships with students, (b) mixed relationships with parents, (c) strong fit to the school, (d) strong relationships with colleagues, and (e) lack of people connections to the community.

Keywords: job embeddedness, connections, experiences, retention, recruitment

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to God, my maker and creator of all things. His unconditional love is the reason I have the hope of eternal life in heaven and that is the greatest gift I have and can share with others.

To my wife, Erika, and my children, Ko and Remi, who are my greatest earthly joys.

To Londyn and Ashton, who will forever be in my heart as they were the ones who first filled our home with the sounds of growing, happy children. I will love them forever and know that God is perfectly taking care of them and loves them more than I ever could.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the educators I have worked with over the years who work so hard to dedicate their lives to sharing a Christian education with the children and families they serve.

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I would like to acknowledge my colleagues who encouraged me to conduct a phenomenological study on a group of educators with the hopes of learning how to improve the retention of these employees.

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I owe a huge debt of thanks to my wife, Erika, who supported and encouraged me throughout this process. She was a positive source of inspiration who gave me the flexibility needed throughout the entire process of my doctoral studies, even after the birth of our first child, Ko, who was born while I was working on my dissertation.

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Finally, I give my greatest gratitude to my Savior, Jesus Christ. No matter how long and tedious this process was at times, I was constantly reassured of Christ's presence, love, and support throughout this entire process. I could find peace knowing that God was fighting for me along the way. The words of Exodus 14:14 (NIV) were a constant source of comfort: "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

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List of Abbreviations

Anytown Preparatory School – pseudonym for a preparatory high school (APS)

Anytown Lutheran Seminary – pseudonym for a Lutheran seminary high school (ALS)

Area Lutheran High School (ALHS)

Early Childhood Ministry (ECM)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Lutheran Elementary School (LES)

Pseudonym for a private, parochial school system (ABC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter One includes the framework for a study through which I explored the lived experiences of 12 educators' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school in the southeastern United States. I used the job embeddedness theory of Mitchell et al. (2001) throughout the course of this study. In this chapter, I examine the background of the study within its historical, social, and theoretical contexts and explain the problem statement, purpose statement, and significance of the study. Chapter One also includes the central research question and three sub-questions that are related to Mitchell et al.'s job embeddedness theory. Finally, the chapter concludes with the definitions and summary sections.

Background

Students may have new educators from one year to the next, but when the educators who work at a school are leaving, the impact may have negative effects on the performance of the students at the school (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Educators leave for many reasons, and over 157,000 educators leave the profession each year, but this number only includes teachers who are quitting early, not retirees or people who transfer to other districts or schools (Mack et al., 2019). There are more than financial costs associated with educator turnover, so schools and administrators need to address this issue of turnover and work toward developing initiatives and strategies that administrators design for retaining educators (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Historical Context

Educator attrition has been an issue since the time of the Great Depression, and this trend has continued to be an issue in recent decades (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Administrators have had difficulty staffing their schools with educators since at least the 1930s (Sutcher et al., 2019). Fast forward two decades, and the United States began to have its first critical shortage of educators in the subject areas of math and science, and in the 1960s a lack of educators in special education began to take place as well (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). The shortage did not stop in the 1960s, though. Experts reported severe shortages in specialty fields such as foreign languages, math, science, and those educators in exceptional education in the 1980s as well (Gardner, 1983). The trend of educator shortages continued into the 1990s when states across the country continued to face difficulties in filling their classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Over the past 60 years, the number of public school students has increased from 30 million in 1960 to over 50 million today, which has continued to put a strain on the number of educators available to instruct these students in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). There has been a greater push to reduce the educator-to-pupil ratio in recent years, which requires an even greater need for increasing educator candidates (Sutcher et al., 2019). Researchers expect this trend of needing additional teachers to continue, and educational leaders expect the need for additional educators to increase in the coming years (See & Gorard, 2019). Administrators may address this issue of educator shortages by increasing educators' levels of job embeddedness through a variety of strategies that include improved training, professional development, and career mobility. When educators receive support and opportunities for growth, they increase their job embeddedness and are likely to stay in the teaching profession (Shibiti, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most recent cause of educator burnout and attrition. Researchers found in a recent survey that half of the educators who voluntarily left the teaching profession after March 2020, and before their scheduled retirement, did so because of the

COVID-19 pandemic. The educators in this study stated that they experienced higher levels of stress due to increased work hours and an unfamiliar remote work environment which led to their decision to quit teaching (Diliberti et al., 2021). Researchers conducted a study in January 2021 and found that nearly one in four educators were considering an exit from the teaching profession after the 2020–2021 school year due to stressful work conditions and increased personal and family obligations which made teaching too difficult for these educators to continue working in the profession (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Administrators need to focus on job embeddedness during tough situations such as a pandemic when natural connections between employees and the organization become challenging. Employees need meaningful engagement to increase their levels of job embeddedness to keep them satisfied and content to continue working in their profession (Tran & Smith, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is an historical event impacting educator retention, but it has also affected educator recruitment. Enrollment and completion of educator training programs have declined in nearly every state since the beginning of the pandemic (Moser & Wei, 2021). The decline in the number of teacher candidates is further evidence that demonstrates the need for a continued focus on improving educator retention through job embeddedness since fewer candidates will be available to replace educators who leave the profession. High levels of job embeddedness lead to workers being inclined to stay in their place of employment, and administrators need to consider job embeddedness to help keep educators in the teaching profession.

A lack of qualified teachers available to teach is not the cause of educator shortages in the United States. There are more credentialed teachers in the United States than there are job openings (Goldhaber, 2018). Educators are choosing not to teach, which is a cause for not having enough educators in the profession. Employees who choose to leave their job are not likely to

feel embedded or connected within their school or community (Mitchell et al., 2001). The issue of educator turnover is not a new concept, as it has been an issue for nearly a century (Sutcher et al., 2019). The examples cited in this section all highlight the issue of teacher retention and the need to focus on the job embeddedness of educators. Employees need to feel valued and connected to their place of employment, and they must feel a sense of connection between their personal and professional lives for them to be likely to stay with their employer. Employees who have high levels of connection to their place of work and community experience high levels of job embeddedness, and individuals who have a high level of embeddedness at work and in their community are likely to stay in their job (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). School leaders and those responsible for recruiting and retaining educators need to find ways to firmly link and embed new educators into the school by including community connections in addition to connections at the educator's school of employment.

Social Context

The issue of educator attrition affects schools in the United States in different ways, and some of the highest levels of educator shortages take place in urban schools (Wiggan et al., 2020). Educators face a variety of obstacles in these school settings that make it difficult for schools to recruit and retain quality educators. The same issue plagues schools in rural communities as well, especially in those areas that are low income. Colleges and universities that prepare educators rarely give attention and discussion to the nation's rural schools (Azano et al., 2019). As a result, there are not enough educators in these areas, and the shortage negatively impacts these urban and rural schools as well as the students who rely on them for their education (Moore et al., 2018; Nguyen, 2020). Educator shortages are a problem that society needs to address because students living in these urban and rural areas are not always receiving a

quality education due to the amount of educator turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The lack of teachers in these urban and rural schools leads to unqualified teachers instructing these students, and researchers have shown that unqualified teachers lead to lower student achievement and create opportunity gaps for children in these underserved schools (Wiggan et al., 2020). Educator shortages are a problem because they do not provide equal access to education for all students.

Urban and rural schools are not the only institutions dealing with shortages in their teaching staff. School leaders across the country have a hard time recruiting and keeping educators in high-demand subject levels, such as math and science (Craig et al., 2017). The same recruitment issues exist for other specialized fields related to special education. Schools must often create incentives to attract educators to these specialty areas, and school leaders' efforts have limited success. There is still a shortage of educators in these high-demand subject areas, and educators often leave the profession to pursue higher-paying jobs in other fields (Feng & Sass, 2017). A shortage of teachers is a problem because students do not have access to quality teachers in high-demand subject areas, which means that they are not being prepared as well as needed in these subject areas. A lack of preparedness negatively impacts student achievement and creates a gap that may make it difficult for students to succeed in science-related college programs and professions (Bal-Tastan et al., 2018).

Leaders at academic institutions across the country are struggling with the issue of educator retention. The problem of educator retention is negatively impacting society because the quality of education that teachers deliver to students is subpar due to the lack of qualified teachers in the classroom, thus lowering the quality of instruction and student achievement (Wiggan et al., 2020). Our society's most vulnerable students, those children who are minorities

and/or are living in poverty, are the ones most negatively affected by teacher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Minority, low-income, and urban students are divided by an achievement gap that limits their opportunities to succeed and to be prepared for college and careers (Wiggan et al., 2020). Job embeddedness provides a pathway for improving educator retention, which will benefit the children of the United States enrolled in schools across the country. Employees who feel embedded in their organization are likely to stay in their job. Job embeddedness is important in the educational field because educators who experience a high level of embeddedness in their work and community are likely to be satisfied with their work and stay in the teaching profession (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). Retaining quality teachers improves instruction and provides the greatest opportunities for students to succeed (Young, 2018). Conversely, losing teachers or having unqualified ones limits the opportunities for student success and achievement.

Theoretical Context

It is becoming difficult for school leaders to recruit and retain qualified educators (Holmqvist, 2019). Researchers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Sutchter et al., 2019) have studied educator retention in the past and have used a variety of other theories to study the problem, too. Researchers who developed the motivation-hygiene theory stated that intrinsic motivators are the most critical factors for impacting employee retention in any occupation and that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two different issues and have their own set of factors that influence employee retention (Herzberg et al., 1959). Employee turnover has increased across all sectors over the past few years, including in the field of education. Specifically in education, researchers found that personal growth and positive administration supervision and support lead to improved job satisfaction for educators (Chiat &

Panatik, 2019). Sumipo (2020) examined the experiences of educators in private schools and noted that teacher retention is an important focus of school administrators. While studying the motivation-hygiene theory, Sumipo found that administrators may motivate educators to stay at their place of employment by providing opportunities for professional growth and offering administrative support in their efforts to improve. Support factors even improved job satisfaction more than an educator's monetary compensation (Sumipo, 2020). Finally, there is evidence from researchers in recent literature that further supports the need for administrators to help create a positive educator experience in the workforce. Administrators primarily achieve positive educator experiences by using motivating factors that intentionally focus on the needs of educators during different stages of their careers. Leaders who concentrate on intrinsic motivation initiatives that focus on educator experiences positively influenced educator retention (Tran & Smith, 2020).

Researchers have used another theory to study the issue of educator retention, the path-goal theory, which states that a leader's behavior is critical in helping employees reach a goal (House, 1971). Researchers in a recent study observed that the administration at an academic institution may demonstrate behaviors that help their educators achieve success, which helps to positively impact educator retention (Olowoselu et al., 2019). Administrators best achieve higher retention when they employ supportive and achievement-oriented initiatives that allow educators to actively participate in achieving success toward the completion of tasks. Initiatives for helping educators to experience success lead to improved job satisfaction and positively influence educator retention (Olowoselu et al., 2019). Four additional researchers conducted a study that examined secondary high school administrators and their use of the path-goal theory (Saleem et al., 2020). The researchers in these studies concluded that a directive leadership style,

in addition to a supportive and achievement-orientated style of leadership, improved job satisfaction and educator retention (Saleem et al., 2020).

Researchers have used Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and path-goal theory to study the issue of educator retention and job satisfaction. Researchers have conducted most of those studies in the public school sector (Chiat & Panatik, 2019; Saleem et al., 2020; Tran & Smith, 2020). I expanded on the current literature regarding educator satisfaction and retention by examining the job embeddedness theory in my study. I specifically investigated private, parochial schools in the southeastern United States that were part of a national parochial school system. Finally, I gathered information in my study that explored educators' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness while teaching at their current school.

Problem Statement

The problem is that educator retention is an issue that leads to ongoing challenges in the educational sector, and researchers may use job embeddedness to further understand this problem. The importance of job embeddedness is clear in that improving an employee's level of job embeddedness not only improves the capacity of retention, but it also improves organizational performance (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). The positive effects of employing the job embeddedness theory in education have been noted and studied by researchers. Sumipo (2020) found that school leaders who focus on job satisfaction factors for their educators lead to improved retention. Connected with this idea, school leaders who supported their educators with meaningful engagement were likely to see improvement in their retention efforts (Tran & Smith, 2020). Educators, and employees in general, who did not have this connection to their organization were likely to leave in search of a new job (Watson, 2018; Yildiz, 2018).

Job embeddedness has been studied in public schools with questionnaires by examining mentoring programs and higher pay as a means of investigating teacher turnover; however, the results were inconclusive (See et al., 2020). When studying educators in an urban public university, training, development, and career mobility all positively improved job embeddedness and educator retention (Shibiti, 2019). Another researcher examined 143 public school teachers with less than 5 years of experience, and this quantitative study found that job embeddedness was related to teacher retention (Watson, 2018). Even with these findings, there is a lack of understanding of the job embeddedness theory in diverse realms of education, particularly in the private school sector and even more specifically when it comes to educators' experiences with job embeddedness (Watson, 2018; Yildiz, 2018). Previously conducted studies have taken place in public schools, and researchers have called for the need to improve understanding of the job embeddedness theory by looking at other demographics and types of institutions (Shibiti, 2019). Additionally, many studies have collected quantitative data, and the gap in the literature calls for the addition of qualitative data by using interviews or focus groups to strengthen the understanding of the job embeddedness theory in the educational field by exploring educators' experiences (Pieters et al., 2022). Therefore, I explored educators' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness in private, parochial schools to address the lack of understanding in this part of the educational setting. A focused qualitative study that took an in-depth look at educators' experiences of job embeddedness added to the body of research and filled this gap.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and

communities. I defined job embeddedness as an educator's fit, links, and sacrifice to their place of work and community (Mitchell et al., 2001). Fit includes the perception of shared values and goals that an educator has with the school. Links are related to all the connections that teachers form with the organization and community through other people, groups, or activities. The final dimension of sacrifice includes the stressors that an educator would experience if they left their workplace and/or community. Sacrifice ultimately includes what the educator would be giving up if they left their community and place of employment (Watson, 2018). The theory that guided this study was the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). The job embeddedness theory relates to the idea of educator retention because it provides a framework for creating situations where the employee is connected to the organization and community through various initiatives while also finding ways to connect the employee's outside personal interests to work experiences as well.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was to share the lived experiences of educators during their employment while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States. I contributed to the body of literature regarding educator retention and job embeddedness so that administrators and school leaders may use the information from this study to explore the importance of job embeddedness and how it relates to educator retention in their schools. I showed through the empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this study how the information taken from the study may help to address gaps that exist in this area of research.

Empirical Significance

I focused on educators' lived experiences of job embeddedness during their employment in southeastern United States parochial schools for my data collection. I gathered data to provide

information about how these educators described their experiences of job embeddedness while working at a parochial school in the southeastern United States. I collected the data from 12 educators using a questionnaire, interview, and journal entry as the educators described their experiences of link, fit, and sacrifice, which are the three components of the job embeddedness theory. Phenomenological studies include detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I provided empirical data through the results of my study about the descriptions of the experiences of job embeddedness for 12 parochial educators in the southeastern United States. My study about educators' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness added to the work of Holtom and Darabi (2018), who explored job embeddedness factors of employees and their relation to job satisfaction. I collected data from 12 participants' experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school. Researchers have conducted previous studies in the educational sector, but they have studied public schools and been quantitative in nature (See et al., 2020; Shibiti, 2019; Watson, 2018). My research was similar to other studies in that it examined the job embeddedness theory; however, my study was qualitative and examined educators' experiences of job embeddedness in private, parochial schools. I filled a gap in the literature regarding the job embeddedness theory as it is applied in the educational sector through my study (Pieters et al., 2022).

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of this study was based on the job embeddedness theory. Job embeddedness includes the levels of fit an employee feels to their organization and community while also investigating the employee's level of connectedness to both the organization and community. Finally, job embeddedness also includes the level of sacrifice that any employee would feel if they left their place of employment. All three of these components summarize the

job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). My study was useful in providing a framework for gathering the descriptions of 12 educators' experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States that had roughly 300 educators. Watson (2018) utilized the job embeddedness theory and found compelling evidence to support the importance of job embeddedness for educators. Other researchers have conducted quantitative studies on job embeddedness in public schools (See et al., 2020; Shibiti, 2019). The findings of my study served to further develop the job embeddedness theory by providing qualitative data on educators' experiences in a private, parochial school. It is for this reason of understanding educators' experiences of job embeddedness that I recruited 12 educators for this study who were working in a parochial school in the southeastern United States to examine their experiences of job embeddedness to further the knowledge regarding job embeddedness.

Practical Significance

Schools face a host of difficulties when educators decide to leave their schools. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) explained that student achievement decreases and an educator's effectiveness diminishes when school leaders divert resources from school programs to educator recruitment when educator turnover is high. Administrators may benefit from the data findings through the course of this study by gaining information about educators' experiences of job embeddedness and applying it to their local schools. School leaders increase job embeddedness when they provide opportunities for educators to develop and have opportunities for advancement and mobility (Shibiti, 2019). Teachers may also find this study useful by reading about other educators' experiences of job embeddedness and then seeking ways to improve their own professional and community embeddedness. Teachers who are embedded in their community and place of employment are likely to find job satisfaction and

stay on the job (Watson, 2018). My study added to the practical significance by including qualitative data specifically in a private educational setting. Educators may find the information in this study as a means of analyzing their own job embeddedness in the educational sector.

Research Questions

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. The central research question began with an overview and sub-questions included additional details. The central research question and three sub-questions are listed in the following sections.

Central Research Question

How do educators describe experiences of job embeddedness while teaching in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States?

Individuals need to feel embedded in their jobs to improve employee retention. Job embeddedness may be accomplished in many ways, and one of the most effective is by providing opportunities for growth and career advancement (Shibiti, 2019). In addition, researchers conducting studies in other industries have found a strong correlation between improving an employee's knowledge and expertise as a determining factor for improving job embeddedness (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). School leaders may also benefit by improving retention by focusing on specific job embeddedness strategies.

Sub-Question One

How do educators describe their experiences of connectedness with their school and community while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States?

The components of the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) include why employees who feel connected to their jobs and others are likely to stay with their company. The development of stakeholders, specifically praising them as a means for fostering improvement, may not only progress employee performance but may also allow the employees to gain knowledge and skills that could benefit both the employee and the organization (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). Employees who continue to gain knowledge are likely to remain embedded within the organization (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018).

Sub-Question Two

How do educators describe experiences of utilizing their talents and abilities while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States?

Employees who are engaged in interests outside of work that are connected to their professional life are likely to have increased job embeddedness, which leads to employee retention (Mitchell et al., 2001). Organizational leaders are creating corporate social initiatives that allow employees to be engaged in the community with organizational support and are creating corporate social initiatives as an effective format for increasing employee motivation, which has a positive correlation to improved employee retention (Bode et al., 2015). It may benefit schools to employ corporate social initiatives as a means of improving educator retention as well.

Sub-Question Three

How do educators describe experiences regarding the sacrifices they would make if they were to leave the organization?

Employees who are truly embedded within an organization are hesitant to leave the company when they feel that they may be sacrificing too much if they left their job (Mitchell et

al., 2001). Organizations benefit when they create an environment and situations that employees enjoy and appreciate. Employees who are connected to their place of employment and community are likely to feel that the benefits of leaving their place of employment do not outweigh the sacrifice for leaving (Ampofo et al., 2017). It may benefit organizations and allow for improved embeddedness and employee retention when employees feel that the sacrifice for leaving an organization is too great (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study include the following:

1. *Job embeddedness* – Job embeddedness explains how well (or not) an employee is connected to their place of employment and community. Job embeddedness is best summarized by an employee’s fit or compatibility to the firm, their link or number of connections to the organization and/or community, and sacrifice or what is lost if they leave the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001).
2. *Retention* – Retention is the process that organizations use to help ensure that employees do not quit their jobs (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018).
3. *Corporate social initiatives* – Corporate social initiatives are organizational plans and strategies that have explicit social mandates, take place outside of the organization, and are geared towards improving the firm in a specific capacity (Bode et al., 2015).

Summary

Educator retention has been an issue that has plagued the educational system for generations (Sutcher et al., 2019). While educator turnover is inevitable, there is a growing body of literature that indicates high levels of educator turnover lead to lower levels of academic achievement and school efficacy (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The current

literature shows that there are many reasons why educators leave the teaching profession and many of those reasons have to do with low levels of organizational commitment, perceived lack of support, and high stress (Mack et al., 2019).

Improving educator retention is critical for the success of the school system in the United States (Watson, 2018). In this phenomenological study, I aimed to contribute to the literature regarding job satisfaction and educator retention by examining the descriptions of 12 educators' experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school in the southeastern United States. My study was focused on this central research question: How do educators describe experiences of job embeddedness while teaching in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States? Through the findings of this study, I contributed to a greater examination of the lived experiences of parochial school educators' descriptions of job embeddedness. Information from this study is beneficial for administrators, educators, and other stakeholders who work within a Christian, parochial school system.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review includes information and studies related to job embeddedness as it pertains to educators in their employment setting. While researchers have done a great deal of work on employee retention as it relates to job embeddedness, gaps in the literature exist, which provided the basis for this study. For example, Boswell et al. (2017) explained that researchers need to conduct additional studies to understand why employees choose to stay with an organization when they have an opportunity to leave. In addition, Shibiti (2019) noted a limitation of current research on educator retention is that much of the data collected through studies has been dependent on the participants being self-aware and perceptive, and the participants may be biased in this area of self-reporting. Many researchers (Kamau et al., 2020; Rajappan et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2020; Shibiti, 2019; Watson, 2018; Yildiz, 2018) have examined educator retention as it relates to job embeddedness but few of them do so through a lens of parochial, private schools like the school system included in this study. Due to these gaps, there was a compelling reason for this study to be conducted.

Researchers who developed the job embeddedness theory provided a theoretical understanding of an employee's link, fit, and sacrifice to their place of employment and community. Mitchell et al. (2001) developed the job embeddedness theory and explained that employees have links or connections with other people and activities within the organization. In addition, employees must also fit well within their profession, organization, and community. Finally, employees need to consider what they are willing to sacrifice to leave an organization. There is a great deal of knowledge that exists regarding employee retention strategies and

initiatives, and school leaders may glean information from these strategies to help to pave the way for future research studies.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework was necessary for the basis of this study, and these frameworks “provide four dimensions of insight for qualitative research that include: (a) provide focus and organization to the study, (b) expose and obstruct meaning, (c) connect the study to existing scholarship and terms, and (d) identify strengths and weaknesses” (Collins & Stockton, 2018, p. 5). The job embeddedness theory was the theoretical framework for this study. Mitchell et al. originally investigated why employees would leave their place of employment. As they began their work, they had a moment of clarity when they realized they (the researchers) had been in the same job for decades and could make a list of reasons why they did not want to leave. From their discussions, these researchers developed the job embeddedness theory, which is described as a 3x2 matrix (Mitchell et al., 2001). Links, fit, and sacrifice are three dimensions categorized when related to the employee’s organization and community. Employees must feel like they are the right fit for the organization, they must experience a connection between every aspect of their life (both personally and professionally), and they must recognize that they may be missing or giving up something if they leave the organization (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Employees who are not highly embedded are likely to leave the net or organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). Employees may be embedded in a variety of different ways, all of which impact whether an employee may stay with an organization or be inclined to leave it. Holtom and Darabi (2018) supported the work of Mitchell et al. (2001) by explaining that individual employees who have a high level of embeddedness in their organization, as well as their

community, are likely to stay in their current job. In addition, these researchers explained that job embeddedness not only predicts the likelihood of an employee staying with a company, but it also indicates other positive work outcomes related to the employee's performance (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). There are many reasons why organizational leaders are concerned about retaining their employees, and there is increasing empirical evidence that demonstrates the importance of developing human capital as a strategic means for growing an organization's value (Holtom et al., 2006). Companies must strategically plan for ways to retain employees, and increasing retention supports the work of Shibiti (2019) and Mitchell et al. (2001), who all noted the various ways that job embeddedness takes place and that there is a correlation between ensuring that all aspects of an employee's life agree and align with their professional work. One area that Holtom et al. (2006) discussed that is not addressed by the other researchers is that there are exceptional costs to an organization when employees leave and are not retained by the company. Some of the costs to an organization that experiences turnover (lack of retention) are a decrease in customer service, a decline in communication, and a lack of experts in each field of employment (Holtom et al., 2006). Some of these costs are in addition to the natural monetary costs that take place with training new employees, investing in professional development, and other costs associated with the onboarding process of new employees (Holtom et al., 2006). All three groups of researchers (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Holtom et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001) agreed that organizations benefit when employee retention is high. All these researchers further agreed that the principles of the job embeddedness theory may have a tremendously positive impact on retaining employees when leaders apply the three principles of the job embeddedness theory.

Shibiti (2019) further corroborated much of the work of Mitchell et al. (2001) and Holtom and Darabi (2018). Job embeddedness is important because of its emphasis on the

contextual elements that influence retention beyond other constructs such as satisfaction, commitment, and involvement in the organization while placing a heavy emphasis on the environment at the school (Shibiti, 2019). Another researcher found that job embeddedness of educators was higher in those educators who chose to stay working within a school when compared to those educators who chose to leave and that an educator's link and fit to the organization were more important than the sacrifices they would feel if they left (Watson, 2018). Holtom and Darabi (2018) further expanded on job embeddedness as a predictor of additional work habits that benefit the employee and organization.

Shibiti (2019) and Watson (2018) contributed to the work in this area of job embeddedness through their research in the educational sector. Rajappan et al. (2017) focused on 105 educators in a secondary school and found that educators have a desire to find meaning and purpose in their work. In addition, educators want to be connected to colleagues in the school and other people outside of it. Educators who had a greater sense of meaning and purpose had improved levels of job embeddedness (Rajappan et al., 2017). Job embeddedness is important because increased levels of job embeddedness positively impact employee retention (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). Another researcher found that educators who have increased levels of job embeddedness are happier in their jobs and are likely to persist in their vocation (Yildiz, 2018). Embeddedness is important for educators outside of the workplace as well. Researchers conducted a study in secondary schools in Kenya and concluded that human resource employees improve educator retention when they help ensure that the educators are embedded in the community outside of school (Kamau et al., 2020). In addition, embedding educators in their schools and community increases the likelihood of the educator staying in the teaching

profession; this likelihood of teachers staying in the profession is true across many countries, cultures, and in various school settings around the United States (Watson, 2018).

I used the job embeddedness theory to guide this study because researchers have used the this theory in a variety of vocational fields, including education. In addition, a new study conducted in parochial schools extended the job embeddedness theory to show how researchers may use it across all educational settings, both public and private. Researchers concluded that teacher retention improves when educators are embedded in their school and community (Kamau et al., 2020; Rajappan et al., 2017; Shibiti, 2019; Watson, 2018; Yildiz, 2018). By examining the descriptions of 12 educators' experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school in the southeastern United States, I gathered additional data to help add to the literature that already exists on job embeddedness.

Related Literature

A great deal of literature is available regarding the issue of educator retention as it relates to job embeddedness, and the following sections include the literature related to educator retention as it relates to the job embeddedness theory. The related literature section begins with a general understanding of educator retention and then includes three distinct areas that may affect educator retention. Four themes are related to an educator's link to their workplace and community, followed by three themes that pertain to an educator's level of fit to their workplace and community. The final section includes a general theme relating to the sacrifices that an educator must make when choosing to leave their place of employment and whether the benefits of leaving outweigh the negative aspects of leaving.

Understanding Educator Retention

Employee retention is important for organizations to consider. The cost of replacing an employee is too great since employees who leave an organization take their skills as well as organizational culture and values with them to their next place of employment, which a company's competitors may use to add value to their organization (Singh, 2019). In the same way, increases in turnover compromise organizational performance (Wynen et al., 2018). Both Singh (2019) and Wynen et al. (2018) found support that employee turnover has negative consequences for an organization. Researchers concluded that an important element of understanding employee retention is to consider what happens when employees begin to engage in some sort of withdrawal process but end up staying with an organization (Boswell et al., 2017). Researchers further examined this withdrawal process by looking at the cost of losing employees, even if they did lose engagement at some point in their employment (Kim & Beehr, 2018). It is always best to keep employees and limit turnover because the benefits of keeping existing employees outweigh the costs of replacing them with new employees (Kim & Beehr, 2018). Singh (2019) explained this concept of limiting turnover by noting that it is always beneficial to keep employees from leaving the company, even if they have thought of leaving at some point in their employment.

The studies listed above have important components that school administrators may apply to the educational sector as well. Shibiti (2019) highlighted the issue of educator retention by noting that the loss of educators working in the profession is a real issue that researchers need to address. In addition, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) explained that the loss of educators is a problem that continues to persist, and researchers' projections point to this trend continuing. COVID-19 has also increased the need for retaining educators since attrition has

increased since the beginning of the pandemic (Diliberti et al., 2021). Another researcher examined the issue of educator attrition and advocated for schools and their leaders to take an active role in helping to ensure that quality educators stay in the classroom (Kelchtermans, 2017). Finally, Oyen and Schweinle (2021) explained that educator attrition negatively impacts this nation's schools in countless ways, and leaders need to address this issue of educator attrition so these trends do not continue. Overall, the review of the literature points to the importance of retaining educators and limiting turnover.

Educators' Links to the Workplace and Community

One important component of the job embeddedness theory is an employee's link to their place of work, and these links include whom individuals connect with in an organization, as well as the employee's connection to activities within their place of work and community (Mitchell et al., 2001). A researcher concluded in a recent study that schools need to address the social and professional needs of educators (Kelchtermans, 2017). Relationships, specifically those relationships that connected workers to the school, were a contributing factor to educators staying on the job (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Researchers noted that job embeddedness requires a strong link to the organization, and it is important for schools to develop practices that help foster those strong connections of job embeddedness by developing programs that connect educators to each other and to activities in the school (Podolsky et al., 2017). Organizational leaders benefit and retain employees when employees create strong links to the workplace and community (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Administration and Relationships

Employees are embedded in their organization when they connect to other people in the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). In the case of educators, a positive relationship with the

administration increases job embeddedness and leads to educators wanting to stay in their place of employment (Shibiti, 2019). Administrators play a role in helping to increase an employee's level of job embeddedness by building relationships with their educators. Researchers consistently point to administration–educator relationships as one of the most important characteristics of educator retention. Researchers have proven that supportive communication between administration and new educators helps to reduce educator attrition by up to 67% (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Principals are responsible for creating and building relationships with educators, as these relationships lead to greater job satisfaction (Abitabile, 2020). Two other researchers came to the same conclusion, stating that social connectivity between administration and educators is one of the strongest predictors of educator retention and that a lack of administrative support has “a large influence on the decision of educators to leave the profession as it decreases school culture and perceived emotional support” (Moser & McKim, 2020, p. 270). A researcher conducted another recent study that also noted the importance of positive relationships between principals and their educators for improving performance and retention (Berkovich, 2018). In addition, the importance of principal–educator relationships and support is one of the most critical factors for retaining educators in Christian schools (Jones & Watson, 2017). The literature in this area indicated the need for administrators to find ways to develop relationships with their educators and to find ways to support them as contributing factors for improving educator retention. Positive relationships between educators and their administration help to increase job embeddedness, which affects an educator's desire to stay at their place of employment (Watson, 2018).

Researchers recognize that several important steps are necessary for principals to implement relationship-building initiatives with their educators. First, principals should be active

and visibly seen on campus because new educators especially desire interaction (Abitabile, 2020). When a principal is present in the hallways and classrooms, he or she is likely to observe new educators in moments that may result in positive affirmations. Direct, genuine connections such as these may lead to individual relationships between administration and educators, which is one of the most important aspects in building trust and keeping educators on staff (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Principals must also focus on demonstrating that they find value in developing relationships with their teaching staff. A researcher found a high correlation between an educator's job embeddedness improving when the administration focuses on the development of relationships (Elsaied, 2020). The development of relationships increased job embeddedness among the teaching staff and had a positive impact on increasing educator retention. Small moments of positive interactions, so long as they are genuine, often do lead to greater job satisfaction (Abitabile, 2020).

When principals are highly visible, they have opportunities for increased and honest communication with educators. Improved communication and support are other keys to helping educators succeed and preventing turnover while increasing job embeddedness. Administrators need to work to understand their educators' personalities and unique quality traits as it may help them determine what support they might need and what potential struggles they may face (Kell, 2019). Classroom visits are intimidating, but when completed on a routine basis and coupled with honest and timely feedback, educators are likely to trust their principals and become proud of their work when principals document and share the educator's improvement (Abitabile, 2020). Educators who have positive interactions with their principals are likely to feel empowered and inspired through these interactions (Szeto & Cheng, 2017), and these positive relationships between educators and their administrators increase job embeddedness (Watson, 2018). In

addition, positive interactions between educators and administrators are positively correlated with increasing educator retention (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018).

Principals' jobs no longer focus solely on scheduling, budgeting, and management; instead, principals must invest in relationships with their educators because the development of trusting relationships between principals and educators is a critical element for improving morale and building a positive culture (Berkovich, 2018). If a principal were to invest as much time and effort into relationships as educators do with their students, a positive school culture would emerge (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Administrators may also play an important role in developing more than just a superficial relationship with their educators so that the educators feel supported through all the programs the school offers such as human resources support, leadership, and supervision. Principals who develop relationships with their educators help to develop job embeddedness and promote a positive environment that leads to improved retention (Elsaied, 2020).

Peer Relationships and Mentorship

Relationships between principals and educators are important, and researchers have shown the importance of these relationships in the literature as well. Additionally, researchers also focus on the importance of relationships among educators and their peers. Moser and McKim (2020) found in their study of 13,500 educators that relationships with peers may be just as important as relationships with administrators, and that a lack of strong peer relationships may connect to educator turnover. Positive relationships increase feelings of job embeddedness, which leads to educators wanting to stay at their current place of employment (Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017). School connectivity (having strong relationships with other educators and administrators) is the strongest predictor of career commitment (Moser & McKim, 2020).

O'Brennan et al. (2017) reported this same finding and stated that the more connected an educator feels to other educators, staff, and their principals, the less likely they may feel overwhelmed and experience burnout. Strong relationships result in higher levels of job satisfaction; similarly, connectedness translates into the belief that educators have the skills to do their job well (Moser & McKim, 2020; O'Brennan et al., 2017). In the same way, supportive relationships between co-workers increase feelings of job embeddedness (Self et al., 2020). Educators oftentimes develop strong relationships with their peers when they participate in knowledge-sharing behaviors (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). When educators feel connected to their colleagues and place of employment, they are likely to have strong feelings of job embeddedness, and these educators are inclined to stay as a teacher within their organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). Individuals desire connectedness to other people in their place of employment, and when connections happen, there is evidence that shows it may lead to improved employee retention, specifically among educators. Researchers described an educator's link to their place of employment in job embeddedness as their connectedness to other individuals and activities (Mitchell et al., 2001). Educators achieve this connectedness or link to a place of employment via the development of relationships, specifically between educators and their colleagues (Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017). A researcher examined math and science educators in a case study and found that the development of positive relationships between educators had a positive impact on an educator's desire to remain in the profession, while negative relationships had the opposite effect (Webb, 2018). Another study conducted with 18 science educators found that the educators who reported experiences of building positive and supportive relationships with their colleagues were more likely to be embedded in the organization (Larkin et al., 2022). In the same way, experienced educators benefit when they strategically cultivate and nurture

relationships through school programs (Whalen et al., 2019). Researchers conducted this study and found that relationship-building programs not only help to improve educator efficacy but also help to develop relationships between colleagues. In the same way, Martinez (2019) concluded that new educators face unique obstacles that may cause them to leave the profession within 3 years. Individuals do not always find it easy to share their ideas, knowledge, and experiences with co-workers, but when educators can share their ideas and knowledge, it proves to positively impact employee retention for an organization (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018).

Social contexts and the development of relationships between colleagues has an important role in developing motivation within an employee, and positive collaborative units between colleagues may lead to employees wanting to remain in their place of employment (Ozyilmaz et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Employees who want to remain in their place of employment have higher levels of job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001). Colleagues build trust between each other when a real relationship exists. Improved levels of trust lead to an improved work environment that ultimately makes an employee want to stay with an organization (Wang et al., 2019). School leaders benefit when they helped foster the development of relationships between educators so that greater connections exist, and the employees become embedded in the organization. When job embeddedness increases, educator employee retention increases as well (Shibiti, 2019).

Strong connections among the people in an organization help to increase job embeddedness (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). Mentorship programs may help to increase job embeddedness and thereby improve retention through the development of peer relationships. Ronfeldt and McQueen (2017) found in their analysis of three major surveys and studies that having a mentor reduces the odds of leaving the career of teaching by up to 55%. While the

quality of mentors certainly matters and differs from program to program, it does appear that most mentorship or coaching programs have an important role in retention because of the social and moral support (O'Brennan et al., 2017). A formal mentorship program is not even necessary nor does a principal need to assign a mentor for these programs to be effective. Instead, a series of good relationships in a school setting, no matter how casual or formal, helped educators develop and gain confidence (Reitman & Karge, 2019).

Morettini et al. (2019) learned that for many first-year educators, mentors are often the major reason why novice educators continue to teach, noting that quality mentorship was one of the most important factors for keeping new teachers in the classroom. Mentorship programs were particularly important in urban schools, where conditions for teaching were high-stress and difficult. New teacher induction programs that work to mentor urban educators and others in hard-to-staff schools were promising in helping to mitigate educator attrition for educators who are new to the field (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017). Mentors are most effective in helping to retain new educators when they develop a trusting relationship with their mentee and help the mentee to forge meaningful relationships with others in the school (Sowell, 2017). It is also important to note that mentoring programs are most effective when they last throughout the year (as opposed to a few weeks or months) and when they target the emotional demands of new educators (Morettini et al., 2019). All these strategies ultimately help build trust and rapport, which supports the school in retaining their educators by increasing an educator's level of job embeddedness (Shibiti, 2019).

A potential benefit of incorporating quality mentorship programs is the ability to help develop resiliency. Kutsyuruba et al. (2019) wrote about educator resiliency and how this characteristic is a good predictor of retention. Educators who participated in mentoring programs

with experienced educators could cope with the challenges and stresses they faced in the teaching profession (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). In the same way, mentoring programs help to retain educators, to varying degrees, but they are generally successful in helping to improve educator persistence (Bastian & Marks, 2017). Educators who display resiliency thrive in their profession, despite challenges and adverse situations. According to Kutsyuruba et al. (2019), resilient educators generally have good relationships and community support, so tailoring mentorship programs to focus on the “reflection and reflective attitudes in teacher resilience” may lead to retention (p. 292). A mentor who is accessible, reliable, and trustworthy may help new educators develop self-reflection skills that can carry them through the most difficult moments of teaching. Yildiz (2018) reported that employees who have high levels of vocational belonging and thrive in the workplace are likely to have high levels of job embeddedness, which improves their desire to stay within their organization. Administrators may effectively use mentoring programs to help educators feel like they belong in the school in which they are teaching by allowing them to learn from and associate with their peers (O’Brennan et al., 2017). Squires (2019) also noted that mentor programs may help to improve educator retention. When educators, or employees in general, feel like a good fit for their organization, job embeddedness increases, and increased levels of job embeddedness have the potential to improve the organization’s employee retention efforts (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Student–Educator Relationships

Positive relationships between an educator and their students are also an important factor in helping to improve job embeddedness and educator retention (Yildiz, 2018). One of the top three ways that schools may improve educator retention in these high-needs schools is by helping educators learn how to develop and foster positive relationships with their students because

educators who have positive relationships with their students are likely to be committed to the school and the students they serve. Positive relationships between students and teachers are a necessary component for improving educator retention (Wronowski, 2017). Additional researchers conducted a study in 2017 and surveyed 120 educators, and they discovered that an educator's sense of meaning and the development of positive and supportive relationships with their students both led to higher levels of job satisfaction and improved attitudes (Lavy & Bocker, 2017). A similar study found that an educator's sense of finding their work meaningful was through the development of positive and supportive relationships with their students (Kun & Gadanez, 2022). Educators who report a closeness with students showed an increased feeling of accomplishment, but when conflict between educators and students was prevalent, an educator's sense of accomplishment decreased and their levels of emotional exhaustion increased (Corbin et al., 2019). Remote work environments during the COVID-19 pandemic have also affected the level of meaningful interaction between students and educators that many educators find beneficial (Diliberti et al., 2021). The studies of these authors (Corbin et al., 2019; Diliberti et al., 2021; Lavy & Bocker, 2017) are important because educators who are experiencing job satisfaction through positive educator–student relationships are inclined to be embedded within the organization (Yildiz, 2018). In the same way, high levels of job satisfaction and a positive attitude about one's job both lead to higher levels of retention (Granziera & Perera, 2019).

Relationships Outside the Workplace

The prevalence of strong community connections is important for increasing job embeddedness (Yunlu et al., 2018). Anderson et al. (2017) conducted a study where members of the School of Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks reviewed the rates of educator retention and attrition in rural Alaskan schools. These researchers proved that educator turnover

is higher in rural areas than in urban areas in arctic Alaska. While educators cited a lack of support from the district and/or administrators as a major reason for educator attrition, a close second was the lack of community connection. Less than 50% of the educators in this study felt connected to their communities, which the researchers believed played a large role in educator turnover. Unfortunately, it appeared to be a cyclical issue. The researchers stated that the frequent departure of many educators made it difficult for the schools in rural Alaska to deliver quality education to their students (Anderson et al., 2017). The constant turnover led to a lack of trust within the community, making it even harder for future educators to connect and build relationships. The cycle repeated when educators felt unwelcome in the community, and as a result, left soon after arriving.

Another issue related to the lack of community connection in this study was the lack of diversity in the racial makeup of the educators (Anderson et al., 2017). The vast majority (over 90%) of the educators in the study were White and had no previous history of living in rural Alaska. The schools that these researchers studied had a racial makeup of over 85% Alaskan Natives. Anderson et al. (2017) stated diversity issues were likely a major cause of attrition, claiming that recruiting local educators with similar backgrounds would result in higher retention. White educators new to the area who received training on local indigenous cultures appeared to stay at their job longer. Rude and Miller (2017) confirmed this finding, stating that it is especially vital that administrators train rural educators to have a greater understanding of the area and cultures they serve to create trust and build relationships. A researcher conducted another study in Illinois and analyzed some of the smallest rural schools in the state and found that community connectedness played an important role in improving educator retention in these schools (Ulferts, 2018). The lack of community connections supports the job embeddedness

theory and highlights the fact that employees who do not experience high levels of job embeddedness within their community are likely to leave their place of employment (Shibiti, 2019).

The importance of striking a work–life balance so that educators may make community connections, particularly in an urban context, is important for instilling community embeddedness (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Kutsyuruba et al. (2019) pointed out that this work–life balance is especially difficult for educators in their first few years of teaching. A lack of work–life balance was due to stress, many responsibilities, and the lack of mentorship opportunities available. To both provide for their teachers’ well-being and increase community relationships, school leaders must “develop sustainable learning communities characterized by wholeness, connectedness, meaning, commitment, and depth of collaborative relationships” (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019, p. 292). Community connectedness is an important part of job embeddedness and teachers who have high levels of job embeddedness are likely to stay working at their school, so it is important to consider this factor when analyzing educator retention through job embeddedness (Shibiti, 2019).

Educators’ Fit to the Workplace and Community

A second important aspect of the job embeddedness theory is an employee’s fit to their place of work. Mitchell et al. (2001) described this feeling of fit as to how an individual’s work and role in the community relate to their values, needs, talents, interests, and goals. There is a great deal of evidence in the existing literature that points to an educator’s level of fit being related to their self-efficacy at work and their ability to continue to improve and serve the organization (Reitman & Karge, 2019). The educator’s level of fit must also take place in the community if it is going to increase the educator’s feelings of job embeddedness (Fontinha et al.,

2019). Administrators cannot overlook a person's value and how their work and community fit into their life in a positive and meaningful way. The researchers who developed the job embeddedness theory articulated that employee retention improves when employees feel a high level of fit at work and in the greater community in which they live (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Employees must also feel a high level of fit in their community, and community levels of fit are contributing factors that improve educator retention and job embeddedness (Shibiti, 2019). Recent studies and literature include details about the need for employers to focus on off-the-job embeddedness, which includes life outside of the place of employment (Treuren & Fein, 2018). A person's fit into their community is almost as equally important as their fit to the workplace. People have varying degrees of attachment to the communities in which they live and interact, and the degree of these attachments is a contributing factor for increasing fit, which ends up helping to increase employee retention (Singh, 2019). Employees who are involved in their local community are likely to have greater social networks, which helps to balance work-life conflicts. Fontinha et al. (2019) stressed the importance of employers finding ways to help employees find a healthy work-life balance and limiting work hours to help alleviate employee stressors, which may ultimately allow them to be actively involved in their local communities. The impact of COVID-19 has made it difficult for educators to have an appropriate work-life balance due to increased personal and family obligations (Steiner & Woo, 2021). In the same way, researchers conducted a study and concluded that employers benefit when considering factors such as work hours, place of work, work conditions, and pace of work as helping employees maintain a healthy work-life balance which allows for greater activities and involvement within the community (Fein et al., 2017). A healthy work-life balance is important for many reasons. Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2020) noted that employers are equipped to recruit and retain

employees when they recognize the importance of a healthy work–life balance, which is critical for the organization’s success.

Educators spend a great deal of time in the classroom and preparing outside of it, so it is important for them to also seek an appropriate work–life balance. Watson (2018) specifically mentioned the need for educators to be the right fit for their job and community. People have a need to participate in hobbies, church activities, or other community events. The same is true for those people in the teaching profession. Watson (2018) argued that an educator’s fit into their community is almost as equally important as their fit to the community at large. Job embeddedness and educator retention improve when an educator’s values and goals align with how they work in their academic institution and how they live in their community. In addition, educators who are likely to persist in the profession and their place of employment report a fit to their community at large and not just the school itself (Shibiti, 2019). Researchers recently examined young academics at a variety of public and private secondary institutions. In addition, young educators seek embeddedness in their community and when that does not take place, they are inclined to leave their place of employment (Shah et al., 2020). The educators who participated in this study reported that they wanted to make meaningful contributions to their community through creative work projects, increased opportunities for social interactions, and personal development. When young academics were fully embedded in their community and work, they were likely to stay in the profession of teaching and not leave for other professional opportunities (Shah et al., 2020). Researchers found that community embeddedness had a direct impact on educator retention in Kenya and that human resource practices that target an educator’s fit within the community may help increase educator retention (Kamau et al., 2020). School leaders must recognize the need to encourage the educators at a school to not only feel

like they are a good fit at the school but within the larger community as well. School leaders may accomplish these feelings of community connectedness by supporting initiatives in the community that encourage educator involvement (Vishwanathan et al., 2019). Initiatives that encourage community involvement may benefit the educators and the institution by increasing educator retention and limiting turnover in the profession. Finally, researchers further magnified the issue of community embeddedness for educators in a study conducted by Yunlu et al. (2018), who found that community embeddedness increases educator retention, especially when the educators are not native to the area. Researchers added to the literature that advocates for educator connection to be a priority in their communities in addition to their place of employment. It may not only help with a healthy work–life balance but also contribute to improving educator retention.

The work of these researchers (Shah et al., 2020; Shibiti, 2019; Watson, 2018) articulates the need for schools to focus on initiatives that recruit educators who are the right fit for both the school and the community. School leaders benefit when their educators are embedded in both their place of work and community. Researchers showed that embedded employees are likely to stay and may have a harder time leaving for other employers and organizations (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Rajappan et al., 2017; Yildiz, 2018). Educators also need to feel this level of embeddedness, and when they do, they also may be compelled to stay in the profession and continue working at their current places of work.

Educators' Self-Efficacy and Feelings of Belonging

Self-efficacy is an important quality for every individual to possess across all areas of industry. Yu et al. (2020) concluded that employees who have high levels of self-efficacy are likely to have high levels of job embeddedness and are inclined to continue working within their

organization. Employees who have a high level of self-efficacy are likely to be committed to their place of employment; self-efficacy is a predictor of one's confidence in a task and plays a role in perseverance, thought patterns, job performance, and effort (Ozyilmaz et al., 2017). Wang et al. (2019) addressed the social context being an important factor, and Ozyilmaz et al. (2017) also highlighted this aspect of self-efficacy. Ozyilmaz et al. (2017) emphasized the impact that an individual's psychosocial functioning has between that individual's motivation and the environment in which he or she works; an employee's self-efficacy, alongside a high level of trust and confidence in their organization, may result in employees having a higher motivational value. These researchers concluded that high self-efficacy, combined with elevated trust in the workplace, may likely cause employees to stay at their job (Ozyilmaz et al. (2017). However, if employees have high self-efficacy but low trust in their organization, they are likely to be confident they may find work elsewhere and may leave their organization. Furthermore, an employee's level of self-efficacy is positively correlated to his/her ability to develop positive relationships at work, and these positive relationships are an indicating factor as to an employee's desire to continue working for a company (Ozyilmaz et al., 2017).

The people in the educational sector also benefit when educators have high levels of self-efficacy. Martin and Mulvihill (2019) conducted research and found that when an educator's level of self-efficacy is high, they have high levels of psychological well-being, are likely to reach their goals, and have improved levels of job satisfaction and commitment to the workplace (Martin & Mulvihill, 2019). Researchers conducted another study in China with Chinese educators and found that educators' self-efficacy improves in a variety of ways, and when self-efficacy improves for any reason, it leads to lower levels of educator burnout and higher levels of educator retention (Zhu et al., 2018). Researchers make a strong argument for the need to focus

on an educator's self-efficacy as a means of promoting educator retention and increasing their levels of belonging (fit) at their place of employment, which is a component of job embeddedness. Finally, Steiner and Woo (2021) highlighted the importance of self-efficacy by pointing out that educators feel that the effects of COVID-19 have left them feeling they cannot properly do their job, which is increasing attrition.

Educators may achieve self-efficacy in a variety of ways. For example, researchers conducted a recent study and found that beginning educators' self-efficacy improves when educators have collegial support from peers and other experienced educators (Thomas et al., 2019). Troesch and Bauer (2017) conducted another study that focused on second-career educators who had previous work experience in other industries and found that job well-being was one of the most important ways of improving these educators' levels of self-efficacy. Finally, researchers also examined pre-service educators as a means of proactively understanding how to improve their levels of self-efficacy and concluded employees achieve self-efficacy through longer training periods as a means of building up self-esteem and confidence so that the pre-service educators felt confident to adequately instruct their students (Colson et al., 2017). All of these researchers found that pre-service educators are most concerned about having the skills necessary to be effective at their future jobs. Educators may achieve self-efficacy in many ways, and they need many tactics to improve self-efficacy. All three researchers found through their studies (Colson et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2019; Troesch & Bauer, 2017) that regardless of how educators gain self-efficacy, improved levels of self-efficacy improve educator commitment and retention.

Educator self-efficacy is an important avenue for improving educator retention. School leaders may help educators bolster self-efficacy in many ways, and improved self-efficacy helps

to achieve positive outcomes for increasing educator retention (Colson et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2019; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Researchers have largely focused on large, public school populations, and there are limited studies that focus on improving educator retention in private, parochial schools. Researchers need to conduct future studies that build on the literature and knowledge in this area, particularly in the realm of self-efficacy to apply this knowledge and gain an understanding of how administrators may apply these strategies to private, parochial schoolteachers. The researchers who developed the job embeddedness theory stated that employees who have a strong fit to their place of employment are embedded and likely to stay working at their place of employment (Mitchell et al., 2001). Educator self-efficacy is an important quality for educators to have so that they are inclined to stay teaching at their school. In the same way, educators who experience high levels of job embeddedness are likely to keep teaching at their schools as well (Shibiti, 2019). For this reason, administrators may use educator self-efficacy as a means for increasing job embeddedness since self-efficacy increases the educator's level of fit for their organization.

Professional Development Opportunities and Innovation

Shibiti (2019) showed that school leaders use job embeddedness to improve educator retention. Researchers showed school leaders use continuing education opportunities to help with educator retention and explained that some of the best support educators may receive is through professional development (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Rose and Sughrue (2020) concluded that professional development opportunities provide great avenues for improving educator retention. Educators have reported a desire to have agency to help direct their own professional growth initiatives for them to feel valued and to work towards reaching their goals (Allen, 2018). Researchers demonstrated that school leaders also use professional development opportunities to

mitigate educator attrition in high-poverty and high-minority schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Educators in high-needs schools also reported the setting of goals and working towards a plan to achieve them as helping to improve educator retention and the desire to stay in the profession (Holmes et al., 2019). Just like educators in high-needs areas report the benefit of professional development, new educators also benefit from professional improvement plans. Professional development models that target new educators in terms of support and are personalized to meet their needs are some of the most important ways that schools may support beginning educators while also improving educator retention (Suriano et al., 2018).

An important part of new teacher induction programs, which leaders design to support educators in the hopes of improving educator retention, includes professional development opportunities that administrators design to make educators effective and prepared to teach in the classroom (Suriano et al., 2018). In the same way, a researcher provided information that educator longevity increases when pre-service educators are adequately prepared and continue to work with experienced educators even after fully assuming their own classrooms (Overshelde et al., 2017). Another researcher also found that professional development using experienced mentors may be effective for not only improving an educator's confidence in the classroom but also leading to educator self-efficacy that correlates to improved educator retention (Cornelius et al., 2019). School leaders may use professional development opportunities for educators to assist in helping them to feel prepared and well-suited to perform their job while also helping to improve educator retention (Coldwell, 2017). The need to use professional development applies to the field of education and other areas of business as well, and it aligns with the job embeddedness theory because educators are likely to feel embedded within the organization when they feel equipped to do their job (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Kamau et al. (2020) supported the idea of improving an employee's innovative capacities as a means of improving employee retention and noted that turnover rates decrease when administrators properly train employees and demonstrate examples of innovative initiatives. Wang et al. (2019) advocated for the use of employee innovation as a means of improving retention by increasing the employee's level of fit and job embeddedness in the organization. Educators have reported that it is important for them to have autonomy and to use their creativity to enhance the learning environment. When educators receive this flexibility, there is improved job satisfaction which reduces educator turnover (Barker, 2020). Improvement in innovative practices is likely to lead to increased levels of employee retention. For this reason, organizational leaders may benefit by placing an increased emphasis on using innovative strategies for improving employee retention. Professional development opportunities are one avenue for increasing an educator's level of fit to their school. An educator's level of job embeddedness increases when their level of fit into their school increases (Shibiti, 2019).

Additional Strategies for Creating Fit in the Workplace

It is important for employees to feel like they are the right fit for the organization in which they are employed. Mitchell et al. (2001) explained that an employee's level of fit with the company contributes to his/her desire to stay with the organization. In the same way, Holtom and Darabi (2018) took this concept of feeling like the right fit a step further and argued that employees are likely to stay in their place of employment longer if they feel like they are a good fit with the organization. It is also important for employers to look for ways to increase job embeddedness as a means of retaining employees since researchers argued that employees that have a high level of fit with their workplace have a stronger tie to it as well (Ma et al., 2018).

Employees may experience organizational fit in a variety of ways. One way is through the perceived fairness that exists within an organization. A researcher found that employees who perceived their place of employment to be just and fair in their practices tend to feel a higher level of fit within the organization (Roczniewska et al., 2018). The same researchers further concluded that this level of fit also increases an employee's perceived level of well-being. An employee's sense of well-being increases when there are strong connections that exist between the employee and the organization. Researchers conducted another study on employee-organization fit and found that a positive person-organization fit affects a person's self-efficacy, which ultimately improves employee outcomes related to job performance and how the employee behaves in the organization (Kim et al., 2017). All these studies highlighted that there is a vested interest on the part of an organization to ensure that employees have a high level of fit within the organization. Mackey et al. (2017) also examined the issue of employee fit within an organization. The researchers in this study examined how employees experience stress concerning their feelings of fit within the company and included information that an employee's stress level at work is reduced when the employee felt a high level of fit into the organization. They further concluded that employers benefit when they create initiatives that foster high levels of fit between the employees and the organization. Leaders make the same argument that this area of helping employees feel like the right fit for the organization should receive a high level of commitment and dedication from the leaders within an organization. Finally, Kodden (2020) agreed with all the research that advocates for focusing on the employee's level of fit within the organization by arguing that work performance and engagement increase when the employee's organizational fit is high.

Educators also must feel a high level of fit within the school they are working. Educators may experience fit in a variety of ways. Researchers focused a recent study on a diverse school district to examine the levels of fit felt by the teaching staff. Educators experience a higher level of fit when they are teaching in the subject area in which they feel comfortable and where they have had previous experience, and administrators should ensure that educators have a genuine interest and/or experience in the subject areas in which they are instructing (Perrone & Eddy-Spicer, 2019). Teachers are likely to be embedded in the school when faculty members are allowed to help make decisions that impact the school (Miller et al., 2020). The same researchers also found that educators who experience high levels of fit, in any capacity, are likely to stay in the profession and their current schools for more than 5 years. Miller and Youngs (2021) solidified the work of Miller et al. (2020) by stating that new educators have a desire and need to have strong connections with their colleagues. Educators who have a strong relationship with fellow educators are likely to stay with the school when deciding on their future employment. Miller and Youngs (2021) advocated for schools to create initiatives that focus on educator–educator relationships to increase levels of fit while also improving educator retention.

Researchers have demonstrated that positive educator–student relationships may improve educator retention because positive educator–student relationships are part of the reason why many educators choose the profession in the first place. Veteran educators’ levels of job satisfaction were highest, at every point in their careers, when they had positive relationships with students (Admiraal et al., 2019). Positive relationships with students increased the educator’s commitment to the school and improved their desire to keep working at the school. In the same way, another study included information that the level of student–educator relationships correlates to an educator’s level of job well-being and that educators reported a desire to not only

stay in the profession but to stay at their current school when they knew they were reaching their students' needs and making a difference (Webb, 2018). The researcher in this study highlighted the fact that educators reported a desire to make connections with their students that are meaningful and impactful. When relationships are strong, the educator's level of job well-being is high. Conversely, when the educator-student relationships are weak, the educator's well-being at their job is low (Aldrup et al., 2018). High levels of fit are important for increasing job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001). School leaders benefit through improved retention when an educator's level of job embeddedness is high (Shibiti, 2019).

Educator's Sacrifice to Leave the Workplace and Community

The third and final component of the job embeddedness theory includes the idea that an employee must consider all factors when contemplating quitting employment with an organization, and the employee must conclude that the benefits of leaving the workplace and community outweigh the negative factors in doing so (Mitchell et al., 2001). Researchers demonstrated there are sacrifices that employees must consider when leaving the workplace and community (Ampofo et al., 2017; Bibi et al., 2018; Zimmerman et al., 2020). The sacrifices employees make when they leave their workplace or community are included in this section of the literature review.

Sacrifice Within the Workplace

It is important to recognize that employers benefit when they make the sacrifice for leaving the organization too high for their employees (Ampofo et al., 2017). For this reason, an important component of educator retention may be for school leaders to create initiatives that make the cost of an educator leaving the school greater than the benefits of leaving. Another approach would be for the school administrators to make the benefits of staying outweigh the

benefits of leaving. Schools retain their educators when the cost of leaving is simply too great for their educators (Shibiti, 2019).

An employee has many factors to consider when leaving one place of employment for another. Mitchell et al. (2001) explained through the job embeddedness theory that when workers feel they are sacrificing too much to leave a job, they tend to stay. For this reason, organizational leaders may benefit when they create initiatives that support employees in various ways that make the cost of leaving the company too great. One of the first sacrifices employees may consider when evaluating the costs of leaving is the financial component (Zimmerman et al., 2020). In other words, if employees were compensated well, it becomes harder for them to leave one place of employment for another. The teaching profession is no different. Two researchers found that faculty members' compensation is highly correlated to retention efforts (Bibi et al., 2018). When administrators compensate educators well, they are embedded and tend to stay at their school for longer periods. Researchers have studied the idea of improving educator compensation as a means of increasing job embeddedness and improving educator retention in hard-to-staff schools such as schools found in urban areas, rural settings, and in schools with hard-to-fill vacancies such as higher-level mathematics and science teaching (Swain et al., 2019). Administrators do not readily accept this practice, though, and there is conflicting evidence about whether increasing educator compensation may have a drastic impact on educator retention, especially in hard-to-staff schools (Shifrer et al., 2017).

Another approach for increasing the sacrifice to leave is related to educator support. Educators report a supportive environment as being important for increasing their desire to stay working within a particular school setting (Tran & Smith, 2020). Mentoring programs are one way to achieve this supportive environment for educators. Another researcher learned that

effective educator mentor programs accomplish two goals. They allow educators to improve their skills and increase educator retention (Sowell, 2017). Educators receiving support in their current place of employment may be less likely to leave their place of employment (Ford et al., 2019). The same researchers included information that educators who build on their existing knowledge and skills through positive support from their leaders not only improve retention but also work to decrease burnout and improve organizational commitment. All of these factors combine to help educators want to remain working at their current schools (Ford et al., 2019).

Career advancement is important to employees across all industries. There are many approaches to increasing employee retention, and one effective strategy is by making it clear to employees that they have an avenue for climbing the employee ladder and furthering their careers through job promotions (Ott et al., 2018). If an employee is contemplating a move to another company, they may be less likely to leave if they know that they have an opportunity at their current place of employment for career advancement opportunities. It is important to note that many educators also look for opportunities to advance in their careers. Researchers found in a recent study that educators are especially attracted to institutions that provide training and development opportunities for educators (Bibi et al., 2018). Educators view schools that invest in these types of programs as being committed to improving educator efficacy. When educators know they have opportunities to advance in their careers, they are less likely to leave their current place of employment. Professional development initiatives at a school may increase an educator's likelihood of persisting within the field (Coldwell, 2017). All these researchers point to the importance of schools creating career advancement opportunities that are competitive, so that educators feel they would be losing out on career advancement opportunities if they left their place of employment.

Sacrifice Within the Community

Employees are people and citizens who are connected to their communities. Educators are also members of the communities in which they live, and school leaders benefit when they help increase an educator's ties to the community. Therefore, if an educator contemplates leaving, they may have to consider the community losses they would incur through such a move. Mitchell et al. (2001) explained that when the sacrifice of leaving an organization is too high, an employee tends not to make the change. School leaders who create initiatives that tie educators to the community and advocate for educators to be active in the community in which they live may naturally help educator retention.

Educators are like any other type of person in the sense that they want to feel connected to their place of employment and community. Educators who are connected to their communities reported a higher level of life satisfaction, and educators who experience high levels of life satisfaction are likely to stay in their current jobs (Ampofo et al., 2017). Community connections and higher levels of life satisfaction seem to be even more important for younger educators than for older ones. Researchers conducted a study in Pakistan and found that institutions benefit when they create community links for the young academics working in their institutions (Shah et al., 2020). Finally, Shibiti (2019) concluded that educators embedded in their community and place of employment have stronger links and fit to both and are therefore likely to stay working in their current school setting. All these researchers make a strong case for school leaders to focus on educator embeddedness within their communities as a means of improving educator retention (Ampofo et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2020; Shibiti, 2019). If educators feel like they would be giving up some level of life satisfaction, they are less likely to leave their current school.

Summary

Employee retention is an issue that affects virtually every area of business, including the educational sector (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). Managers and leaders are responsible for not only recruiting talent but also supporting them in a way that leads to the retention of employees for the organization. Various researchers (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018; Darrat et al., 2017; Shibiti, 2019) have examined the factors that lead to retention, as well as the factors that prevent turnover from taking place. In addition, Thakur and Bhatnagar (2017) have conducted studies and examined practices that lead to improved retention while also recognizing areas of focus for managers that may support retention efforts. Organizational leaders define retention as the processes that are in place by an organization to ensure that employees do not quit their jobs. Researchers have not conducted a great deal of research that takes into consideration the job embeddedness theory as it relates to educational institutions. A gap exists in the literature pertaining to educational settings, specifically in parochial schools, so it is important to conduct future studies that focus on retention efforts by school leaders using the job embeddedness theory.

The role of retention in education is not as extensive as in other areas of business. Leaders in educational institutions also struggle with retention, especially in reference to new educators (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). The researchers who developed the job embeddedness theory provided a foundation for the issue of educator retention. In addition, organizational leaders have a critical role in employee retention efforts by focusing on retention strategies that include training and development, overall health initiatives, and leadership behaviors. By focusing on the retention efforts of non-educational organizations, researchers may conduct studies in the education sector that implement strategies that work in other areas of business. Retention may continue to be an issue that affects educational institutions and other areas of business; therefore,

developing initiatives that support retention, minimize turnover, and increase job embeddedness may benefit the organization.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. I have included the research design and analysis for this study in Chapter Three. I have also included the research questions, site, participants, procedures, and the researcher's role. I also explained the data collection techniques in this chapter. Finally, I included information regarding trustworthiness and ethical considerations, as well as a summary in the methods section of this dissertation.

Research Design

I conducted a study that was a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study focusing on the ABC parochial school system (pseudonym) in the southeastern United States and 12 educators' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness. Quantitative researchers rely on the collection of large amounts of numerical data that the researcher analyzes, so that the researcher may generalize the findings. On the other hand, qualitative researchers use an approach to inquiry that utilizes "the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 8). I chose a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study because I was interested in speaking directly with the participants of this study and hearing specifically from them about their experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school in the southeastern United States. I gained rich descriptions of the participants' experiences and analyzed the data to develop themes from the information collected throughout the study. Husserl is often credited with being the founding father of phenomenological research studies (Husserl & Gibson, 1962), and Moustakas (1994) explained

that phenomenological research describes what a person perceives and knows by becoming aware of their experiences. I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach for this study because it explored the descriptions of 12 educators' experiences of job embeddedness. Furthermore, a hermeneutical phenomenological researcher explores how people describe, interpret, and make meaning of a particular phenomenon (Husserl & Gibson, 1962). My study fit the definition of a hermeneutical phenomenology and was the best design because the participants described their experiences. I explored the descriptions of these educators' experiences of job embeddedness throughout this study.

Qualitative research includes human experiences in a particular context and allows the researcher to derive interpretations from those experiences (Malterud, 2015). Researchers may use various designs to conduct qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case studies include in-depth investigations and analyses of an individual or group (Yin, 2018). Narrative studies are another design for qualitative research that explores the stories from the life of an individual (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A third design for qualitative research is an ethnography, and researchers who use this design describe and interpret a group that has commonality in a culture (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). While these three designs serve a purpose in qualitative research, I did not use them for my specific study. A case study would have been too specific, and I was not looking to conduct an in-depth investigation. In the same way, I did not choose a narrative study because I was hoping to gain more than just a story from the participants. Finally, an ethnography would not help me accomplish the purpose of my study since I did not directly observe my participants but relied on descriptions of their experiences.

A fourth research design, and the one I chose for this study, was a phenomenology. Phenomenological researchers seek to understand the essence of an experience of a group of

individuals who experience the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, phenomenological research is effective in providing a voice for people who often are silent (Picton et al., 2017). A phenomenology was a beneficial approach, and I used it for my study since it provided a voice to educators who otherwise might not have one in terms of sharing their lived experiences of working in a school as it related to job embeddedness. In this case, I provided a platform and voice to the educators as they shared their lived experiences regarding their employment at an ABC parochial school in the southeastern United States. A phenomenology was appropriate for this type of study because I collected data from 12 different educators who were employed at an ABC parochial school in the southeastern United States and were all experiencing the same phenomenon, which was employment in an ABC parochial school and their descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness. In this study, I was the main instrument for collecting the data and analyzing it. I explored the “what” and “how” of educator experiences as they related to job embeddedness through this phenomenological study.

Research Questions

My study had a central research question. In addition, there were three sub-questions related to the issue of job embeddedness. Each of the sub-questions included one of the three areas of job embeddedness. Sub-Question One referred to an employee’s connectedness to the school and community. I focused Sub-Question Two on how the educators described their value and link to the school and community, while Sub-Question Three related to the sacrifice an educator would endure if they left their school and community.

Central Research Question

How do educators describe experiences of job embeddedness while teaching in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States?

Sub-Question One

How do educators describe their experiences of connectedness with their school and community while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States?

Sub-Question Two

How do educators describe how their talents and abilities are utilized while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States?

Sub-Question Three

How do educators describe experiences regarding the sacrifices they would make if they were to leave the organization?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants that I used for this study are included in this section. I explain where I conducted the study. I also provide details about the setting that includes the number of schools, teachers, and students. The second section includes information about the participants. I included in the participants' section all the various demographic details of the participants. It was important to include this section of the study to help provide details that will allow future researchers to have the information necessary to replicate or extend this study.

Setting

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. I gathered the participants from various schools in multiple states across the southeastern United States that were operating institutions within the ABC parochial school system. All these schools offered either a preschool, elementary, middle school, or high school education, with the possibility existing that they also offered a combination of one or more of

those levels. All the schools in which the participants worked were a member school of the ABC parochial school system. The schools had one or more of these levels because these are the levels that leaders in the ABC parochial school system offered in their schools. I conducted the interviews via Zoom with the participants. It is important to note that I used a pseudonym for each of the participants in this study, and these pseudonyms helped protect each participant's identity and ensure confidentiality.

The ABC operates early childhood ministries (ECM), elementary schools (LES), high schools (ALHS), and two preparatory schools, Anytown Preparatory School (APS) and Anytown Seminary (ALS). The schools in the ABC operate independently but are connected in doctrine and mission while receiving (non-financial) support from the ABC. The schools are divided into 12 districts that cover the entire United States, as well as the Caribbean Islands of Grenada, St. Lucia, and Antigua. The ABC operates 123 standalone ECMs, 34 standalone LESs, 248 combined ECM/LESs, and 24 ALHSs. In addition, there are two preparatory high schools, APS and ALS, that are focused on recruiting young people for full-time work in the public ministry. The ABC schools have an enrollment of 9,810 students in their ECMs; 24,618 students in their LESs; 5,874 students in their ALHSs; and 581 students at APS and ALS. The ABC schools employ 473 ECM educators; 1,780 LES educators; and 585 ALHS educators, including the staff at APS and ALS (ABC [Redacted] School Statistics, 2020). Each of the ABC schools has at least one administrator who is responsible for the educational leadership of the school. In some cases, the administrators teach full-time, part-time, or not at all. I focused this hermeneutic phenomenological study on collecting data from the southeastern United States since this area is one of the 12 districts that comprises the ABC. The parochial schools that are a member of the ABC in the southeastern United States have 35 ECMs, 15 LESs, and 1 ALHS. In the

southeastern United States' schools, there are 922 ECM students, 945 LES students, and 356 ALHS students. The district is comprised of 243 educators (73 in ECEM, 130 in LES, and 30 in ALHS; ABC [Redacted] School Statistics, 2020).

I chose these sites because the schools are a part of the ABC parochial school system, and I was interested in collecting data in the parochial school system regarding educators' experiences related to job embeddedness. I articulated this study in a manner so that other researchers may replicate it in other geographical areas to further the research. I gleaned information from this study so that I may provide a baseline of knowledge for researchers to conduct future studies, while also providing insight into the area of job satisfaction and educator retention for private school educators in a faith-based school.

Participants

I sought 12 educators for this study who could describe their experiences of job embeddedness while teaching within the ABC parochial school system in the southeastern United States. The type of sampling where researchers select participants because they meet predefined criteria is known as criterion sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2017), which in this study was being a fully licensed, highly qualified educator with non-lateral entry in a parochial school within the ABC parochial school system in the southeastern United States. Criterion sampling is useful in helping to ensure quality assurance exists in the study (Patton, 2015). The participants were educators serving in an ABC ECM, LES, or ALHS. I recruited educators for this study without regard to ethnicity, age, or gender. I did not include those factors because the only demographic information that is pertinent to the study is related to the educator's grade level and position. The district president of the southeastern United States in the ABC was the one to allow the schools, and the educators who are employed by them, to be

included in this study (see Appendix A). I did not use more than two educators from the same school to help ensure that I had a diverse sample of teachers in the southeastern United States who had different experiences as it related to the phenomenon of job embeddedness. In addition, the educators were all working in a full-time capacity. Twelve participants participated in this study and met the guidelines of a heterogenous group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used a separate pseudonym for each participant to protect their identity.

I gathered my participants from the pool of 243 ABC educators in the southeastern United States. The various schools in the southeastern United States in the ABC employ 73 ECM educators, 130 LES educators, and 30 ALHS educators (ABC [Redacted] School Statistics, 2020). After I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix B), I then received the email addresses of each principal from the district website, and I verbally asked (via phone call or an email) all the principals at each school to serve as a gatekeeper to all full-time educators in their school to gather interest in participating in my study. I asked these principals, who are serving as a gatekeeper, to forward my participation recruitment letter (see Appendix C) to the educators on their staff. Since I did not recruit enough participants, I utilized snowball sampling for my study. Snowball sampling is a form of sampling in which existing participants recommend additional participants who might be interested in participating in a particular study (Patton, 2015). I used snowball sampling by asking existing participants to recommend other educators who might be willing to participate in my study. After I secured the minimum number of 12 participants for my study, I then gave the educators a questionnaire to gain information related to their name, position at the school, and terminal degree earned to confirm their eligibility for this study. All participants agreed to have this information shared and published.

Researcher Positionality

The purpose of this section was for me to articulate the motivation for conducting this study through the interpretive framework. I explained the three philosophical assumptions, and I used these assumptions to help guide my study. I also explained my role in the last part of this section. It was important for me to explain my role in the research process and to list any forms of bias that may have existed. Finally, it was important for me to disclose the ways that I maintained the validity of this study.

Interpretive Framework

Postpositivism is a paradigm that accepts the idea that discoveries in research are approximations of the truth (Levers, 2013). I intended to recruit 12 ABC educators in the southeastern United States who represented the average ABC educator so that I could use the themes developed from the lived experiences of the participants to explore job embeddedness within the ABC parochial school system. I conducted a postpositivist study because I interviewed 12 educators and used their different perspectives to make approximations for examining the participants' experiences with job embeddedness in the ABC parochial school system. Furthermore, I conducted a postpositivist study because I believed that the data from a participant's description of their experiences of a phenomenon are approximations of the truth because sin and outside influences may sometimes affect an individual's perception of their experiences. I have experienced external influences firsthand and recognized that the same might be true as educators describe their experiences of job embeddedness. Since I was conducting a postpositivist study, my goal was to describe the experiences of the participants and articulate those experiences into various themes that may help examine job embeddedness within the ABC school system. I planned for the themes that were developed throughout the course of this study

to help me draw meaningful conclusions regarding the descriptions of the participants' lived experiences related to job embeddedness in a parochial school in the southeastern United States.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are important in helping the reader to understand the lens through which a researcher views the world and a given topic. In addition, I used philosophical assumptions to help with the direction of research goals and outcomes, assist in the scope of training and research experiences, and provide a basis for evaluative criteria for research-related decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Three specific philosophical assumptions are ontological, epistemological, and axiological. I address all three of these philosophical assumptions in the following sections.

Ontological Assumption

As an administrator, I have seen the issue of educator turnover negatively impact the schools in which I have served. I have also seen quality educators leave the profession because of situations and events that took place early on in their employment that became obstacles to their desire to remain with the school. It became apparent to me that school leaders must place additional attention and effort into retaining educators in the profession. The stakes are too high if we fail to retain educators effectively. The main ontological debate is whether reality is defined as objective entities or if it is subjective based on people's perceptions (Saunders et al., 2019). I understand that the participants in this study were all sinful and lived in an imperfect world. I planned to articulate the various perspectives that educators have regarding the description of their experiences with job embeddedness on job satisfaction, but I also understood that a person's description of their experiences may be based on perception, just as much as reality. The educators' descriptions of job embeddedness helped to shape the themes that

developed from the 12 ABC educators who worked in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States.

Epistemological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the epistemological assumption means that the researcher attempts to get as close as possible to the participants in the study to gain knowledge. In addition, a researcher uses the epistemological assumption to ask whether knowledge is hard and real, or if it is soft, subjective, and influenced by individual perception (Saunders et al., 2019). The participants in this study were not experts but were educators who were employed in the ABC parochial school system in the southeastern United States. Their participation required them to share their subjective experiences through the data collection process, and it was for this reason that I tried to become as familiar as possible with their work setting and environment. Each of the participants in this study described their experiences of job embeddedness that were unique to their experience.

Axiological Assumption

A researcher uses axiological assumptions to make their values known and to understand how those values might influence the research process (Saunders et al., 2019). I have been an educator for over 15 years. I have served in two schools, and both had the same issue negatively affecting them. Some educators, who had a lot of promise, did not have great experiences at the start of their employment, and these experiences negatively affected their perspective and, in some cases, led to them leaving the school during their first few years of teaching at the institution. Some of them left the teaching profession altogether, and this exodus of teachers was painful for me to see. I also saw experienced educators not finding satisfaction in their work, which caused them to quit. In talking with other administrators, the issue of educator retention is

a theme that other school leaders, in both private and public schools, face as a challenge each year. Many school leaders I have spoken to voiced concern about retaining quality educators. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) explained that educator turnover decreases school effectiveness and forces school leaders to take away the distribution of valuable budget dollars from improving instruction so that administrators may recruit new educators. I have seen firsthand the negative effects of educators leaving a school, and it seemed that school leaders need to take additional steps to address this issue of educators leaving their schools of employment. The leaders of the ABC parochial school system have attempted to address educator retention through the New Teacher Induction (NTI) program which focuses on educator support and mentoring as a means of retaining educators. While the goals of this program are helpful, I have always wondered if there are other ways for a school in the ABC parochial school system to analyze and understand the issue of job satisfaction and educator retention. Educator retention and job embeddedness are important issues for me as an ABC leader and educator, and I wanted to ensure that our school system has quality educators who enjoy their work and have a desire to stay in the teaching profession. In my opinion, the teaching ministry in an ABC school requires educator stability and longevity to develop a quality educational program while also developing relationships that are essential for carrying out ministry. The goal of the ABC school system is to share the Gospel message with its students, but it also serves to provide quality education, with dedicated and talented educators, to the children in the classroom. It is for this reason that I chose to study and investigate the issue of what keeps educators in their jobs by exploring descriptions of educators' experiences related to job embeddedness in the ABC school system.

Researcher's Role

I was the human instrument in this phenomenological study because I was collecting the data and analyzing it. I was responsible for compiling all the data, transcribing the responses, and summarizing “what” the participants experienced and “how” they experienced it. Researchers are considered the primary instrument in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have attended private, faith-based schools from kindergarten through high school, and I currently serve as an administrator of a Christian, private school. I did not have a professional relationship with the participants in this study, and I was not in a position of authority over them. In addition, I was not a colleague, co-worker, or supervisor of any of the participants who agreed to participate in the study.

I chose a hermeneutic phenomenological study to explore the descriptions of 12 educators' experiences related to job embeddedness because I wanted to gain additional insight into this area (Holtom & Darabi, 2018; Watson, 2018). The study was important to me because I am an administrator of an ABC school where retention has been a perceived problem in the past, and the school is part of a larger school system that has also had issues with retention. It is important to note that educators at the school where I currently work did not participate in this study. I strived to identify any biases that I held and set aside my thoughts or assumptions to ensure the validity of the study. I identified my biases by bracketing out all my preconceived notions and descriptions of job embeddedness as it related to the questionnaire, interview, and journal questions.

Procedures

The purpose of the procedures section is to provide a template for other researchers to replicate the study. Site approval (see Appendix A), IRB approval (see Appendix B), and

soliciting participants through a participant recruitment letter (see Appendix C) are all included in this section. I also included all the data collection pieces and the analysis plan for the questionnaire, interview, and journal entry. Finally, I also included an explanation as to how I achieved triangulation through this study.

Permissions

There were important steps that I had to follow before conducting any research or collecting data for my study. First, I needed to secure permission from the district president of the ABC school system in the southeastern United States to conduct my study in the district and to seek participants who are educators in the southeastern United States (see Appendix A). The next step involved approval from the IRB at Liberty University (see Appendix B). After I received approval from the IRB, I gathered the email addresses of all the administrators in the southeastern United States by using the directory database of the district that is accessible to all educators who are employed in the ABC school system in the southeastern United States.

Recruitment Plan

After I received the email addresses from the district website, I asked the principals to serve as the gatekeepers at each location and to share my participant recruitment letter (see Appendix C) with all the educators in their school with the plan of recruiting eligible participants for my hermeneutic phenomenological study. Participants were requested to send me an email, and my email address was included in the participant recruitment letter (see Appendix C) if they were interested in participating in the study after receiving the email from their principal (gatekeeper). Since I did not initially receive 12 participants, I used snowball sampling to recruit additional participants. As mentioned in a previous section, this type of sampling involves a form of recruitment in which existing participants recommend additional participants who might be

interested in participating in a particular study (Patton, 2015). Through this process, I secured 12 participants. After a participant indicated a desire to participate in my study, I emailed the informed consent form (see Appendix D) to them, so they could print, sign, and send it back to me. Based on the return of the informed consent form, I ended up with 12 participants who agreed to participate in my study.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection is an important part of the qualitative approach for conducting a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is important to stress that I did not collect any data until I received IRB approval. The process of data collection includes a researcher gaining permission from participants, having a quality sampling strategy, and then determining best practices for recording the information and storing it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, there should be varied methods of data collection to ensure triangulation and data validation (Ary et al., 2019). I shared an initial questionnaire, conducted an interview, and collected a journal entry from each participant for this study.

Questionnaire

I utilized a questionnaire at the beginning of the study (see Appendix E) after a participant had reached out to participate and returned the informed consent form. I chose a questionnaire as the first means of collecting data because questionnaires are beneficial in qualitative studies to help the researcher learn about the attitudes, beliefs, and characteristics of a group of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In addition to acquiring basic demographic information, I asked 12 additional questions (see Appendix E) based on the three components of job embeddedness as stated by Mitchell et al. (2001), including an employee's link to the organization, their fit to it, and a sense of sacrifice they would experience if they were to leave

the organization. I used a questionnaire to explore how the participants viewed the three components of job embeddedness.

I asked the participants to verify their name, position at the school, and the highest terminal degree earned through the initial questionnaire. The purpose of this basic questionnaire was to provide a framework for me to explore how the participants view job embeddedness. Since I developed this questionnaire, I needed to address face and content validity. I established this validity by linking the questions to similar types of research questionnaires related to job embeddedness in quantitative research studies and existing literature (Holtom & O'Neill, 2004). I also utilized an expert panel of educators who have already earned their doctoral degrees to review the questionnaire questions (see Appendix E). I shared the questions with the expert panel, along with an explanation of the study. The expert panel reviewed the questionnaire after I received IRB approval. I did not need to make any changes to the questionnaire based on the feedback from the expert panel.

I emailed the questionnaire questions to the participants whom I selected for my study. The email indicated that there was a Survey Monkey form that included the questions to which they should respond. The participants needed to click on the Survey Monkey form in the body of the email and submit their responses in the form. I received all these responses from the Survey Monkey form, and I saved and stored the responses on my password-protected computer. I repeated this method for each participant. I sent individual emails to each of the participants and included the same questions in the Survey Monkey form for them to complete and submit.

Questionnaire Questions

The 13 questions included in the questionnaire were the following:

1. Please confirm your name, position at the school, and highest terminal degree.

2. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your students and/or their families. SQ1
3. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your students and/or their families. SQ1
4. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your colleagues. SQ1
5. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your colleagues. SQ1
6. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your neighbors or people in the community. SQ1
7. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your neighbors or people in the community. SQ1
8. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had at your current place of employment that caused you to feel that you are a good fit for the school where you work by providing examples of experiences that led you to how you perceive your level of fit in the organization. SQ2
9. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had at your current place of employment that caused you to feel that you are not a good fit for the school where you work by providing examples of experiences that led you to how you perceive your level of fit in the organization. SQ2
10. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had outside of your place of employment that caused you to feel that you are a good fit for the local community where you live by providing examples of these experiences that led to how you perceive your level of fit in the local community. SQ2

11. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had outside of your place of employment that caused you to feel that you not are a good fit for the local community where you live by providing examples of these experiences that led to how you perceive your level of fit in the local community. SQ2
12. Describe any experiences (in detail) you have had that you would miss at your current place of employment if you were no longer working there. Be sure to provide examples of experiences you would miss and explain why you would miss them. SQ3
13. Describe any experiences (in detail) you have had that you would miss outside of your current place of employment if you were no longer living in your current community. Be sure to provide examples of experiences you would miss and explain why you would miss them. SQ3

I used the first question to confirm the eligibility of the participants for this study. I used the next 12 questions because each one addressed a specific part of the job embeddedness theory. The first six questions that I used addressed embeddedness or connections within the school and community. The eighth, ninth, 10th, and 11th questions I chose highlighted the part of the job embeddedness theory that explores whether an employee feels that they bring value to the workplace and find fulfillment in the work they are doing or not. The final two questions that I utilized addressed an educator's level of willingness to leave the school and find alternative employment opportunities. All 12 of these questions helped to incorporate the ideas associated with the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is an important component of collecting data, and the data analysis process has a variety of steps involved within it (Polkinghorne, 1989). Creswell and Poth (2018) also

explained that data collection is an important and time-consuming part of qualitative studies. One of the first steps to analyzing the data in this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to ensure that I accurately recorded all data and maintained them to follow the data analysis procedures of Moustakas (1994). I began by organizing all the data from the questionnaire and converted the responses to a Microsoft Word document. Creating an audit trail of information for phenomenological research in qualitative studies was necessary to ensure the accuracy of the data (Moustakas, 1994). I started this audit trail by ensuring that the data from each participant's response was saved on my computer. The data were secured because I stored them on a password-protected computer, and I am the only one who has the password to access the computer device. I then began the data analysis process for the questionnaire.

Moustakas (1994) described many important steps in the data analysis process and began by describing that a researcher must epoche an experience so that there are no preconceived notions and the researcher is not making early judgments regarding the phenomenon. I completed this epoche of my experiences by typing out all my preconceived notions and descriptions of job embeddedness as they related to the questionnaire questions. After I completed an epoche of my experience, I then looked for significant statements throughout each participant's data that were related to the phenomenon of job embeddedness as it related to the participant's links, fit, and sacrifice in the workplace and community. I considered a significant statement to be any statement related to the phenomenon of job embeddedness. For example, any statement that included the following would be considered significant: having a good relationship with the principal, feeling unique talents are used to help the school, and mentioning a positive mentoring relationship. I printed the individual's responses and underlined all these significant statements as I reviewed the responses to each question. Significant statements helped

to provide a greater understanding and meaning of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The significant statements were unique (nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping) statements that the participant made. After noting the significant statements, the next step in the data analysis process involved horizontalization, which is reviewing and analyzing the data to highlight important information which may include statements or phrases that express how a participant feels about a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). By using horizontalization, I determined if the statement contained information that was related and pertinent to the phenomenon. I only considered the statements pertinent to the phenomenon. The process of horizontalization left me with significant statements from each participant that were all specifically related to the phenomenon I was studying. I numbered each participant's significant statements that remained to show the number of unique significant statements from each participant.

The next step in Moustakas's (1994) data analysis procedures for phenomenological studies required significant statements to be placed into clusters of meaning units that helped to develop themes. I analyzed each participant's significant statements from the questionnaire and made note of the significant statements that repeated across multiple participants' responses. I then color-coded these and grouped them to create the themes by noting the statements that repeated across various participants' responses. I then had a color-coded list that showed all the themes across all the participants' responses. I used these themes to help me to develop textural and structural descriptions. The purpose of textural descriptions is to integrate what and how the participants experienced a particular phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The textural descriptions articulated what the participant experienced and how they saw the theme. I created individual textural descriptions by writing a narrative summary with verbatim excerpts of each participant's experiences of the phenomenon.

Finally, Moustakas (1994) concluded the phenomenological data analysis process by developing an essence of the experiences. The essence of the experiences served as a representation of the whole group and was derived from each of the participant's experiences. I developed the essence of the experiences by combining all the individual textural descriptions from each participant to create composite textural descriptions for the group. Through the development of composite textural descriptions, I used this process to articulate the essence of the meaning for the group. I achieved the essence of the meaning of the group by reviewing the individual textural descriptions and narrative summaries from each participant that I developed to write down descriptions that multiple participants experienced. I combined these repeated experiences to help present the essence of the meaning for the group.

Interview

Interviews are an important component of phenomenological research studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of my interview questions was to explore the participants' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness. I chose an interview as the second means of data collection because interviews allow for an in-depth collection of data in which the participants may answer open-ended questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I sent the expert panel the interview questions, along with an explanation of the study. The expert panel reviewed the questions and made no suggestions. In this case the instrument was a new set of interview questions, developed by me, so I needed to review the questions with an expert panel. I sent an email to each participant to schedule a time for conducting the interview via a secure Zoom link. I recorded all the interviews through a video recording on the computer. After I completed each interview, I transcribed the questions and responses verbatim onto a Microsoft Word document. I

saved that document and stored it on my computer, which I have protected by a password so that I am the only one who has access to the files on the computer.

Interview Questions

I conducted the interviews after school hours or at a time convenient to each participant. Each interview lasted between 15 and 40 minutes. The open-ended interview questions were the following:

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me about your experiences that led to you working at an ABC school.
2. Please describe in detail your specific role at the school.
3. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected to a colleague. SQ1
4. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected to a colleague. SQ1
5. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected with students and/or their families. SQ1
6. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected with students and/or their families. SQ1
7. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected to people outside of your school/work setting. SQ1
8. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected to people outside of your school/work setting. SQ1
9. Describe experiences when you have felt like you were a good fit at your school of employment. SQ2
10. Describe experiences when you have felt like you were not a good fit at your school of employment. SQ2

11. Describe experiences of how the administration helped assist you in reaching your goals. SQ2
12. Describe experiences of how the administration did not help assist you in reaching your goals. SQ2
13. Describe experiences you have had in your community that make you feel like you are a good fit for living there. SQ2
14. Describe experiences you have had in your community that make you feel like you are not a good fit for living there. SQ2
15. Describe experiences you would miss if you were no longer working at your current school. SQ3
16. Describe experiences you would not miss if you were no longer working at your current school. SQ3
17. Describe experiences you would miss if you were no longer living in your local community. SQ3
18. Describe experiences you would not miss if you were no longer living in your local community. SQ3

Questions 1 and 2 were entirely there to create dialogue that is engaging and friendly.

Researchers need to help the participants to feel comfortable when conducting an interview (McGrath et al., 2018). Since this interview was the first time that I was engaging with the participants in face-to-face interaction, it was important to start the interview in a comfortable format. The first two questions allowed the participant and me to interact in a way that laid the groundwork for comfortable interactions as the interview progressed.

Job embeddedness connects employees to an organization through links, fit, and sacrifice (Mitchell et al., 2001). Mitchell et al. (2001) further explained these three components of job embeddedness theory as links to people and activities, being a good fit with the organization and larger community, and feeling connected in a way that leaving the company would have negative consequences. For this reason, I was seeking to explore how the participants described their experiences of job embeddedness while working in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States. Questions 3–8 corresponded to the idea of an educator being linked or connected to the organization and their community. All these questions directly correlated to the critical research question and the first sub-question of this hermeneutic phenomenological study by seeking information that had the participant reflect on their level of connection to their school and the people who work and learn at the institution. Previous researchers (Holtom & Darabi, 2018) learned that employees who are highly embedded in both the organization and community are likely to be satisfied in their work and personal life, which has a high positive correlation for improving employee retention. Shibiti (2019) further supported this work by stating the importance of job embeddedness being related to community involvement and attachment. For this reason, Questions 3 through 8 all pertained to how the educator is embedded or connected to the organization and community.

I used Questions 9–14 so that they corresponded to an educator's fit with the organization. The educator's perception of their level of fit to the teaching profession, school, and community was the focus of the second sub-question of this hermeneutic phenomenological study. Mitchell et al. (2001) explained that the second component of job embeddedness pertains to how an organization and the surrounding environment fit with the employee's needs, talents, interests, and career goals. Several research studies (Kamalaveni et al., 2019; Shibiti, 2019) show

a positive correlation between an employee feeling valuable and needed, leading to higher rates of retention. In the same way, when employees feel they have a path toward positive career development, they are likely to be embedded with the organization and to be committed to staying as an employee (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). Finally, the job embeddedness theory states that employees must feel like they are contributing to the company to be truly embedded (Mitchell et al., 2001). Since an educator's fit with the organization is related to job embeddedness, which correlates to educator retention, Questions 9–14 were all related to this component of job embeddedness.

I used the last four questions, 15 through 18, to connect to the third and final component of the job embeddedness theory, which is that educators must feel like they are sacrificing something if they leave the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). In other words, educators who leave must feel that there are positive things they may miss once they are no longer employed with the organization or live in the community. All these questions correlated to the third sub-question by focusing on the sacrifices an educator would make if they left their school or community. Some of the benefits that employees enjoy and miss when leaving an organization are strong health benefits and competitive salaries (Mitchell et al., 2016). Other areas of sacrifice include strong leaders who support the employees in reaching their goals and listening to concerns, and leaders who advocate for the people they are leading in the organization (Kossivi et al., 2016). There are many reasons why an employee may feel a sense of sacrifice for leaving a company, and it is the organization's job to make the costs of leaving the firm outweigh the benefits of leaving it. The final component of job embeddedness theory is that employees who feel they are sacrificing too much to leave may ultimately stay and recognize the benefits of

working for the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). I designed Questions 15–18 to understand if educators felt a perceived sense of sacrifice if they left the school.

Interview Data Analysis Plan

I used the same analysis plan for the interview as I did for the questionnaire. I transcribed verbatim all the questions and responses from each participant's interview in a Microsoft Word document. I completed this process by reviewing the audio or video recordings and typing the full question that I gave and followed it up with a full transcription of the participant's response to each question. Creating an audit trail of information for phenomenological research in qualitative studies is necessary to ensure the accuracy of the data (Moustakas, 1994). I created this audit trail by ensuring that I saved the data from each participant's interview transcription on my computer. The data were secure because I stored them on a password-protected computer, and I was the only one who had the password to access the computer device. I then began the data analysis process for the interview questions, which was the same process as outlined in the *Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan* section.

Journal Entry

A researcher may learn about a phenomenon when reviewing the transcriptions of a participant's notes in written form to help gain meaning and understanding surrounding the specific phenomenon (Vicary et al., 2016). I used a journal entry as a third means of collecting data from participants in this phenomenological study. I sent an email to the participants after the interview, and I asked them to reflect on their descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness within their organization by completing a journal entry. I sent the expert panel the questions, along with an explanation of the study. The expert panel reviewed the journal entry questions after I received IRB approval. They did not suggest any changes. In this case the

instrument was a new set of journal entry questions, developed by me, so an expert panel needed to review these questions.

Journal Entry Questions

The 10 questions for the journal entry included the following questions:

1. Describe professional engagements with colleagues or members of your administration that make you feel connected to the organization. Explain all of them that are meaningful and explain in detail. SQ1
2. Describe professional engagements with colleagues or members of your administration that make you feel disconnected to the organization. Explain all of them that are meaningful and explain in detail. SQ1
3. Describe the types of community activities that you enjoy and make you feel connected to the community. Explain in detail. SQ1
4. Describe the types of community activities that you do not enjoy and make you feel disconnected to the community. Explain in detail. SQ1
5. How would you assess your goodness of fit with your current school in terms of feeling valued, utilized, and needed? Please provide as many details as possible to support your assessment. SQ2
6. How would you assess your goodness of fit for the community in which you live in terms of feeling like you are a true part of the community? Please provide as many details as possible to support your assessment. SQ2
7. Describe what you like most about working in your current school. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3

8. Describe any sacrifices you feel you make by working at your current school. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3
9. Describe what you like most about living in your current community. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3
10. Describe any sacrifices you feel you make by living in your current community. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3

All 10 of the questions referenced above were related to three components of the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). I asked the participants to record their entry responses via a Microsoft Word document that they could send to me through email communication. I asked the educators to share their experiences related to job embeddedness and to provide as many details as possible. Finally, I asked the participants to share something that they would miss or not if they had left their place of employment or community for some reason. The purpose of these journal entries was meant to see how embedded educators feel in relation to their link, fit, and sacrifice with the organization and community.

Journal Entry Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed the journal data in the same manner as the questionnaire and interview questions. I took all the responses from the journal entries and save them on my computer. The data were secure because I stored them on a password-protected computer, and I was the only one who had the password to access the computer device. I then began the data analysis process for the journal questions which was the same process as outlined in the *Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan* section.

Data Synthesis

Data synthesis involves analyzing the data and compiling it into a unified statement that incorporates the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole picture (Moustakas, 1994). I analyzed all three data pieces and looked for evidence that showed the repetition of experiences. In the same way, I eliminated any data that were not relevant to the research questions. I looked for data that helped to determine if the experiences that the participants shared were relevant to the information, seeking to explore the participants' descriptions of their experience with job embeddedness. Finally, I looked to label the data that repeated through all three data pieces to find evidence that was repeated through all three sets of the data.

Clustering and Thematizing

I reviewed the data and looked for patterns and themes that provided thematic meaning to the participants' descriptions of their experiences related to the phenomenon of job embeddedness. The data analysis at this stage of the process takes place when the researcher uses a variety of methods to find meaning from all the data collection pieces (Moustakas, 1994). I completed this process by using phenomenological reflection. Phenomenological reflection refers to the methods for analyzing empirical data that I used to uncover the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Maharaj, 2020). I utilized this process by clustering the data from all three data pieces to discover the themes that were redundant in all three of the data pieces.

Validation

Moustakas (1994) described the process of validation as the step that allows the researcher to create a complete record of the phenomenon based on the compilation of all the participants' descriptions of their experiences of job embeddedness. I validated the data through

a two-step process. The first step involved triangulation. Triangulation takes place when the researcher uses multiple methods of data sources in qualitative research to generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 1999). I achieved triangulation by looking at the data and identifying common themes from the questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries. I achieved validation by using member checking. I utilized member checking by taking the feedback of the participants and having them explore the themes that were prevalent across all pieces of the data and repeated in the descriptions of multiple participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I accomplished this member checking by asking the members to confirm whether the data analysis represented their experiences or not.

Synthesis of Meaning and Essences

Moustakas (1994) noted that data analysis requires the researcher to synthesize the textural and conceptual descriptions into statements that ultimately show the essences of the phenomenon, which for this study included the participants' descriptions of their experiences related to job embeddedness. I used all the themes that had been validated across all three data collection pieces. Using themes that were relevant and validated, I completed a composite description that combined the data repeated across the individual textural descriptions. I used the same process with the individual structural descriptions. I combined those individual structural descriptions into a composite structural description that included repeated data from all the participants' descriptions of their experiences. Finally, I integrated the composite textural and composite structural descriptions together to develop a comprehensive synthesis of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important in all qualitative research, especially when considering the credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability of the researcher's findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation is one tool used in qualitative research to help ensure credibility (Denzin, 1989). There are other strategies for ensuring trustworthiness as well, and this can be done with member checking. Member checking supports trustworthiness and credibility because the participants share their views on the findings and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checks are also an effective means of ensuring that trustworthiness is an integral part of a qualitative study (Kornbluh, 2015). Furthermore, trustworthiness is important because it helps to ensure that there is integrity in the data, an appropriate balance between participant meaning and researcher interpretation, and that there is clear communication of the findings (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

Credibility

Credibility is an important part of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Credibility is the extent to which the findings are believable. The credibility of research has received a greater emphasis in recent years due to researcher misconduct and misbehavior (Haven & Grootel, 2019). It was important for me to establish credibility and trust with all participants early in the research process. I further established credibility by learning as much as possible about the participants as well as the organization where they were employed. Researchers need to collect data and present it fairly while also interpreting it accurately (Haven & Grootel, 2019). I helped to establish the credibility of this phenomenological study by developing a positive rapport with the research participants and allowing them to personally verify that I fairly presented and interpreted the data.

I also established credibility by collecting detailed descriptions from the participants. Allowing the participants to review the data collected and to offer their support for its validity is important for establishing credibility (Kornbluh, 2015). In the same way, I allowed the participants to review the my analysis of the information and to opine on the findings of the study before I published and shared the results. All these tactics were beneficial in helping to ensure credibility.

Transferability

I conducted a study specifically related to educators in a parochial school in the southeastern United States that is a part of the ABC school system. Transferability is a type of external validity that researchers achieve through detailed descriptions and variations in how they choose participants (Geertz, 1973). The inclusion of detailed descriptions in my study provides future researchers an understanding of the type of information that they may look for in their own studies. In the same way, this study included a diverse group of participants who vary in age, years of experience, and other characteristics. I presented this study in a manner that included detailed accounts of each participant's lived experience, which may allow future research studies to make transferability assumptions.

Dependability

I achieved dependability through consistency during the research process while also ensuring that I provided rich details about the study. I addressed dependability by speaking to the study's findings as being reliable. I was sure to have the data and findings audited and that triangulation of the data took place; these two steps were effective in ensuring that dependability existed within this qualitative study (Ali & Yusof, 2012). The final step for helping to establish the dependability of this qualitative research was to use thick descriptions that were extremely

detailed (Geertz, 1973). I reported the steps of the research process in detail so that future researchers could replicate the study. In addition, I provided a clear analysis of the findings so that researchers may support any future studies through the work of this study. Finally, I used an inquiry audit by asking another researcher, who was not involved with my study, to examine the data analysis and results of the study.

Confirmability

Researchers achieve confirmability through consistency during the research process, and I achieved this by ensuring that rich details were provided about the study. I achieved confirmability by making sure that the data and findings were confirmed by others. For this reason, the use of member checking was especially valuable in ensuring that confirmability existed in this qualitative study (Kornbluh, 2015). Triangulation takes place when the researcher uses multiple methods of data sources in qualitative research to generate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 1999). The process of triangulation was beneficial in helping to achieve confirmability by looking at the data and identifying common themes from the questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries. The final step researchers use to establish confirmability in qualitative research is similar to the step used to establish dependability, which is by using thick descriptions that are extremely detailed (Geertz, 1973). I needed to report the steps of the research process in detail so that future researchers could replicate this study. Finally, I provided a clear analysis of the findings so researchers may support future studies through the work of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers must contemplate ethical considerations in every study. One of the ethical principles I had to consider was the need to meet the goals of the study while also maintaining

the rights of the research participants (Orb et al., 2001). In addition, I had to protect participants from harm, assure them of their confidentiality, and explicitly state how I securely stored their data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, I gained approval from Liberty University's IRB and then asked for support in recruiting participants through the administrators at each school that is a part of the ABC parochial school system in the southeastern United States. After I completed these steps, I reached out to the participants and asked them to sign consent forms where they voluntarily agreed to participate and understood that they could withdraw from participation in the study at any time without any negative recourse. In addition, I assured the participants I would protect their names by using pseudonyms. Finally, I stored all the information collected from the data on my computer, and I was the only person who had access to the files through a unique password. I took steps to ensure that none of the information gathered would be tied back to any individual participant. In addition, I securely stored all the data and deleted the information from my computer once I finalized and published the study. I shredded all the printed copies of notes and transcripts at the conclusion of the study. I was certain that I fulfilled all the ethical considerations mentioned in this section.

Summary

I designed this study in a manner that allowed for a thorough exploration of educators' experiences during their employment as a full-time educator at an ABC school in the southeastern United States as it related to job embeddedness. Chapter Three of this dissertation contained the research design, research questions, the site, as well as the number of participants, procedures, and the role of the researcher. Details of the data collection process included a questionnaire, an interview, and a journal entry, all three of which I highlighted in this chapter. In addition, I shared my detailed data analysis plan that included the transcription of notes, a

coding system, and then a thorough analysis of all the data. Finally, I also addressed trustworthiness and ethical considerations in this chapter, so that the study may be of benefit to other academic institutions, specifically academic institutions that are faith-based schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. Phenomenological researchers seek to understand the essence of an experience of a group of individuals who experience the same phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenology was used for my study so that I could provide a voice to educators who otherwise might not have one in terms of sharing their lived experiences of working in a school as it related to job embeddedness. I wanted to hear from the educators, in their own words, as to how they experienced embeddedness in both their school of employment and community. I used the collection of data from all 12 participants to report the findings of this study. Each educator agreed to share their experiences through three different pieces of data collection pieces. I used an initial questionnaire, interview, and journal entry to collect the data and will present those findings in this chapter.

Participants

I had asked the principals at each of the ABC parochial schools in the southeastern United States to serve as gatekeepers and to share my recruitment letter with their staff members. I received three responses and followed up with the potential participants by sharing the informed consent form. Each of the educators was asked to review the informed consent form, sign it, and email it back to me. I also asked them to share any names of people they would recommend participating who they thought might qualify for this study. Through this process of snowball sampling, I received commitments from 18 educators, and 14 of those educators returned the informed consent form. Two participants later followed up and told me they could

no longer participate due to not finding enough time to complete the initial questionnaire, so I was left with 12 participants who returned the informed consent form and participated in the data collection process through the initial questionnaire. All 12 participants also completed the interview via Zoom and returned the journal entry responses.

The 12 people who agreed to participate in this study were all eligible because they served as educators in an ABC parochial school in the southeastern United States. The 12 educators in this study all had varying degrees of experience and taught elementary (first through fifth grade) or middle school (sixth through eighth grade). Some of them taught in single-grade classrooms and others taught in combined-grade classrooms where two grade levels were taught in the same classroom. All the participants had earned a bachelor's degree, but none of them had achieved a master's degree at this point in their teaching career. Table 1 contains a summary of the grade levels taught by the participants as well as the highest degree earned by them.

Table 1*Teacher Participants*

Teacher Pseudonym	Grade Level Taught	Highest Degree Earned
Tom	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Lily	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Beth	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Martha	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education
Adam	Middle School	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Clara	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Kate	Middle School	Bachelor's Degree in Education & Bachelor's Degree in Arts and Literature
Paul	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Peter	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education
John	Middle School	Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education
Sue	Middle School	Bachelor's Degree in Education
Mary	Elementary	Bachelor's Degree in Education

Tom

Tom stated in his initial questionnaire that he taught in a combined-grade classroom and earned a bachelor's degree in education. He further stated that he expected his teaching

responsibilities to change over the next few years as the school was growing and adding grades. Tom also stated in his questionnaire that he enjoyed the opportunities he had to build relationships with his students and families. Tom shared in his interview that he appreciated the opportunities he had to share God's Word with his students. Finally, Tom mentioned in his journal response that he enjoyed being a part of a community that was growing and gaining people.

Lily

Lily shared in her initial questionnaire that she had taught at two different locations in her career and that she had been at her current school longer than 10 years and was raising her family there. Lily stated in the interview that she enjoyed the relationships that she developed with her students. She felt like she really could learn about her students by asking them questions about their interests and activities they enjoy doing outside school. She felt this tactic was a great way to connect with her students. Lily listed many reasons for feeling like she was a good fit for her school. She shared in her initial questionnaire that she had been at the school a long time, was adaptable and had taught different grade levels over the years, worked well with families and colleagues, and met her husband while teaching at the school.

Beth

Beth shared in her initial questionnaire that she was a teacher in a combined-grade classroom and enjoyed teaching music. She was grateful that she could use her musical talents in both the school and church. Beth also mentioned in her questionnaire that she enjoyed creating a positive classroom culture which allowed her to develop strong relationships with her students. Beth also shared in her interview that she enjoyed learning from her co-workers and appreciated their support. Finally, Beth wrote in her journal response about having multiple responsibilities

in her school and church that did not allow her to feel connected to anyone or anything outside of her school of employment.

Martha

Martha stated in her questionnaire that she was an educator in a combined-grade classroom and that she had served as a teacher in two different locations. She also mentioned that she enjoyed playing the piano in both her school and church. Martha shared in her journal response that she was very busy with school and work obligations, but she enjoyed the nice weather that was typical at her location. Martha indicated that she enjoyed the ministry where she served as a teacher. She shared in her initial questionnaire that she appreciated the parents who volunteered in her classroom as it provided an opportunity for her to learn about them and develop a closer relationship with them.

Adam

Adam mentioned in his initial questionnaire that he taught in a combined-grade classroom, and that he had been a teacher at the same school his entire career. Adam shared in his interview that he appreciated his principal because he helped him smoothly transition from college to his new career as a teacher. Adam also discussed in the initial questionnaire that he felt like he was a good fit for his school of employment. He specifically mentioned that he helped coach several sports at his school after the school day was done, and he enjoyed helping in this area. Adam shared in his interview that he was most grateful that his co-workers shared the same beliefs as him and that he bonded with his colleagues over their shared faith in Jesus.

Clara

Clara stated in her initial questionnaire that she had served as a teacher in two different locations that were different from each other. She continued by stating that she enjoyed looking

for opportunities to grow as a teacher. Clara also wrote in her journal that she was especially appreciative of her principal. She specifically discussed in detail that she appreciated that her principal always made time for her no matter what he had going on throughout his day. Clara discussed in her interview that she was excited that she lived in a diverse area with many cultures. Finally, Clara wrote in her journal response that her work commitments at school leave little time for anything else in her life.

Kate

Kate mentioned in her initial questionnaire that she was a middle school teacher with a bachelor's degree in education. Kate also shared in her questionnaire that she felt as though she was a good fit for her school because she was teaching middle school. She also mentioned that she felt most connected to the parents of her students when she spent time with them or when they showed up for school meetings and events. Kate provided many details in her interview regarding her feeling connected to her colleagues. She stated that the staff spent a great deal of time together outside of school and that they enjoyed spending time with one another at a restaurant or gathering at someone's home. Kate said that she felt disconnected from her community and was hoping that those feelings would change over time.

Paul

Paul shared a few facts in his initial questionnaire. He mentioned that he had been teaching at the same school his entire teaching career. He enjoyed working at his school and living in the South. Paul shared in his interview that he had a part-time job that allowed him to develop relationships with people in the community, and he mentioned that this was important to him because he enjoyed being social and meeting new people. He enjoyed that he could use his other interests and talents to help in both the school and church. Paul shared in his journal

response that he felt like he was a great fit for his school and community because he could use his talents in music and the arts to help other people.

Peter

Peter wrote in his initial questionnaire that he had taught a few different grade levels throughout his career, but he was currently an elementary grade teacher in a combined-grade classroom. He stated in the interview that he was a valuable member of his school and church ministry because he was uniquely gifted to do a variety of tasks and activities that others did not feel comfortable doing. Some of these activities included coaching a variety of sports in the school and serving in different volunteer roles in the church. Peter expressed in his interview that he had several opportunities to carpool with students and parents to sporting events. He mentioned that these were great ways for him to further develop these relationships and to feel connected to the school through these activities.

John

John stated in his questionnaire that he was a middle school teacher and that he helped to teach departmentalized subjects at his school. He continued by explaining that he felt like he was a good fit for his school of employment because he was teaching in a subject area and grade level that he felt suited him well. John also commented in the questionnaire that he truly enjoyed being a part of his school because he could share his faith and tell his students about Jesus each day. He further elaborated that he had many students who did not attend church or know much about Christ, so he was grateful that he could share the Gospel message daily. John mentioned in his journal response that he enjoyed spending time with his colleagues outside of school because he had bonded with many of them, and they had become his good friends.

Sue

Sue stated in her questionnaire that she had more than 10 years of experience. She also indicated that she had taught in two different locations and had also taught different levels throughout her teaching career. Sue shared in her interview that she enjoyed her school and helping with after-school activities in addition to her teaching duties. Sue also wrote in her journal response that she liked volunteering in her church by leading a women's Bible study and playing the piano for worship services. Sue enjoyed being a part of the local running club, and she stated the great friends she had developed through this organization when she mentioned it in her questionnaire, interview, and journal entry. She shared in her journal entry that she appreciated spending time with her colleagues and socializing with them whenever possible.

Mary

Mary mentioned in her questionnaire that she had over 10 years of experience in the teaching profession. She continued by stating that she was a passionate educator and enjoyed that she could use her artistic abilities in both the school and church. Mary noted in her interview that she most enjoyed sharing the Gospel with her families and sharing her faith. She further elaborated by stating that she tried to show Christ's love in everything she did. Mary enjoyed the school in which she taught and served, and she was especially appreciative of her principal. She wrote in her journal response that she could go to her principal for anything, and he would support her. She was grateful for the fact that her principal was always keeping the mission of the school in front of the staff. Mary shared in the interview that her colleagues were her family, especially since she did not have any immediate family members who lived near her.

Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. I used an initial questionnaire, interview, and journal entry as the three data collection pieces for this hermeneutic phenomenological study. I began the data analysis process by creating a detailed audit trail of the data and securely storing all the data (see Appendix H). I started this audit trail by saving the responses from Survey Monkey for the questionnaire to a Microsoft Word document. I transcribed all the interviews to a Microsoft Word document, and I saved the journal responses to a Microsoft Word document as well. I then had to epoche my own experiences, so that I was fully aware of any biases I may have carried with me into the study and evaluation of the data. I completed the epoche of my experiences by answering the questions to all three data collection pieces and then writing a summary of those responses. I began analyzing the questionnaire, interview, and journal entry responses in the same manner for each collection piece. I started the analysis process by highlighting significant statements from each of the participant's responses to the questionnaire, interview, and journal. The significant statements were meant to note important statements made by the participants that were related to job embeddedness. Horizontalization was done to ensure that all the significant statements were nonrepetitive and related to the phenomenon. The significant statements from each of the three data collection pieces were then grouped into codes/meaning units. The initial questionnaire generated 44 codes/meaning units, the interview had 53 codes/meaning units, and the journal entry had 47 codes/meaning units (see Appendix I). The meaning units were then color-coded and grouped into categories to develop possible themes (see Appendix J). I then continued the analysis process for each of the three data collection pieces by writing textural and structural

descriptions for each participant. The final step of the process for each of the three data collection pieces required me to write an essence of the experiences.

A synthesis of all the data was done to collectively look at all three data pieces from all the participants to fully explain the results and identify the themes and sub-themes. I began this process of looking for repetition of experiences by examining the codes/meaning units and themes that appeared across all three pieces of my data collection for the initial questionnaires, interviews, and journal entry responses. There were 30 codes/meaning units that remained and were grouped into five categories that became the themes, with each theme having two sub-themes. The five themes were the following: (a) strong relationships with students, (b) mixed relationships with parents, (c) strong fit to the school, (d) strong relationships with colleagues, and (e) lack of people connections to the community. Table 2 provides the themes, sub-themes, and codes/meaning units that were derived from the initial questionnaires, interviews, and journal entry responses. Table 2 also records the number of participants who mentioned these themes and sub-themes across at least two of their data collection pieces. See Appendix K for a record of each participant's mention of the sub-themes.

I concluded the validation process of the data synthesis process in two parts by using triangulation and member checking. I first used triangulation to verify that participant experiences from the five themes were present in each of the three data collection pieces. I utilized member checking by asking my participants to participate in a member-checking process through a Zoom conference. I shared the themes and findings with them, so they could confirm if it reflected their experiences or not. I specifically reviewed all the participant quotes and data that I used to ensure that it was accurate and a reflection of what they shared during the data

collection process. I asked for their feedback and received confirmation that the experiences shared were an accurate account of their experiences.

Table 2

Themes, Sub-Themes, and Related Codes/Meaning Units

Sub-Themes	Codes/Meaning Units	Number of Participants
Theme 1: Strong Relationships with Students		
Classroom Connections	academic connections nonacademic connection	11
Connections Outside the Classroom	extracurricular/school event connections non-school event connections	8
Theme 2: Mixed Relationship with Parents		
Face-to-Face Interactions Affect the Relationship	drop off/pick up formal/informal meetings	8
Levels of Parental Involvement Affect the Relationship	partnership difficult communication positive communication	10
Theme 3: Strong Fit to the School		
Talents and Interests Are Utilized	departmentalization extracurricular activities inside classroom talents outside classroom talents	11
Gospel Ministry	sharing Jesus church connections mission opportunities	9
Theme 4: Strong Relationships with Colleagues		
Socialization	get-togethers activities food family events	11

Sub-Themes	Codes/Meaning Units	Number of Participants
Professional Support from Colleagues and Principal	mentor/administration personal support professional support professional development	11
Theme 5: Lack of People Connections to the Community		
Workload Is Heavy and Lack of Time	long hours/many commitments too much work	7
Non-People Connections	weather places events feels disconnected	12

Note. The *Number of Participants* category reports how many of the 12 participants mentioned the code/meaning units in at least two of their data collection pieces.

Strong Relationships with Students

The 12 participants indicated that developing strong bonds with their students helped to create connectedness. The participants demonstrated this through the feedback that was provided across all three data collection pieces. Lily commented in her interview, “I think to be connected to families and kids, you kind of have to make that special effort to find not just the things they’re struggling with, but also the things that interest them and that they’re passionate about.” She further explained that she even kept a spreadsheet to help her track all the things taking place in her students’ lives so that she could be proactive and have conversations with them that were meaningful and specific to what is happening in their lives. Beth stated in her initial questionnaire, “At the beginning of the year, I make sure to establish good relationships with the students and to create a good classroom culture so that they feel comfortable being able to talk with me about anything that they need.” She further mentioned, “It’s really cool that they trust me to be able to talk with me about personal things and private things.” Beth saw the importance

of creating positive relationships and recognized the benefits that exist when positive relationships between teachers and students are established. Martha also expressed in her journal response that she felt, “I have made very good connections to the students.” Martha’s experience provided another example of positive and strong relationships between the teachers and their students.

The educators who participated all commented on developing relationships with students, and those relationships happened in a variety of contexts. The grade level, the role of the teacher at the school, and a few other factors all influenced how the teachers developed those relationships. The two sub-themes were classroom connections and connections outside the classroom, and these sub-themes were demonstrated throughout the responses and feedback provided by the participants. Both sub-themes provided opportunities for the teachers to develop strong relationships with their students.

Classroom Connections

Teachers shared details about the connections they made with students in the classroom setting. The development of strong relationships with students in the classroom was an experience shared by many of the participants. Clara noted an example of stressing the need to create strong teacher–student relationships. She said the following during her interview:

A lot of my connection with students is obviously during the school day. I’m with them the whole day ... I think that if you spend so much time together that just, you’re able to predict each other, and you know how people react, and you know their personalities. I think my strength is bonding over content, where you just get everyone excited about learning or through the activity, and how you’re all in it together.

The classroom provided easy access and intentional opportunities for developing strong student–teacher relationships. Kate noted her experiences in the initial questionnaire:

Working in middle school, I would say that I often feel pretty connected to the students. Just because you're able to have like the more real conversations with them, whether it's about what they're doing, or I was talking with a student today about some problems that she was having at home. So just being able to have those real conversations with them and offer advice. And then that also leads into the relationships with parents where you can reach out and see if everything's okay with them at home. But again, a lot of like intentional relationship building there between students and families for sure.

Lily noted in her journal response that she felt that her students trusted her and felt connected to her because she had been a steady and familiar face to them throughout the years when other teachers and pastors had left and moved on to other places. She noted how her longevity also provided opportunities to support the student's parents since they have known her for a long time. Paul further commented in his reply to the initial questionnaire that he felt connected to his students and made it a priority to have open communication. He stated, "I think it's all very important to make connections and conversations.... go that extra little bit to stay connected." Paul's description of his experiences showed the intentional meaning behind creating these strong relationships between students and teachers. They did not happen on their own and required effort and work to make them meaningful.

Connections Outside the Classroom

Many of the participants noted that they had a variety of roles that they filled at their schools, and these additional roles provided them with opportunities to build relationships with students in other ways beyond the traditional roles found in a classroom. Paul exhibited this in

his response in the interview. He stated, "I love my kids. I try to make it to their sports after school. I tell myself to try to go to at least one game of theirs." Paul showed an interest in his students' hobbies outside of the classroom, allowing him to demonstrate that he cared about his students.

Tom made note of many of the school activities that took place for him to connect with his students outside the school setting. In the initial questionnaire, Tom mentioned that his school participated in a Chick-fil-A spirit night, and he saw many of his students enjoying a meal that helped the school. He could talk to them outside the classroom and in a different context. The same was true for family movie/game nights that were hosted at Tom's school. He saw and interacted with his students in a different format than in the classroom. Finally, he mentioned a water day at the end of the year for the students and families. It was a fun event and an opportunity to connect in a different way. Tom highlighted all these events to show that he felt connected to his families at all these types of activities, and it provided ways to build strong relationships with his students outside the classroom.

Sue wrote in her journal response about the opportunities she had to help with a running club after school with some younger students. She enjoyed running, and this allowed her to bond with students over an interest that they had in common. Sue also gave piano lessons, so she could connect with students in this way, too. It provided another platform for building relationships over a shared, common interest. Both activities helped Sue to feel connected to her students, and they provided opportunities to build strong relationships with the students outside the classroom setting. Adam shared a story in his initial questionnaire of connectedness with his students at a recent school dance that was for the entire family. He stated that the turnout was great, and many of the school families were in attendance. The dance fell on his birthday, and his students

“coerced the crowd into singing happy birthday to me.” Adam further explained how this gesture made him feel connected to his students because he could see that they cared for him, and many of the students came up to him to share kind words and express gratitude.

Peter expressed in his questionnaire and interview that he spent considerable time with students outside of the classroom while helping with athletics. Some of these students were not even the ones he taught, so it provided even more opportunities to develop relationships. He noted two trips that his school took to attend sporting events. One was in Miami, and the families all had a tradition of eating at the same restaurant after the first night. Peter expressed how this tradition was a fun bonding event, and it allowed him to interact with students differently by enjoying a meal and sharing their experiences. A second trip spanned 3 days, and Peter shared in the interview, “I’m with these kids 24 hours a day for 3 days, really getting to know them. So that’s good relationship building with the students there.” All these experiences were ways that helped Peter to feel connected to his students and to feel that he was developing positive, strong relationships.

Many of the educators expressed that relationships are cultivated outside of the classroom setting and school environment altogether. Paul noted birthday parties as being a popular way that he spent time with his students outside of school, and he always tried to attend if invited. Paul stated in the initial questionnaire, “I have great relationships with my students. I have gone to several birthday parties and support them.” Mary noted the same experiences in her interview. She stated that one student invited her a full year ahead of time to a birthday party to ensure that she could attend the event. In addition, Mary expressed that she also attended outside activities for her students. Some of her students participated in baseball or gymnastics, so she supported

them in that area as much as possible. Both Paul and Mary highlighted the benefits of supporting their students in these areas and how they felt connected to them by going to these events.

Sue noted in the questionnaire that her school had held Saturday sporting events where the teachers play against the students. Last year it was basketball, and this year it was soccer. She mentioned that the students loved this activity, and the teachers ended up enjoying it, too. It provided a unique opportunity for students and teachers to bond in a different way beyond the four walls of the classroom. All these events helped Sue to feel connected to her students, and not just her own students she taught in the classroom, but students who were in other grade levels. It provided a platform for teachers to connect with students they did not normally interact with during the school day.

Mixed Relationships with Parents

Participants shared a variety of experiences regarding the building of relationships with parents. The participants' responses demonstrated that the relationships were stronger if they saw the parents and had opportunities to interact with them. In the same way, teachers felt connected to the parents when the parents were involved in the classroom or school. Adam noted the following in the initial questionnaire: "Our parents pick up the students every day after school. This allows for frequent communication and constant dialogue. Parents often share details about the student's lives and their own lives." Conversely, the parent-teacher relationships were difficult if they did not see the parents often or if the parents were not involved in their child's education. Beth shared the following in her interview:

Parents are more hands-off. They just drop their kids off and say, "Go to school." You got this because they're more responsible. So I don't have very strong relationships with

most of my parents of the kids, because they're more hands-off and less likely to volunteer for things that are going on in school or in the classroom.

In both anecdotes mentioned by Adam and Beth, the face-to-face interactions and how involved the parents were impacted the parent–teacher relationship. In fact, these relationships and interactions are the two sub-themes that developed from the theme of relationships with parents being mixed between weak and strong. The weak parent–teacher relationships tended to have a lack of face-to-face interactions and parental involvement was low. Conversely, the parent–teacher relationships were stronger when there were face-to-face interactions and the parents were involved.

Face-to-Face Interactions Affect the Relationship

Teachers who had opportunities to connect with families in a face-to-face format on a regular basis reported feeling connected to the parents. Kate made the following statement in her initial questionnaire:

I feel connected to families when I have the opportunity to meet with them, whether it is at a “Meet the Teacher” meeting or a parent–teacher conference. Another thing that helps to build these relationships is through proactive communication with them.

Paul also noted the importance of chatting with parents as being beneficial to making him feel connected to his parents. He stated the following in his questionnaire response: “I think it’s all very important to make connections and conversations with parents at drop off and pick up, just to go that extra little bit to stay connected.” Paul saw the benefit of connecting with his families and how it improved his relationship with the parents and made him feel connected. Peter explained in the questionnaire about a few opportunities he had enjoyed that had allowed him to build on face-to-face interactions with parents and increased his feelings of

connectedness. Two events were “Muffins for Mom” and “Donuts for Dad” which made Peter feel connected to parents. He stated, “These events allow us to greet and get to know each of the parents.” He also enjoyed connecting with parents when they carpooled together for athletic events. He noted, “Families will often opt to ride in the school van to events, and the commute gives me time to connect with families.” The intentional activities described by Peter allowed him to feel connected to his parents with face-to-face opportunities to connect.

Sue noted in the questionnaire that she had been at her school for many years, and she had enjoyed getting to know families by teaching multiple siblings. She expressed that she had longer than 1 year to connect with families due to the fact she taught siblings. She stated, “I have taught many siblings and have gotten close to several families through the years.” Mary stated in the interview that her school still did home visits where the teacher stopped by the child’s home to meet with the parents before school starts. She noted that home visits were her favorite way to begin developing a strong parent–teacher relationship. She stated, “Seeing their home, meeting their pets, seeing the child in their element are all clues helping me to build a relationship with the students and their families.” Mary also mentioned in her journal entry response that she especially appreciated the personal conversations with parents and the positive comments they shared with her about their appreciation for her work. The personal interactions were invaluable in making her feel connected to the parents of her students.

Martha enjoyed parents who took the time to talk and build on the parent–teacher relationship. Conversations with parents made her feel most connected to them. She stated the following sentiments in her initial questionnaire:

I have some parents of students that will come into the classroom and drop their child off in the classroom. This is an opportunity for me to chat with them and check in with them.

I get a better understanding of their home lives when I do this. These early morning chats also help give me an idea of how the students are feeling through the information I receive from their parents.

A lack of opportunities to connect with families face-to-face made teachers feel less connected to their parents, and this idea was demonstrated by various participants in the questionnaire and interview responses. Kate shared that she felt disconnected from families when her interactions were minimal. She provided two examples in her questionnaire that explained why she did not see many of her parents very often. The first reason was the way the school handled drop off and pick up. The procedures used did not allow her to have face-to-face interactions with her parents. Another example was when parents brought a complaint about her to the administration without going to her first. She stated, “This shows a clear disconnectedness since they feel as though they need to go to administration rather than talk to me about the issue. If our relationship was stronger, this could most likely be avoided.”

Sue expressed disconnectedness by not seeing her parents enough. She stated the following in the interview:

Unfortunately, some parents I don't see outside of the school at all. This creates a huge feeling of disconnection with them, especially the new students and their families. Eight out of 13 students are new this year in that class, so I haven't built a previous relationship with them. I only met them at orientation for about 15 minutes and usually not both parents. I occasionally see them at pick up, but only to wave.

Mary also noted in her questionnaire how not seeing parents at drop-off made her feel disconnected since she could not talk to them in person. She stated, “In the afternoon, all the students remain in the classroom until their names are called over the walkie-talkie, and then

they walk out to their cars. I miss having this daily contact with the families.” Tom stated the same thing regarding pick up and drop off. He said the following in his questionnaire response:

I feel disconnected when it comes to drop off and pick up. I don't have a lot of time to talk with them [the parents] in general and see how things are going with them. I want to do this to gain their trust and build a positive relationship with them.

Martha noted similar feelings about parents with whom she did not interact and how that made her feel disconnected from them. She mentioned in the questionnaire, “I have a few families in which I rarely see their parents. It makes me a little timid to talk to them.” Martha articulated the need to have personal face-to-face interactions to feel connected and for there to be positive parent–teacher relationships.

Levels of Parental Involvement Affect the Relationship

Teachers reported that they felt connected to parents who were actively involved in their child's education. Clara noted that she felt most connected to her parents when they took advantage of the many volunteer opportunities that she provided to her parents. She stated the following in her interview:

I work to create opportunities for parents to be involved. Some parents come in for center time every week, and some come in just once. They work on sight words or read a story to the kids while an aide and I are in small reading groups. I try to create opportunities to send things in, for example, saving shoe boxes or toilet paper tubes for STEM projects.

Martha believed that she felt more connected to her parents when they were spending time in her classroom as volunteers. She expressed the following in the questionnaire:

I have a student with autism and his mom comes in every day. I have learned a lot about her and have her often come into the classroom to help with art class or different projects

that we are doing. She used to be a teacher, and I love watching her interact with the students.

Positive interactions and support from the parents helped Martha to feel connected. She valued the time spent with them to help build on and improve her relationships with the parents.

Teachers reported that they felt less connected to parents who were not actively involved in their child's education. Paul noted in the questionnaire that his main disconnect from parents is when "they are not involved in their child's learning and school life." As an educator, he felt it was important for the parents and teachers to be working together in this area of supporting each student. He noted that he felt disconnected when this does not happen. Clara also expressed in the interview that she felt disconnected when parents felt that it was solely her job to improve a student who was struggling with behavior or academic growth. She believed this was a partnership with parents, and if they did not feel the same, then she felt disconnected from them. Peter felt the same way and expressed the following sentiments in the questionnaire: "The feeling or even the expectation that the school and teacher are 100% responsible for educating the child, rather than parents partnering with teachers can leave a feeling of disconnect from some families."

Sue also highlighted a lack of parental involvement as contributing to her feeling disconnected. She stated the following in the initial questionnaire:

It seems most of the parents aren't as invested in their child's education at this level compared to first grade, so it's harder to get feedback and responses about challenges that occur at school. I have a couple of parents that aren't signed up for our school communication system (after several times asking) so they miss out on everything that is sent home.

Beth commented in her journal response about not feeling like she was a good fit for her school when parents were not supportive and tended to complain about her or the school. She further noted that a lack of parental involvement also made her feel disconnected. She had a small class and expressed the following in her initial questionnaire:

Most of the parents and families of my class this year are hands-off. I do only have a small class of eight students, which might be a factor. When I ask for help on an activity or event, I don't get much, if any, responses from parents that are willing to help or provide materials.

Paul also expressed that he felt disconnected from parents when there was a lack of support for bringing students to school events that were required for them to attend. Two examples he provided in his interview involved attending the Christmas program or singing in church on select Sundays. He felt parents were not partnering the way they should and that created a level of disconnect.

Strong Fit to the School

Teachers who participated in this study felt a strong fit to their school of employment, and these feelings of fit were primarily demonstrated through two sub-themes that emerged. The first sub-theme was about teachers feeling their talents were being utilized at their school of employment, and the second sub-theme was concerned with doing Gospel ministry. Peter specifically stated that he was one of the few educators in his school who could help with sports. He felt that his talents were being uniquely used to help the school in this area. He expressed the following in his interview: "Right now there is no one else on the faculty that can really do sports or athletics at all. I am the only piece of the puzzle that can do that." In the same way, many teachers expressed that their outside interests were recognized and utilized outside of the

classroom realm. For example, Paul noted in the questionnaire that he liked music and art, and he was thankful that he could use those gifts in ways to help the school outside of his classroom setting. Lily expressed in her journal response that she loved sharing Jesus with her students and would miss those opportunities if she were no longer at her school.

A teacher's talents being utilized and opportunities to share the Gospel and God's Word were important sub-themes about teachers feeling a high level of fit to their places of employment. The following sections outline many of the participants' experiences that helped to articulate this theme. Overall, these feelings of having a strong fit helped to make teachers feel connected to their place of employment.

Talents and Interests Are Utilized

Teachers who participated in this study indicated experiences of feeling as though they were a good fit for the school at which they were employed. Adam mentioned that he felt he was the right fit in many ways. First, he stated the following in his questionnaire:

Finding a "fit" is vital in our lives. I have felt the "fit" in my school because of the interactions and responses I have gotten from my students and their families. Last year was the first year we had graduated an eighth-grade class because of our growth plans. Many of them have returned since graduation, and I often hear updates about their lives. I know this job fits me well because I hear of the success they are having at other schools as well as their desire to continue their relationship with their "old" teacher.

Adam continued by explaining that he felt as though he was a good fit by stating, "I also feel very comfortable with my age level. I feel like I help them grow socially, as well as emotionally, mentally, and spiritually." Adam felt as though he was a good fit because he was teaching his students well and developing positive relationships that made them want to return to

visit. In the same way, his talents were being used at the right age level with the students he was teaching.

Clara stated in her interview that she felt she was a good fit for her school because she had developed classroom management skills from a previous school experience that allowed her to maintain order in the classroom and helped the students to learn what they needed to learn. Clara commented, “I was able to take things about classroom management that I’ve learned from urban experiences and that works very well here.” Martha also had a similar experience regarding classroom management. It was a talent she possessed that made her feel like she was a good fit for her school, too. Martha mentioned in the questionnaire, “Our education chairman told me that he believes my classroom management is very impressive.” The education chairman’s comment confirmed to Martha that she had talents in classroom management and made her feel like she was a good fit for her school.

Beth shared in her journal response that she was grateful that the musical gifts she had been blessed with could be used to benefit the whole student body since she was being utilized to teach music once a week to all the elementary levels. She shared in her journal the following thoughts:

Not only do I teach my regular grade class, but I also teach grades K–5 their music special on different days of the week. This allows me to be involved with and get to know all students in the elementary, not just my class. It helps foster more of a familial feeling in our school, which is a teaching value I appreciate.

Kate expressed that she also felt like she was a good fit when she knew that her work was making a difference. In particular, she explained that a parent talked to her about how much her daughter had grown in confidence in not only her academics, but also her identity. Kate stated in

the questionnaire, “This made me feel as though I was a good fit in my current position.” In the same way, Sue explained that she recently moved away from teaching a lower grade level to teaching older students because she could do so. The school needed an upper-grade math teacher, and she had the gifts and abilities to fill that role, so she moved classrooms. Sue explained in her interview, “I think that I am flexible with what I teach and that has helped me to be a good fit for our school.” John had a similar experience. He taught a previous grade level than his current position when he first arrived at the school. John noted the following in his questionnaire:

The major aspect that has made me feel like a good fit has been the transition to becoming the middle school science teacher and activities director. Being that I have a Chemistry major, teaching science is what I love and so the fact that I am able to teach science for half of my day has been great.

In addition to the questionnaire, John reiterated in his journal response that he felt valued and utilized since he taught science and helped with athletics. Both were his passion, and he had natural gifts in these areas. It made John feel like he was a nice fit for his school since he could help in these two areas.

Teachers also indicated feeling a high level of fit when they could connect interests outside of their main classroom responsibilities to the work setting. Paul mentioned that he felt he was the right fit because he could put his musical and artistic abilities to great use at the school. He stated in the questionnaire, “I also feel like I am a good fit because my gifts in music and art have developed into a lot more opportunities to help out with extracurricular activities and with church organizations.” Paul also explained that he used his artistic skills to conduct an art camp each summer for the students. Peter stated in the interview that he was like a Swiss army knife and had a lot of outside talents and interests that were used in his school. He

explained that he could coach after-school activities, he knew how to run the live streaming for events, and he filled in for the principal when he was out of the building by assisting teachers with any problems that came up in their classrooms.

Sue noted in her journal response that she had an interest in running and playing the piano and was grateful she could use those gifts in the school. She was thankful that she could use these interests that she was passionate about to help her school outside of the classroom setting. She further clarified this feeling in the questionnaire by stating the following:

I also coach track and run club, give piano lessons, and play for church once a month. I think the blessings I have been given, help me to be well-rounded and enable me to fit into the different needs that our school has.

John stated that he had interests outside the classroom that he could use at his school, and these outside interests made him feel like a good fit for his school. He stated in the questionnaire, “I love athletics ... so becoming our activities director has been something that I have been enjoying.” John was thankful that he could use these outside interests as a means of feeling like a good fit for his school of employment. Clara stated in her interview that she enjoyed learning and using other languages. She was grateful that she was in a school where many parents did not know English, and she would have opportunities to use her Spanish language skills to help communicate with those families.

Gospel Ministry

The educators who participated in this study were motivated to teach in a parochial school so that they could freely minister to their students and share the Gospel message. Lily summarized her enthusiasm for sharing the Gospel by stating in her journal response, “I

especially love sharing Jesus with kids and families who might not know Him if they weren't attending school here." Clara shared something similar in her journal response:

The most important thing is being in a Christian school. It gives us purpose and makes all the hard work worth it. It has a culture, especially among the called workers, that is unique to Christian education. That's what really makes it home.

Tom stated that the whole reason he became a teacher and was teaching at his school was to share the Gospel with others. He noted this reason in his interview:

As far as what led me to teaching at our school, I would say obviously the mindset of dealing with Christ and sharing God's Word to everyone. That was obviously a huge thing for me and letting others know about that saving truth of the Gospel.

Kate shared in the questionnaire that her school had a tremendous opportunity for outreach for the Gospel because so many of the students were unchurched. If she were to ever leave her school, she shared that she would miss the opportunities to minister to all those unchurched students. Paul was vocal about missing the same thing if he were to ever leave his school. He stated the following thoughts in his interview, "I would 100% miss the mission mindset. I love that, and I love the mission. Love the mission. I love how many unchurched families we have. It's really, really cool." Adam shared something similar in his questionnaire, too. He stated, "I would also miss the opportunity to share the Gospel with so many people who need to hear its life-saving message." Another participant, Peter, also stated that sharing God's Word would be something he would miss if he left his school. Peter explained the following in his initial questionnaire:

I would also really miss the outreach mindset that a place like my school has. It is great to meet the many new faces that come through the school and the church. I have taught at several different VBS programs with over 100 students.

Mary stated a few opportunities she had that allowed her to share God's Word with the students and families. She stated that she looked for opportunities to share God's Word and to carry her families in prayer. Mary continued in her interview by stating that she was a pleasant person, in large part, because of her faith. She said, "I always try to remember that I am reflecting Christ wherever I am." Finally, John enjoyed many facets of his Gospel ministry in education. He stated in the questionnaire, "I would also miss seeing the many baptisms we have of our school children." John further explained this connection to the mission of the school again in the questionnaire:

This community brings a great opportunity to share the Gospel message. I would also miss the mission field that this community brings. As mentioned earlier, we have a large city, and we witness to many who are not churched. This community brings a great opportunity to share the Gospel.

Finally, Lily also discussed the joy she finds in doing Gospel ministry at her school. She stated in her journal, "I especially love sharing Jesus with kids and families who might not know if they weren't attending school here." Lily enjoyed the opportunities she was given to let her students and families know about Jesus.

Strong Relationships with Colleagues

Strong relationships with colleagues was another theme that emerged and was experienced by the participants. Inside this theme were two sub-themes of socialization and

professional support. The participants noted that they enjoyed socializing together. Adam stated in the initial questionnaire:

Our staff is outstanding. Because we are relatively small (10 total), we lean on each other. The families of each staff member are often across the country, so we make it a point to make each other our families. We celebrate birthdays together, explore our local city, and enjoy staff parties. I often find myself cheering at my colleagues' children's games and checking in with them after school.

Professional support from colleagues was another way that many teachers felt connected to their co-workers. Beth stated in her initial questionnaire:

I love that our elementary classrooms are so close together. During the day, if I need something or have a question, I can easily open my door to get another teacher. We can easily speak across the hall to each other. I also appreciate that the elementary staff have very similar values of a positive learning experience for students.

Teachers indicated experiences of having strong relationships with their colleagues, and these relationships were strong in both a personal and professional manner. Participants shared these experiences in all three data collection pieces, and these experiences were articulated in the following sections.

Socialization

The participants in this study shared many examples of how they socialize with their colleagues outside of the school setting. Mary noted some examples of teachers spending time together through the following response on her initial questionnaire:

I feel very connected to my colleagues. We like each other, we laugh together, we support and encourage one another, we jump in and help each other when needed. We

often grab dinner together on a Friday night or have get-togethers at someone's home. We carpool to conferences. We play trivia together on Wednesday nights. We share our lives with one another and pray for one another. When my father died, my staff made it very easy for me to be with my family for the time needed and even sent flowers to the funeral which touched me deeply. I love my colleagues. I am so very blessed to have them.

Sue shared a similar sentiment and stated in her questionnaire, "We often have get-togethers outside of school, which helps build our connection." Peter shared in his interview response that he spent time with his colleagues by going out to eat on Friday nights or by hanging out at the beach for some sort of celebration or a general get-together. John explained in his journal response, "I enjoy that some of the other staff members become great friends. Many of the other staff members have become good friends, and we do things together outside of school." All four of these participants shared similar experiences about enjoying time together by spending time with one another.

Other participants commented on their time together with colleagues as well. Tom mentioned in the questionnaire, "I feel connected with my colleagues because I am young and the majority are young. We enjoy exploring the growing area together and don't have any issues with one another." Sue shared the following experiences in her journal response: "I love my faculty, especially the three other teachers I teach with for departmentalization. We have gotten quite close this year and they are great friends." Kate also shared about the time spent building relationships and how it made her feel connected. She shared her experiences through the interview by stating, "Our staff often gets together for recreational activities, whether it is a

beach day, trivia night, or grabbing dinner on a Friday night. These things help us to feel connected and supported by one another.”

Professional Support from Colleagues and Principal

Educators valued receiving professional support from their colleagues. Beth commented that she enjoyed the support from her peers. She mentioned the following in the questionnaire:

I love that our elementary classrooms are so close together. During the day, if I need something or have a question I can easily open my door to get another teacher. We can easily speak across the hall to each other. I also appreciate that the elementary staff have similar values of a positive learning experience for students.

Martha shared experiences similar to the one Beth mentioned. Martha stated in the questionnaire, “The kindergarten teacher is the vice principal. I go to her for almost everything. We were the only ones that ended up going to conference back in October.” Clara also commented that she appreciated the support that she received from her colleagues in a professional sense. She shared the following details in her interview:

When I have students who need to be sent out of my room, the kindergarten and second-grade teachers let me use time-out spots in their rooms. We can always talk about things that are happening, and they can understand and give ideas to improve things. We’re often dealing with the same types of problems. The kindergarten aide helps during center time, and she’s always smiling and encouraging the kids.

Lily also commented about the professional support she enjoyed at the school and the connections it provided. She shared her experiences in her journal response in the following way:

I find our current professional development to be a great opportunity for us to talk and work together to better our school. We are working on a course with a professor from

[Redacted] to work on our parent/family/school relationships. We often discuss things that are going well and things that need to be addressed and improved upon. I also enjoy when we attend conferences or seminars together, and we can discuss the information we are learning as it pertains to our school and how we can best implement it.

Sue also shared in her journal response about her experiences by stating that her faculty did a professional book study once each month that allowed for great conversations and interactions in a small group while discussing a professional topic. Paul shared similar experiences with Lily and Sue while teaching at his school. In his interview, he provided the following details regarding his experiences:

I also feel connected professionally when we come prepared at elementary meetings to discuss a topic or section of an article that was assigned. It's good to learn from peers this way. We also do peer observations, and that is always helpful, too. I love seeing other teachers doing what they do!

Educators who participated in this study also expressed the positive support they received from their principals. Most of the educators felt connected to their schools through the support they received from their principal. Clara was a relatively new teacher and shared that her administrative support had been greatly appreciated and provided for creating a strong connection to the school. She stated in the interview:

Our administration is mainly our principal. He conducts one-on-one interviews with us once a year. His time is limited, but if there's something really important like a defiant student, he's willing to listen and consider my solutions. I think his attitude, understanding, and support is more important than most of the action he is able to take.

Mary shared experiences in her journal response that she appreciated that her principal supported the teachers and helped to always keep the school's mission in front of them. Tom appreciated the support he received early on in his career from his principal. He was surprised that his principal was so supportive of a young teacher pursuing a master's degree. Tom shared in his interview, "I'd say probably the biggest thing would be the encouragement, because I never, never thought about doing this right after I graduated from college, but he supported me in beginning my masters." Martha expressed gratitude to her vice-principal for supporting her and offering advice as needed. She stated in her questionnaire, "I really enjoy the ideas and advice that she shares with me." Adam described details of his experiences in his interview by thinking back to his first year and how the principal "helped me transition from college to career and helping me with all the ins and outs." Paul commented in his interview that his first year of teaching was during COVID, and it was a crazy year starting out and then learning how to navigate teaching digitally to his students. He appreciated all the support his administration gave him during this year, especially during COVID. He was most grateful to the pastor and his wife, founders of the school, who "helped me in every way under the sun during that year." Finally, Peter expressed in his questionnaire, interview, and survey that he was thankful to his principal for supporting him through his health struggles and assisting him in getting through that tough time.

Lack of People Connections to the Community

The 12 participants expressed a variety of ways in which they felt connected to their school; however, they largely felt a lack of connection to their community. There are two sub-themes to this theme. The first is that many of the participants felt they had too much work to do

that created a lack of time to make meaningful community connections. Martha shared the following through her journal response regarding her experiences:

I do not do much in the community. School takes up a lot of my time and I haven't had the privilege to join any community activities. There are activities that I am interested in joining but are scheduled so late in the day for adults that it makes it difficult to be able to join them.

The second sub-theme is that many of the participants all made connections to the community in ways that largely did not involve meaningful connections with people outside of their school and church ministry. John's descriptions of his community connections were shared in the interview:

I do enjoy the weather that comes with living in this community. I also enjoy being close to the beach. Our community also is very friendly and nice which has been a blessing when going to stores and restaurants.

The following section provides the experiences of the participants in relation to the two sub-themes. Except for two of the participants, most of the educators shared experiences that provided examples of being overworked and not having enough time to connect to the community. They also provided examples of connections to the community that did not involve deep and meaningful people connections.

Workload Is Heavy and Lack of Time

Many of the teachers expressed true joy and connectedness to their school and ministry. At the same time, there were concerns expressed by many participants about the amount of time they were required to work, and this heavy workload made it harder for the teachers to gain

meaningful connections to the community. Some of the participants' experiences are highlighted in this section. Beth shared her experiences by stating the following in her journal response:

I have had to give a lot of my time to this school as a first- and second-year teacher. I know that will get better over time; however, there are responsibilities we have been asked to do that are not typical of teachers having to spend their time doing. We have had to oversee or run events after school or on weekends. Last year, we had to take turns running elementary aftercare from 3:30–4:30 p.m. and miss out on the already minimal planning time we have. We don't have much planning time during the week, too. Some elementary teachers (including myself) are also being asked to run the summer camp for three weeks of our summer as well, which takes away more prep time, and half of our summer.

Beth provided a detailed description of her experiences that showed why she felt she did not have enough time to do much else outside of her school setting. Clara also shared in her questionnaire that she was busy and spent most of her time at school. She said, "I don't really see my neighbors or people in the community much because I put in long hours at school." Martha shared similar experiences at her school. Her journal response provided insight into her experiences regarding a lack of time to do things outside of her work setting. She shared the following experiences:

As mentioned earlier, I feel that I have many requirements that take up my personal time and that sometimes my time is not my own. I sometimes feel that church members expect me to do more because I work at the school and I should want to do more for the church. I don't necessarily disagree but it is hard sometimes to have so much school responsibility and then have church commitments because then all my time is spent at

school (church and school share a building), and I have none for myself to get things done that I need to at home and for my personal life.

Clara also expressed concerns about her lack of time by sharing details in her journal response. While her experiences were summarized with fewer details, she showed how she felt when discussing the sacrifices she makes. Clara said, “The biggest sacrifice is probably time. I’m at school from 6:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. on a typical day, and I also have to do school prep every Saturday and Sunday.” Her experiences showed that she spent 7 days each week, and often over 12 hours on a given day, preparing for work, or actively engaging with her students. Kate felt disconnected from the community due to the time requirements that were placed on her as an educator in a Christian ministry. She shared her experiences by writing the following in her questionnaire: “I feel disconnected from my community often. I think it is partly due to the large amount of time that I spend working at school/church.” Mary also described experiences she has had at her place of employment that were related to a lack of time when her work obligations were completed. Mary summarized her experiences in the interview by stating that work could be hard (at her school and in the district) and required long hours. People can burn out. She had often seen it happen in her 10+ years of teaching. John has had similar experiences to Kate and Mary. He also felt like he did not have much time outside of work to do things he enjoyed. John stated the following in his journal response:

This year I feel as though I have given up much of my free time due to work. I started teaching a new grade in my second year of teaching and became the activities director. With these new tasks it has taken much of my time and energy as there is always something I feel as though I need to do. I know with time though this will improve, and I will get better at managing these tasks.

Non-People Connections

The teachers shared connections they enjoyed outside of school. Most of these connections did not have to do with connecting with people on a meaningful level. They either involved simple connections without developing a relationship or involved facets of the community that did not involve connecting with people. There were only two participants who expressed strong connections to people in their community who were not affiliated with their church and school. Highlights of some of the participants' experiences are shared in this section.

Lily shared her experiences in the community by stating the following in her initial questionnaire:

I like that I live in a place where people are active and enjoy outdoor activities. I like that pickleball, golf, the beach, and swimming are available year around. I love that my daughter is growing up with a love for outdoor activities. I also love the variety of people and their diverse backgrounds that we get to meet and share Jesus with.

Beth shared that she enjoyed going to the library and parks on the occasional weekend to relax and unwind. She enjoyed spending some free time in that way. She mentioned in the interview, "I don't hear about many activities for young people happening in my community, so it's hard to make friends my age here." Martha shared a somewhat similar experience to Beth. Martha stated in her questionnaire, "Where I live is pretty centrally located, and I have many stores, parks, entertainment activities, and restaurants near me. I like that there are many options for people of all ages." Adam shared specific experiences and feelings he has had while living in his community, including the following details in his journal response:

The only drawback to our eclectic and large community is the small community feel.

There are not very many community events that get many people involved. There is no

small-town buzz about the local football team or a new building. It can sometimes feel like we are a drop in the ocean.

In her journal response, Kate shared some of the experiences that she missed and had not replicated in her new hometown:

At times, I miss my hometown and being near my family. I feel as though I don't have numerous solid connections that would tie me down to this area, and this makes me feel not fully part of the community.

Adam shared two items that he would miss if he were no longer living in his local community. He mentioned these two examples in his questionnaire: "I certainly would miss the weather! I would also miss the culture of my area. Our area is steeped in rich American history, every outing feels like an adventure." In his journal response, John articulated similar experiences and feelings as Kate and expressed what he was looking for in his community but had not found:

I feel as though the community is not the best fit for me. As I mentioned before, I feel as though our community does not offer many opportunities for adults my age to be involved in activities (or make it very easy to access these activities). I grew up playing sports and played in adult sports' leagues in the summer during college. I have struggled to find similar leagues in my community to help me feel that connection to it.

Mary articulated in her interview that there were many places that she would miss if she were no longer living in her community. She shared local attractions, restaurants, and parks that she would miss. She would also miss the proximity to an airport that made for easy travel; however, she did not mention any personal connections that would be missed outside of her church and school community.

Outlier Data and Findings

The responses that were gathered from the 12 participants were used to develop the themes for this study. While the themes that were developed were shared by most of the participants, there was one major outlier that I found when analyzing the data. Most participants listed connections to people in their school ministry, while only listing connections to the community that did not involve the development of deep relationships with other people outside their school ministry setting. Two participants mentioned personal connections with people outside their ministry setting, and these personal community connections were identified as an outlier for two reasons. The first reason is that only two participants mentioned this experience of having meaningful personal connections in the community, and they did so in detail across all three data collection pieces. The other 10 participants did not mention any relationships that existed outside the ministry setting. The second reason personal connections with people outside the ministry setting was identified as an outlier was that it was the opposite of what the other participants experienced. The other 10 participants only mentioned connections to the community that involved places to visit (restaurants, parks, beaches, and other landmarks) and the warm weather in the South. The same participants also made comments in their initial questionnaire, interview, or journal response that they largely felt disconnected from the community.

Sue stated in all three collection pieces that she was an avid runner and enjoyed being a part of a running club that had over 200 people who were members. Sue stated in her questionnaire, "I am part of a 200+ running club in my county, so I have met lots of people through that group and at races I run. I have made a few really good friends through this group." She also shared something similar in her interview:

I'm part of a big running group in my county which has about 200 people in this running group. It's kind of fun, so we have meetups all over, and I've met a lot of people through that. A couple really good friends. It's always nice to have friends outside of your job that have the same interests.

Sue also detailed her experiences with this group and the connections she felt through the journal entry she shared:

I love my running group. We have several races we put on as a group for the community, and we have group runs several times a week to meet and run with others. I have built great relationships this way and met a ton of people from my city and county.

Paul also provided details in all three data collection pieces that articulated his experiences regarding the development of people connections outside his church and school. He stated in the initial questionnaire:

I have felt connected with people in the community through becoming a regular at restaurants, stores, etc. Our school hosts an annual gala, and I'm in charge of community donations, so I've built relationships with lots of people outside of our church/school.

Paul followed up with these details from his questionnaire and shared similar sentiments in the interview that was conducted via Zoom. In that interview, he highlighted the following experiences:

I've lived in two places here now, and I always try to make it an effort to become at least friendly with my neighbors. I had good friends at my apartment that I still keep in contact with. And now I bought a house 2 years ago, it's a townhouse. I share these two walls with two older ladies, and it's just fun. I watch their dogs, they watch my cats, stuff like that. I've made connections through just being a regular at a coffee shop or a restaurant or

a bar. I know a lot of people by name and they know me. They know my orders; they know where I work. I actually picked up just a really low-key job, and I'm a bartender on Mondays, so I've just gained a lot of community by making connections with people, which I really love because I bartended through college, and I love just meeting people and everything. Then for our gala, like I mentioned before, I'm in charge of getting donations from businesses and family-owned places, and so I've made a lot of connections through that for the past 2 years. Some have developed into friendships, but I guess I just like to know people.

Finally, Paul further expanded on these feelings regarding his experiences when he discussed community connections in his journal response. He stated, "I feel like I am a good fit into the community because of all my connections with the businesses and restaurants. I also enjoy my bartending job once a week where I really feel like part of the community."

Research Question Responses

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. I analyzed the data that was received from the participants through their responses to an initial questionnaire, an interview, and a journal entry. The participants' responses and subsequent analysis provided the participants with a platform for sharing their lived experiences regarding the phenomenon. Their responses are discussed in this section.

Central Research Question

How do educators describe experiences of job embeddedness while teaching in a parochial school system in the southeastern United States? The 12 participants provided rich details of their experiences as a teacher in a parochial school in the southeastern United States.

All 12 participants articulated examples of having a strong link and fit to their place of employment. They also stated that they would be giving up several things they enjoy if they were to leave their place of employment.

Mary highlighted the connections and closeness she felt with her colleagues. She stated the following in her initial questionnaire:

I feel very connected to my colleagues. We like each other, we laugh together, we support and encourage one another, we jump in and help each other when needed. We often grab dinner together on a Friday night or have get-togethers at someone's home. We carpool to conferences. We play trivia together on Wednesday nights. We share our lives with one another and pray for one another. When my father died, my staff made it very easy for me to be with my family for the time needed and even sent flowers to the funeral which touched me deeply. I love my colleagues. I am so very blessed to have them.

Participants also expressed strong relationships with students in their schools. Kate noted the following in her questionnaire:

Working in middle school, I would say that I often feel pretty connected to the students. Just because you're able to have like the more real conversations with them, whether it's about what they're doing, or I was talking with a student today about some problems that she was having at home. So just being able to have those real conversations with them and offer advice. And then that also leads into the relationships with parents where you can reach out and see if everything's okay with them at home. But again, a lot of like intentional relationship building there between students and families for sure.

In the same way, teachers expressed they had strong relationships with parents, so long as they had opportunities for face-to-face interactions, and the parents were invested in their child's

education and viewed it as a partnership with the teachers. Martha noted the following in her questionnaire:

I have some parents of students that will come into the classroom and drop their child off in the classroom. This is an opportunity for me to chat with them and check in with them. I get a better understanding of their home lives when I do this. These early morning chats also help give me an idea of how the students are feeling through the information I receive from their parents.

Teachers also expressed that they felt like they work a lot, possibly too much. Clara's journal response stated, "The biggest sacrifice is probably time. I'm at school from 6:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. on a typical day, and I also have to do school prep every Saturday and Sunday."

Finally, the educators who participated in this study felt like they were a good fit for the school where they were working. The unifying theme was that they were passionate about Gospel ministry. Peter explained the following in his initial questionnaire:

I would also really miss the outreach mindset that a place like my school has. It is great to meet the many new faces that come through the school and the church. I have taught at several different VBS [Vacation Bible School] programs with over 100 students.

Overall, the participants expressed large feelings of connectedness to their school. They enjoyed the relationships that they had developed in the school and those included relationships with their colleagues and co-workers, the students, and the parents of their students. The development of these relationships created feelings of connectedness, with some exceptions when the parents were not present or showed a lack of interest in partnering together. The participants were close with their own colleagues. There were many examples of spending time

together outside the school day. Some of the educators even called their colleagues family and noted how they spent holidays and birthdays together.

The strong fit to the organization was described through experiences shared from the responses that were received in the initial questionnaire, interview, and journal entry. Many of the teachers commented about how they felt like they were the right fit because they could use their talents to help the school. Some of them mentioned how they switched grade levels or moved subject areas because they had the ability and could help fill a need in that way. Others mentioned interests or talents they had that were being utilized outside the classroom setting. Some of the educators assisted with athletics after school, and others used artistic abilities or musical talents to help the school in some capacity. Talents and abilities being utilized made all the teachers feel connected.

Finally, some experiences were shared that highlighted the fact that teachers felt supported professionally. The teachers commented on the benefits of professional development, the support by their principal in pursuing an advanced degree, or the help in dealing with a tough situation. Connections that were developed because of this support were noted by most of the participants. Teachers reported feeling connected to the school through this support and appreciated that it was being given to them.

Sub-Question One

How do educators describe their experiences of connectedness with their school and community while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States? The educators largely shared that they were connected to their school. Paul shared about these school connections by explaining in the interview, “I love my kids. I try to make it to their sports after school. I tell myself to try to go to at least one game of theirs.” Paul was showing an interest in

his students' hobbies outside of the classroom, and his interest in these activities allowed him to show that he cared about his students. Teachers shared that parental involvement and contact made them feel connected or disconnected, depending on the circumstances. Teachers shared that face-to-face contact and involved parents made them feel connected. Kate made the following statement in her initial questionnaire:

I feel connected to families when I have the opportunity to meet with them, whether it is at a "Meet the Teacher" meeting or a parent-teacher conference. Another thing that helps to build these relationships is through proactive communication with them.

Conversely, a lack of parental involvement and face-to-face contact made teachers feel disconnected. Sue also highlighted a lack of parental involvement as contributing to her feeling disconnected. She stated the following in the interview:

It seems most of the parents aren't as invested in their child's education at this level compared to first grade, so it's harder to get feedback and responses about challenges that occur at school. I have a couple that aren't signed up for our school communication system (after several times asking) so they miss out on everything that is sent home.

Community connectedness was missing from most of the participants. They expressed that they worked too much and did not have time for community connections. In addition, the majority said they liked things about their community that did not involve the development of deep relationships with other people. Kate shared in her journal response about feeling disconnected from her community:

I think a lack of interaction with the community leaves me feeling disconnected. As a called worker, there are many weeks or months when I find myself almost exclusively working and not taking the time to reach out to neighbors or attend community events.

When most of my time is taken up by work-related activities, there is not much time left for recreational community activities. This is when I feel most disconnected.

Sub-Question Two

How do educators describe how their talents and abilities are utilized while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States? The teachers agreed that they felt their talents and abilities were utilized by the school and made them feel connected, valued, and appreciated. Some of the examples of their experiences are highlighted in this section. Adam mentioned that he felt he was the right fit in many ways. Adam shared the following thoughts in his questionnaire:

Finding a “fit” is vital in our lives. I have felt the “fit” in my school because of the interactions and responses I have gotten from my students and their families. Last year was the first year we had graduated an eighth-grade class because of our growth plans. Many of them have returned since graduation and I often hear updates about their lives. I know this job fits me well because I hear of the success they are having at other schools as well as their desire to continue their relationship with their “old” teacher.

Beth also stated that she felt her gifts were being utilized, especially in classroom management. She stated the following in her initial questionnaire:

In college, my main focus was urban ministry. The values I learned from that helped shape my classroom management skills. I have been told by other members of staff, parents, and mentors that my classroom management style is solid and works well with the students we have in our school.

Finally, Lily’s summary about the Gospel ministry that is being done at her school was shared in similar responses by other participants. Lily stated in her journal response, “I especially

love sharing Jesus with kids and families who might not know Him if they weren't attending school here.”

Sub-Question Three

How do educators describe experiences regarding the sacrifices they would make if they were to leave the organization? Most of the things that the participants indicated they would miss were related to the relationships they developed at their places of employment. There are strong bonds that had been created, especially with other staff members. Kate shared the following in her interview:

Working in middle school, I would say that I often feel pretty connected to the students. Just because you're able to have like the more real conversations with them, whether it's about what they're doing, or I was talking with a student today about some problems that she was having at home. So just being able to have those real conversations with them and offer advice. And then that also leads into the relationships with parents where you can reach out and see if everything's okay with them at home. But again, a lot of like intentional relationship building there between students and families for sure.

Peter expressed in both the questionnaire and interview that he spent significant time with students outside of the classroom while helping with athletics. Some of these students were not even the ones he taught, so it provided additional opportunities to develop relationships. He noted two trips that his school took to attend sporting events. One was in Miami, and the families all had a tradition of eating at the same restaurant after the first night. Peter expressed how this activity was a fun bonding event, and it allowed him to interact with students differently by enjoying a meal and sharing their experiences. A second trip spanned 3 days, and Peter shared in his interview how, “I'm with these kids 24 hours a day for 3 days, really getting to know them.

So that's a good relationship building with the students there." The experiences described by Peter helped him to feel connected to his students and to feel that he was developing positive, strong relationships.

Mary noted some examples of teachers spending time together through the following response on her initial questionnaire:

I feel very connected to my colleagues. We like each other, we laugh together, we support and encourage one another, we jump in and help each other when needed. We often grab dinner together on a Friday night or have get-togethers at someone's home. We carpool to conferences. We play trivia together on Wednesday nights. We share our lives with one another and pray for one another. When my father died, my staff made it very easy for me to be with my family for the time needed and even sent flowers to the funeral which touched me deeply. I love my colleagues. I am so very blessed to have them.

Principals played an important role in developing their teachers. Educators who participated in this study also expressed the positive support they received from their principals. Most of the educators felt connected to their schools through the support they received from their principal. Clara is a relatively new teacher and shared that her administrative support had been greatly appreciated and provided for creating a strong connection to the school. She wrote the following in her journal response:

Our administration is mainly our principal. He conducts one-on-one interviews with us once a year. His time is limited, but if there's something really important like a defiant student, he's willing to listen and consider my solutions. I think his attitude, understanding, and support is more important than most of the action he is able to take.

Summary

Chapter Four included the descriptions of each of the research participants in both a table and narrative format. I secured 12 educators who agreed to share their lived experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. Chapter Four also included the five themes and 10 sub-themes that I found after analyzing the data from the initial questionnaire, interview, and journal entry from all the participants. The five themes included the following: (a) strong relationships with students, (b) mixed relationships with parents, (c) strong fit to the school, (d) strong relationships with colleagues, and (e) lack of people connections to the community. I answered the central research question and three sub-questions through the development of these themes. The findings were presented in this chapter and affirmed through the direct responses of the 12 participants as they shared their lived experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. Twelve educators participated in this study. The primary purpose of this chapter is to present an interpretation of the research findings that were uncovered as the teachers shared their lived experiences of job embeddedness while serving as a parochial school educator in the southeastern United States. Chapter Five begins with a discussion regarding the interpretation of the findings, which then develops into an explanation of the implications for practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, recommendations for future research, and a summary.

Discussion

The study I conducted involved the participation of 12 educators. The goal was to answer the central research question and three sub-questions that included educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. I collected data from the 12 participants through an initial questionnaire, an interview, and a journal entry. I analyzed the data through the process of Moustakas (1994) and found five themes and 10 sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis process regarding these educators' lived experiences regarding job embeddedness.

Interpretation of Findings

The process of analyzing the data from the initial questionnaire, interview, and journal entry resulted in the identification of five themes and 10 sub-themes. The participants' experiences were summarized into the following five themes: (a) strong relationships with

students, (b) mixed relationships with parents, (c) strong fit to the school, (d) strong relationships with colleagues, and (e) lack of people connections to the community. The five themes each included two sub-themes that provided greater depth and detail for each of the themes. The participants explained their experiences of job embeddedness and described experiences that have embedded them in their work but not as much in their community. The participants shared detailed experiences of having strong connections with their students and how they developed relationships with them both inside and outside of the classroom. The teachers also considered their experiences with parent relationships and how face-to-face interactions and involvement were important in helping the teachers to feel connected. The collegial relationships were also shared through the teachers' experiences. They shared experiences of connectedness through both personal friendships and professional support and encouragement. The educators reported experiences of feeling like a good fit for their school by feeling valued and believing in the faith-based ministry of the school. Finally, except for two participants, most of the teachers did not have strong people connections to their community. They enjoyed the weather, a local park, or some fun places to visit, but they lacked deeper relationships with people outside of their school and church setting. Interpretations of these five themes and their sub-themes are provided in the following section.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Twelve parochial schoolteachers who taught grade levels between first and eighth grade responded to an initial questionnaire that had 13 questions, an interview that consisted of 18 questions, and a journal entry that had 10 questions. While the central research question guided the focus of this study, all the questions from all three data collection pieces were connected to the three sub-questions. The three sub-questions asked the following:

SQ1: How do educators describe their experiences of connectedness with their school and community while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States?

SQ2: How do educators describe how their talents and abilities are utilized while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States?

SQ3: How do educators describe experiences regarding the sacrifices they would make if they were to leave the organization?

The development of the five themes allowed me to interpret the data and allowed for connections to be made between the phenomenon, the participants, the setting, the literature, and the theories to generate new knowledge about job embeddedness.

Relationships Create Connections in the School. It was obvious that relationships between colleagues were exceptional, and it would be wise for leaders at these schools to continue to encourage these strong relationships between colleagues. Strong relationships existed between teachers and were demonstrated by their socializing together, mentoring/supporting one another, and receiving support from their administration. Moser and McKim (2020) found in their study of 13,500 educators that relationships with peers may be just as important as relationships with administrators and that a lack of strong peer relationships may connect to educator turnover. Positive relationships increase feelings of job embeddedness, which leads to educators wanting to stay at their current place of employment (Thakur & Bhatnagar, 2017). The same could be said of the teacher–student relationships. It would be wise to make these relationships a priority and for the administration to continue to support the teachers in this endeavor. The existing literature supports the development of teacher–student relationships as a benefit for educators. Lavy and Bocker conducted a study in 2017 in which they surveyed 120 educators and discovered that an educator’s sense of meaning and the development of positive

and supportive relationships with their students led to higher levels of job satisfaction and improved attitudes. The relationships with parents were mixed. Strong parent–teacher relationships existed when there were opportunities for face-to-face interactions and the parents were viewed as partners. The opposite took place, and relationships between parents and teachers were not strong when there were limited opportunities for face-to-face interactions and parent partnerships. Administrators would be wise to help develop ways to promote face-to-face interactions and to create meaningful opportunities to partner with the parents and teachers together. It was interesting to note that many of the teachers who participated in this study were single or did not have children, so perhaps some of the gaps in this area are that there is not a shared experience between the teachers and parents.

Teachers Want to Feel Valued and Needed. The teachers who participated in this survey shared experiences of how they felt they were needed at their school and felt like their talents were used to help the school and ministry. Teachers shared stories of using musical or artistic abilities, as well as coaching sports and helping with extracurricular activities after school. They also shared many experiences of bringing value to the organization by being able to share the Gospel message with their students and families. One way that employees feel like they are the right fit for their organization is when they feel like they are contributing to the success of the organization through the skills they have and can use. Perrone and Eddy-Spicer (2019) focused a recent study on a diverse school district to examine the levels of fit felt by the teaching staff. Educators experienced a higher level of fit when they were teaching in the subject area in which they felt comfortable and in which they had previous experience, and administrators should ensure that educators have a genuine interest and/or experience in the subject areas in which they are instructing (Perrone & Eddy-Spicer, 2019). Many of the teachers in this study

shared experiences of teaching in a subject area in which they had a passion for teaching or were certified to teach the content to their students. Job embeddedness is also created when employees feel like their work matters and make a difference. Yu et al. (2020) concluded that employees who have high levels of self-efficacy are likely to have high levels of job embeddedness and are inclined to continue working within their organization. In the case of these participants, they shared many stories of feeling equipped and empowered to share God's Word with their students and families throughout the year. In the same way, teachers are likely to be embedded in the school when they are doing work and making decisions that impact the school (Miller et al., 2020). Sharing God's Word was an important part of these educators' jobs and helped them to feel like the right fit for their school and ministry.

Community Connections Are Limited. More than half of the participants shared experiences where they felt as though they worked too much and did not have enough free time to engage in their community. Additionally, many of the participants did not share experiences of personal community connections as being something they would miss or sacrifice if they were to leave the organization. In most cases, this lack of connections caused the educators to feel disconnected from their communities. Research studies have been conducted in this area that prove it will lead to problems down the road if employees do not have community connections. The importance of striking a work-life balance so that educators may make community connections, particularly in an urban context, is important for instilling community embeddedness (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). My study showed the need for educators to have time to do the things they enjoy. While arguments could be made that free time outside of work is generally a good thing in and of itself, the research showed it helped improve job embeddedness. Watson (2018) conducted a study that also showed community connections increasing job

embeddedness and specifically mentioned the need for educators to be the right fit for their job and community. People have a need to participate in hobbies, church activities, or other community events. The same is true for people in the teaching profession. Watson further argued that an educator's fit to their community is almost equally as important as their fit to their work. Job embeddedness and educator retention improve when an educator's values and goals align to how they work in their academic institution and how they live in their community.

The experiences shared by the participants were that teachers did not feel connected to their community, at least not in the form of personal relationships. The experiences they mentioned would most likely not create feelings of strong job embeddedness through community connections. The participants mentioned that the weather, parks, and fun restaurants were things they enjoyed and would miss in their community. Except for two participants, no one shared that they would miss friendships outside of school ones. They also did not mention that they would miss any events or activities with local community members. Ampofo et al. (2017) conducted a study and shared other implications that existed when educators were not connected to their community. Educators who were connected to their communities reported a higher level of life satisfaction, and educators who experienced high levels of life satisfaction were likely to stay in their current jobs (Ampofo et al., 2017). In addition, educators who were likely to persist in the profession and their place of employment reported a fit to their community at large, and not just the school itself (Shibiti, 2019). The researchers of these two studies demonstrated the potential benefits when administrators helped promote community involvement on the part of their teachers. Educators are like any other type of employee, and they want to feel connected to their place of employment and community. Administrators will have educators who are satisfied in

their work and life, and the employees will experience higher levels of job embeddedness when community and work connections exist.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The teachers all shared a variety of experiences that articulated their job embeddedness. The findings in this study provided implications for policy and practice from a variety of stakeholders that includes district leaders, on-site principals, teachers, and parents. The recommendations for policy and practice were derived from the experiences that were shared by the educators in this study regarding their experiences of job embeddedness. The following sections outline several implications for both policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

Participants expressed experiences of connectedness with their colleagues. Teachers naturally connected with one another in both a personal and professional manner, but it should not be assumed that these connections will automatically continue in the future. The first recommendation for a policy change is to help ensure connections with colleagues continue to thrive. It is recommended that school leaders create two programs to ensure these connections continue. The first would be a “buddy program” for all teachers. A “buddy program” could be accomplished in several ways and adapted to meet the needs of each school. Teachers would be assigned a “buddy” or a group of “buddies” where they regularly check in with each other about life and work. The schools could even direct funds to this program to allow the groups to occasionally meet at a local coffee house, restaurant, or some other location with the school picking up the tab. Initiatives that help develop relationships between colleagues may help ensure the culture of teacher connectedness continues. Schools could create a special name for this program and personalize it to make it fun and to ensure it is accomplishing its goals for the

school. In addition, school leaders should hold quarterly parties for all their staff members to enjoy one another's company and to have fellowship together.

The second policy recommendation would be to require intentional parent interactions across all grade levels. It seems that schools have kept COVID-19 policies in place that limit the face time parents have with teachers in the morning and afternoon. If possible, especially in smaller schools, it may be helpful to arrange drop-off and pick-up procedures that allow every parent to see their child's teacher, even if it is only once per week or every other week. The school may benefit by communicating to parents why they are implementing this policy and the benefit they (the parents) would gain from it as well. Similarly, mandatory events for parents may be a great way for teachers to connect. Schools could adapt these events to fit their school's needs. It might be a classroom showcase once per quarter where students share what they have been doing in the classroom, a featured speaker on an important topic, or anything else that would bring parents and teachers together around a common theme. Opportunities for parents and teachers to communicate more often may help to create a culture of parental involvement and increase the partnership mentality that is important between parents and teachers to support the students collaboratively.

A third recommendation for a change in policy would be to limit the number of extracurricular activities that teachers are required to assist with after the school day. Some of the teachers shared that they coached sports after school year-round or helped with multiple extracurricular activities that were offered at different parts of the year. It may benefit the teachers and school if new teachers with one or two years of experience were not required to do extracurricular activities. The school may benefit by creating a guide for experienced teachers to assist with extracurricular activities up to a certain number of hours in a year. For example, 0

hours of extracurricular obligations for teachers with 1 or 2 years of experience, teachers with 3 to 5 years of experience may do up to 100 hours, and teachers with greater than 5 years of experience would do up to 150 hours. The school administrators would have to examine the school's needs to create this guideline. The result of a policy change in this area for limiting extracurricular obligations may result in teachers having additional time to be encouraged to participate in a community activity.

A final recommendation for a change in policy is perhaps the most significant since most participants in this study expressed a lack of people connections in their communities. As mentioned in the literature, strong community connections were needed to increase job embeddedness. The recommendation for change would be to provide an "off period" each day for teachers that could be used for preparation, replying to emails, or completing other important tasks. An "off period" for educators may give teachers a feeling of being treated similarly to their peers at larger private schools and in the public sector. In addition, it may give them time each day that would allow them to feel less burdened with work and possibly provide time that could be channeled into community involvement. The administrators could work to provide this time off during a class period or a lunch/recess break, so long as it is a meaningful amount of time. The administrators would also need to encourage staff members to use this time as a means of allowing the teacher to have additional opportunities to become involved in the community with hobbies or interests they enjoy. It is further recommended that administrators add community involvement to a teacher's growth plan to help encourage community connectedness for all their staff.

Implications for Practice

Schools can encourage activities that could potentially help build deeper feelings of connectedness for their teachers. One recommendation for practice is to have a personal inventory assessment available for each teacher to complete at the time of their hiring. The purpose of this personal inventory assessment would be to help ensure that the teachers are feeling valued and needed by the ministry by putting their talents and abilities to use. The recommendation is to have teachers do a strengths finder assessment (Clifton Strengths or something similar) during the onboarding process. An initiative for providing a strengths assessment may help the teachers understand their general strengths while also helping the administration to see what strengths are available across their entire team. The teachers would also share their interests and hobbies so that the principal may see if those assessments can be used in some capacity to benefit the school in a class that is offered, an after-school option, or in some other way. Information from this personal inventory assessment may be important to administrators to provide opportunities for teachers to put their talents and interests to use. In addition, the teachers may feel valued that their organization appreciates everything they bring to the table to help improve the school.

A second recommendation for a change in practice is to include a Parent–Teacher Organization or parent group to help connect the teachers to the community. It may be beneficial to allow parents to help the teachers become more connected in the community since many of the participants expressed a disconnect from the community and a lack of involvement in it. A change in practice that encourages community connections for educators could potentially accomplish two goals. The first one would be that teachers have a bridge to participating in community events and building outside relationships. Parents might be assigned a teacher and

invite them to get-togethers, a community event, or some other social gathering. Partnerships between parents and teachers may allow deeper personal connections to develop between the teachers and other members of the community. The second goal that could be accomplished through this practice would be stronger parent–teacher relationships. The teachers and parents would be seeing each other more and potentially help build stronger bonds between the two parties.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Theoretical and empirical implications based on the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) are included in this section. The job embeddedness theory states that employees are connected to their workplace and community when there are high levels of link and fit to both the workplace and community. In addition, employees who have high levels of job embeddedness feel the sacrifices to leave either the workplace or environment are too great. The following two sections include a discussion of the theoretical implications based on the work of Mitchell et al. (2001) regarding the job embeddedness theory as well as empirical implications through an analysis of how the findings of this study relate to the current body of literature on the topic.

Theoretical Implications

The job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) was the framework for this hermeneutic phenomenological study. Job embeddedness includes the levels of fit an employee feels to their organization and community, while also investigating the employee’s level of connectedness to both the organization and community. Finally, job embeddedness also includes the level of sacrifice that any employee would feel if they left their place of employment. All three of these components summarize the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). The

job embeddedness theory states that employees experience improved levels of job embeddedness when they are highly connected to their workplace and community. Watson (2018) employed the job embeddedness theory and discovered strong evidence to support the importance of job embeddedness for educators. The findings of this study support the theory that employees need to experience high levels of connectedness to both the workplace and community to have high levels of job embeddedness.

All 12 educators who participated in this study shared experiences of feeling connected to their place of employment. The job embeddedness theory states that employees experience embeddedness in their place of work when they have links or connections to their workplace (Mitchell et al., 2001). The results of my study added to the job embeddedness theory through educators' experiences of connections that were created through relationships built in the workplace. Connectedness to the school was felt primarily through the various relationships that the teachers developed, and the most compelling of these were the connections the teachers felt with other teachers on the staff. The teachers trusted one another to help with professional needs and offered advice to one another. They also expressed that they genuinely enjoyed one another's company. They participated in many social activities together and indicated they spent significant time together outside of their work, not because they had to do so, but because they enjoyed doing so. Some of the participants even described their colleagues as family. The participants described strong bonds that were created between staff members that helped the teachers feel connected to their school.

Feelings of being the right fit for their job are also important for an employee to experience according to the job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001). My study extended the job embeddedness theory through the experiences the participants shared that articulated their

feelings of being the right fit for their place of employment. The participants shared experiences of feeling like the right fit for their workplace by noting that the talents and interests they had were being utilized by the school and administration. Some teachers shared experiences of moving to a different grade level because they possessed the skills to do so, and it helped the school. Others taught departmentalized content in art or music because it was a talent that could be used to benefit many students, not just the ones in their homeroom class. A variety of others expressed other abilities or interests that brought them joy and fulfillment. All these experiences contributed to the educators feeling like they were a good fit to be working in their school.

The educators who participated in this study did not share many experiences of embeddedness to the community in the way that the theory suggests is required for full job embeddedness. The job embeddedness theory explains that people need to have connections in their workplace and outside of it through the community. Except for the experiences of two participants, there were no strong people connections in the community for 10 of the participants. While the initial questionnaire, interview, and journal entry did not specifically ask questions about how the participants experienced community, it could be argued that they still felt community in a capacity that is different from how the theorists discovered it in their development of the theory. It might be possible that community is an arbitrary term and does not have to be experienced outside the workplace. It is possible that community could be defined in a broader capacity or further clarified to narrow the definition of community with a distinct and clear explanation of what it is and what it is not. My study added to the job embeddedness theory in this way by highlighting the need for community to be more clearly defined or for the definition to be considered in a broader context.

Empirical Implications

There is an existing gap in the literature regarding teachers' lived experiences of job embeddedness, specifically a gap in qualitative studies that use interviews or focus groups to strengthen the understanding of the job embeddedness theory in the educational field by exploring educators' experiences (Pieters et al., 2022). I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this study that helped capture the lived experiences of parochial school educators in the southeastern United States. The findings in this study were consistent with the findings that have been noted in similar studies. Some of these findings included strong teacher–student relationships, positive relationships among colleagues, strong levels of support from administrators, and high levels of fit and belonging due to a teacher's talents and interests being utilized.

Sub-Question One Answered. The first sub-question stated the following: How do educators describe their experiences of connectedness with their school and community while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States? Many of the participants described feelings of connection to their students and strong relationships with their students. The participants shared these experiences through their descriptions of intentional interactions inside and outside the classroom. The experiences of these teachers corroborated the work of Yildiz (2018), who stated that educators who were experiencing job satisfaction through positive educator–student relationships were inclined to be embedded within the organization. Kun and Gadanez (2022) conducted another study that surveyed 297 educators. They found in this study that an educator's sense of finding their work meaningful was through the development of positive and supportive relationships with their students. The studies of these authors (Kun & Gadanez, 2022; Yildiz, 2018) are important because educators who are experiencing job

satisfaction through positive educator–student relationships are inclined to be embedded within the organization (Yildiz, 2018).

Strong relationships between the participants and their colleagues were noted by all 12 participants. They all enjoyed strong bonds with co-workers in a variety of different ways. The feelings of connectedness were made in both a personal and professional capacity. Participants mentioned how they socialized together and spent time with each other outside the work setting. The participants' experiences were related to the body of literature that currently exists on the topic of job embeddedness. Research has shown that support between co-workers increases feelings of job embeddedness for the employees (Self et al., 2020). The participants also shared experiences of feeling connected to their peers through the professional support they received from colleagues. The participants experienced this connectedness with colleagues by receiving help with job-related tasks and offering advice and support. The literature supports relationship building through professional support. Educators often develop strong relationships with their peers when they participate in knowledge-sharing behaviors (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). Another study conducted with 18 science educators found that the educators who reported experiences of building positive and supportive relationships with their colleagues were more likely to be embedded in the organization (Larkin et al., 2022). When educators feel connected to their colleagues and place of employment, they are likely to have strong feelings of job embeddedness, and these educators are inclined to stay as a teacher within their organization (Mitchell et al., 2001).

Strong relationships and feelings of support between the educators and their principal were shared through the participants' experiences. Clara shared that her principal offered great support and was willing to help her with whatever tough situation she faced. Paul was grateful to

his administration who helped him through his first year of teaching, which happened to be the year of the COVID pandemic which resulted in online teaching for 2 months or longer. Lily appreciated the professional development offered by her principal that was relevant to her classroom situations. The body of literature suggests there is a need for strong teacher-administration relationships to help promote job embeddedness. Principals are responsible for creating and building relationships with educators, as these relationships lead to greater job satisfaction (Abitabile, 2020). Direct and genuine connections are necessary to build individual relationships between administration and educators, which is one of the most important aspects in building trust and keeping educators on staff (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Principals must demonstrate that they find value in developing relationships with their teaching staff. A researcher found a high correlation between an educator's job embeddedness improving when the administration focused on the development of relationships (Elsaied, 2020).

Sub-Question Two Answered. The second sub-question stated the following: How do educators describe how their talents and abilities are utilized while teaching in a parochial school in the southeastern United States? The participants reported strong feelings of fit because they appreciated that their talents were being used to help the students and the school. The participants reported experiences of feeling valued when they could use their talents to help the school and church ministry by teaching in a subject area in which they felt equipped, by using creative talents like artistic abilities to support the school, and by having the flexibility to do their job while using their talents and abilities. The literature shows that teachers feel connected and embedded in their organization when they can use their talents to help in some capacity. There is evidence in the existing literature that points to an educator's level of fit being related to their self-efficacy at work and their ability to continue to improve and serve the organization (Reitman

& Karge, 2019). Educators must feel a high level of fit within the school they are working. Perrone and Eddy-Spicer (2019) conducted a recent study in a diverse school district that examined the levels of fit felt by the teaching staff. Educators experienced a higher level of fit when they were teaching in the subject area in which they felt comfortable and where they have had previous experience, and administrators should ensure that educators have a genuine interest and/or experience in the subject areas in which they are instructing (Perrone & Eddy-Spicer, 2019). In the same way, educators in this study reported that it was important for them to have autonomy and to use their creativity to enhance the learning environment. There is evidence in the existing literature that points to an educator's level of fit being related to their self-efficacy at work and their ability to continue to improve and serve the organization (Reitman & Karge, 2019). Self-efficacy can be related to a teacher's feelings and experiences of being equipped to be successful in the classroom. Yu et al. (2020) concluded that employees who have high levels of self-efficacy are likely to have high levels of job embeddedness and are inclined to continue working within their organization. Finally, teachers are likely to be embedded in the school when they felt they could make decisions and participate in tasks that impact the school (Miller et al., 2020). The experiences of teachers in this study supported the idea that they feel like they are connected and the right fit for the organization when their talents and abilities are utilized.

Sub-Question Three Answered. The third sub-question stated the following: How do educators describe experiences regarding the sacrifices they would make if they were to leave the organization? The participants shared that they would miss the various relationships they had established at their school of employment. One of these relationships included the ones that the participants established with their students and colleagues. Beth stated that she would miss the strong relationships with her students, especially since she had a small class and knew them so

well. Paul indicated that he loves the children in his classroom and would miss them if he was no longer teaching there. In the same way, Mary mentioned that her colleagues were her family. John also shared that he would miss his co-workers. The sentiment of missing or sacrificing strong relationships was a common experience among the participants. The strong relationships between teachers and students and teachers and their colleagues are supported in the literature for promoting job embeddedness. Researchers conducted another study that surveyed 297 educators. They found in this study that an educator's sense of finding their work meaningful was through the development of positive and supportive relationships with their students (Kun & Gadanecz, 2022). Educators who are experiencing job satisfaction through positive educator–student relationships are inclined to be embedded within the organization (Yildiz, 2018). In the same way, supportive relationships between co-workers increase feelings of job embeddedness (Self et al., 2020). Educators oftentimes develop strong relationships with their peers when they participate in knowledge-sharing behaviors (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018). When educators felt connected to their colleagues and place of employment, they were likely to have strong feelings of job embeddedness, and these educators were inclined to stay as a teacher within their organization (Mitchell et al., 2001).

The participants did not experience strong connections to the community and largely mentioned non-people connections. Adam mentioned that he would miss the weather, and Tom also stated his love of a warmer climate that would be missed. Lily even mentioned that there was not much she would miss and would be happy to live in a different area. Mary shared some of her favorite restaurants and stores that would be missed. The educators who participated in this study did not share experiences of strong connections to the community nor did they indicate anything from the community they would sacrifice or miss if they were no longer living there.

Recent studies included details about the need for employers to focus on off-the-job embeddedness, which includes life outside of the place of employment (Treuren & Fein, 2018). In addition, employees who were involved in their local community were likely to have greater social networks, which helps to balance work–life conflicts. Several participants mentioned that too much work made it difficult to be embedded within the community due to long hours of work that allow for little time to pursue other interests or hobbies. Fontinha et al. (2019) stressed the importance of employers finding ways to help employees find a healthy work–life balance and that limiting work hours helped to alleviate employee stressors, which may ultimately allow them to be actively involved in their local communities.

Limitations and Delimitations

The fact that this study was a qualitative one with only 12 participants who were similar in background is a possible limitation of this study. There is a need for studies with both diverse methods and diverse demographic profiles when studying job embeddedness (Shibiti, 2019). If additional people participated, there may have been a greater variety in the backgrounds of the participants. The most significant aspect of this limitation that I observed was that most of the participants were single, and the ones who were married did not have children, except for two participants. It may be beneficial to have additional participants to ensure varied backgrounds or to limit the study to a minimum number of people who fit certain demographics related to marriage and family, years of experience, and other demographic information. Another limitation may have been the timing of the study. Researchers have struggled with finding the right time to conduct a study, and it is a factor to consider before conducting research (Vindrola-Padros et al., 2020). I received IRB approval right before Christmas and did not reach out to participants until after the Christmas break. I thought that waiting until after the Christmas vacation might have

been a more ideal time than right before Christmas break, but my thoughts on waiting may have been misguided. When I finally started receiving participants, some backed out or stopped replying to correspondence after agreeing to participate. Teachers are always busy, and some are busy at different times due to work obligations, so finding the ideal time might not be possible unless it is over the summer.

The major delimitation I observed was in how participants were recruited for this study. I used principals at the school to serve as gatekeepers to share my recruitment letter. Researchers have discussed the challenges that exist when accessing potential participants in a study using gatekeepers (Turhan & Bernard, 2020). It came to my attention that some principals did not share my recruitment letter right away, which slowed down the recruitment of participants. It may have been beneficial for the principals to provide permission and share the names and emails of teachers with me so that I could have reached out to the teachers directly to participate. Other than that delimitation, I had minimal requirements to participate, other than being a teacher in a parochial school in the southeastern United States. I may have received different data if I did have delimitations in this study. For example, most of my participants were relatively new to teaching. It may have been helpful to require the teachers to have a minimum number of years of experience to provide experiences that spanned many years and maybe even multiple locations, administrators, and colleagues. Future researchers may want to consider recruiting participants with more experience when replicating this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Teachers with high levels of job embeddedness feel a strong link and fit to both their work and community. They also feel that they would be sacrificing something if they were to leave their work and community for another means of employment. The body of literature

suggests that there are many benefits that teachers and school leaders enjoy when staff members experience high levels of job embeddedness. There are four recommendations for future researchers.

The first recommendation is that a larger district be used to collect the data. A larger district may allow for opportunities to exist to attract participants with a wide variety of backgrounds. The district used is one of the smallest in this parochial school system, so fewer potential participants were available. It would increase the likelihood of recruiting participants with varied backgrounds that include whether they are single or married, have children or not, or fit in a certain age demographic. A second recommendation would be that at least 50% of the participants must have a minimum of 7 years of experience. Recruiting participants with more experience may allow for the participant to share stories that reflect a variety of experiences. A third recommendation would be to include other instructional staff members such as teacher assistants and other employees in support positions. They may provide experiences from a different perspective that will help the schools understand the job embeddedness levels of additional stakeholders. The final recommendation would be to use a different recruitment method. I believe the use of gatekeepers slowed down my ability to recruit participants in a timely fashion. I would suggest that the researcher consider other methods of recruiting participants that are faster and more efficient. Alternative recruitment methods may prevent a delay in recruiting participants for the study.

The findings of this study may lead to related studies being conducted in a different area of the country or including participants from different areas across the entire country. It may be helpful to investigate if the findings of this study are limited to a specific region or if similar findings would be discovered in other geographic areas. Another potential study based on the

findings of this study would be to explore educators' experiences of community embeddedness in more detail. The findings of this study concluded that teachers were largely disconnected from personal connections to their community. Future studies might investigate this phenomenon in more detail, and it may even be beneficial to conduct a new quantitative study that focuses on ways to improve community embeddedness.

Conclusion

This study was a hermeneutic phenomenological study which explored educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. The theoretical framework for this study was the job embeddedness theory, which examines the links and fit an employee has to their place of work and community while also considering what they would sacrifice if they were to leave either one. The findings of this study suggested that educators in these schools have experiences of job embeddedness in their place of employment. They reported feeling embedded in terms of relationships with students and colleagues, in addition to feeling levels of fit for the schools in which they were working. Community embeddedness was not evident through the experiences of the participants, and teachers reported feeling connected to places and the weather, but not the people with whom they are living in their communities. Teachers reported feeling that they worked too much and had little time to invest in community relationships. The body of literature suggests that job embeddedness is important at both an employee's place of work and community. Recommendations were suggested to help promote experiences of embeddedness at work while working to create experiences of embeddedness in the community. Future research would be helpful to include additional participants with varied backgrounds and from other parts of the country.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Site Approval

October 12, 2022

Dear President [REDACTED]

I pray this email finds you doing well. I am conducting a qualitative research study as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Organizational Leadership at Liberty University. The title of my research study is “Educators’ Experiences of Job Embeddedness in Parochial Schools: A Phenomenological Study.” The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study will be to explore educators’ experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities.

I am writing to request your assistance to be able to reach out to the principals of all schools in the [REDACTED] in order to use them as gatekeepers as I recruit participants for my study. I would like to contact ABC educators in the [REDACTED] in order to recruit 12–15 participants for this research study. For this reason, I am asking for your support and cooperation in order to send my Participant Recruitment Letter (see the attached document) to all the principals in your district, so that I can provide them with information about the study and to seek their permission to participate in this study. Please email me ([REDACTED]) your approval or any questions you have.

I appreciate your consideration in this matter. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

God bless,

Tim Biesterfeld
Doctoral Candidate – Liberty University

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

October 15, 2022

Tim Biesterfeld

[Redacted]

Dear Tim Biesterfeld:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled "Educators' Experiences of Job Embeddedness in Parochial Schools: A Phenomenological Study" I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study in the [Redacted]. I also give you permission to be able to reach out to the principals of all schools in the [Redacted] by using the synod yearbook on the [Redacted] website to obtain contact information for each principal. Finally, I grant permission to use teachers in the [Redacted] as participants in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

- I grant permission to access principals' contact information on the [Redacted] to Tim Biesterfeld, and Tim may use the directory to contact the principals in the [Redacted] to ask them to serve as gatekeepers as he seeks to recruit participants for his research study.
- I grant permission for Tim Biesterfeld to contact teachers in the [Redacted] to invite them to participate in his research study.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Name]

President
[Redacted Title]

Appendix B: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 7, 2022

Tim Biesterfeld
Christopher Clark

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-471 Educators' Experiences of Job Embeddedness in Parochial Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Tim Biesterfeld, Christopher Clark,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix C: Participation Recruitment Letter

Date:

Dear Educators of the ABC,

I am beginning my research as a doctoral student at Liberty University and will be conducting a qualitative research study in order to fulfill the requirements for earning a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Organizational Leadership. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study will be to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. The title of my research study is "Educators' Experiences of Job Embeddedness in Parochial Schools: A Phenomenological Study".

I am writing to invite you to be a participant in this study. If you are currently working as a full-time educator in an ABC school and agree to participate in my study, I will ask you to complete an initial questionnaire, participate in a single interview, and complete one writing prompt. You can complete the initial questionnaire via a Survey Monkey form and it should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The interview will last between 30–45 minutes, and the writing prompt should only take 10–15 minutes of your time.

If you choose to participate in this study, your participation will be completely confidential, and I will not share information that might reveal your identity. Furthermore, if you would like to participate in this study, please email me at [REDACTED] indicating your willingness to participate. Please type *Research Study* in the subject line and include your full name, school in which you work, and the grade level/subject area in the body of the email. I will then reply to your email with the informed consent form. Please complete, sign, and return the attached consent form via e-mail to [REDACTED] within 10 days if you would like

to confirm your participation in this study. I will be contacting you via email to confirm your participation if you agree to do so. Finally, participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as an acknowledgment of your time and as a token of my appreciation.

I appreciate your consideration for participating in my study. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions. Thank you again for considering to participate in this research study.

God bless,

Tim Biesterfeld
Doctoral Candidate – Liberty University

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Title of the Project: Educators' Experiences of Job Embeddedness in Parochial Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Tim Biesterfeld

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

I invite you to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a full-time educator in a parochial school in the southeastern United States. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study will be to explore educators' experiences of job embeddedness in southeastern United States parochial schools and communities. **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Respond to an initial questionnaire via email that will take approximately 10 minutes of your time.
2. Participate in an interview (via Zoom or in person). The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes, and I will record the interview.
3. Respond to a writing prompt via email that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should expect to benefit from this study by being able to contribute to the data I am collecting.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

I will keep the records of this study private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher[s] will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

I will protect information in the following ways:

- I will keep participant responses confidential by using a pseudonym. I will conduct interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- I will store data on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, I will delete all electronic records.

- I will record and transcribe all interviews. I will store recordings on a password-locked computer for three years and then erase the data. Only the researcher[s] will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

I will compensate participants for participating in this study. Each participant will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of their full participation in the research study. Participants will not receive a \$25 Amazon gift card if they begin the study but do not complete it.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, I will immediately destroy all data collected from you and none of your data will be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Tim Biesterfeld. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Christopher Clark, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix E: Questionnaire Questions

The thirteen questions included on the questionnaire are the following:

1. Please confirm your name, position at the school, and highest terminal degree.
2. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your students and/or their families. SQ1
3. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your students and/or their families. SQ1
4. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your colleagues. SQ1
5. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your colleagues. SQ1
6. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your neighbors or people in the community. SQ1
7. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your neighbors or people in the community. SQ1
8. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had at your current place of employment that caused you to feel that you are a good fit for the school where you work by providing examples of experiences that led you to how you perceive your level of fit in the organization. SQ2
9. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had at your current place of employment that caused you to feel that you are not a good fit for the school where you work by providing examples of experiences that led you to how you perceive your level of fit in the organization. SQ2
10. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had outside of your place of employment that caused you to feel that you are a good fit for the local community where you live by

providing examples of these experiences that led to how you perceive your level of fit in the local community. SQ2

11. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had outside of your place of employment that caused you to feel that you not are a good fit for the local community where you live by providing examples of these experiences that led to how you perceive your level of fit in the local community. SQ2
12. Describe any experiences (in detail) you have had that you would miss at your current place of employment if you were no longer working there. Be sure to provide examples of experiences you would miss and explain why you would miss them. SQ3
13. Describe any experiences (in detail) you have had that you would miss outside of your current place of employment if you were no longer living in your current community. Be sure to provide examples of experiences you would miss and explain why you would miss them. SQ3

Appendix F: Interview Questions

The open-ended interview questions will be the following:

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me about your experiences that led to you working at an ABC school.
2. Please describe in detail your specific role at the school.
3. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected to a colleague. SQ1
4. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected to a colleague. SQ1
5. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected with students and/or their families. SQ1
6. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected with students and/or their families. SQ1
7. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected to people outside of your school/work setting. SQ1
8. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected to people outside of your school/work setting. SQ1
9. Describe experiences when you have felt like you were a good fit at your school of employment. SQ2
10. Describe experiences when you have felt like you were not a good fit at your school of employment. SQ2
11. Describe experiences of how the administration helped assist you in reaching your goals. SQ2
12. Describe experiences of how the administration did not help assist you in reaching your goals. SQ2

13. Describe experiences you have had in your community that make you feel like you are a good fit for living there. SQ2
14. Describe experiences you have had in your community that make you feel like you are not a good fit for living there. SQ2
15. Describe experiences you would miss if you were no longer working at your current school. SQ3
16. Describe experiences you would not miss if you were no longer working at your current school. SQ3
17. Describe experiences you would miss if you were no longer living in your local community. SQ3
18. Describe experiences you would not miss if you were no longer living in your local community. SQ3

Appendix G: Journal Entry Questions

Write your thoughts that describe how you feel about the following:

1. Describe professional engagements with colleagues or members of your administration that make you feel connected to the organization. Explain all of them that are meaningful and explain in detail. SQ1
2. Describe professional engagements with colleagues or members of your administration that make you feel disconnected to the organization. Explain all of them that are meaningful and explain in detail. SQ1
3. Describe the types of community activities that you enjoy and make you feel connected to the community. Explain in detail. SQ1
4. Describe the types of community activities that you do not enjoy and make you feel disconnected to the community. Explain in detail. SQ1
5. How would you assess your goodness of fit with your current school in terms of feeling valued, utilized, and needed? Please provide as many details as possible to support your assessment. SQ2
6. How would you assess your goodness of fit for the community in which you live in terms of feeling like you are a true part of the community? Please provide as many details as possible to support your assessment. SQ2
7. Describe what you like most about working in your current school. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3
8. Describe any sacrifices you feel you make by working at your current school. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3

9. Describe what you like most about living in your current community. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3
10. Describe any sacrifices you feel you make by living in your current community. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3

Appendix H: Raw Data Samples

Initial Questionnaire – Mary

1. **Please confirm your name, position at the school, and highest terminal degree.**

[Redacted], 1-2 grade teacher and K-8 Art at [Redacted], Bachelor of Science in Education

2. **Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your students and/or their families. SQ1**

We still offer home visits before school begins. Families have the option of inviting the teacher into their home or coming into the classroom and meeting with the teacher there. These meetings allow me to see where the child is coming from each morning when they step into my (our) classroom. Seeing their home, meeting their pets, seeing the child in their element are all clues helping me to build a relationship with the student and their families. Often both parents and students will share with me through texts or in person conversations some of the challenges going on in their lives. These are opportunities to encourage them by sharing God's Word and carrying them in prayer. I have found in my experience that communication and time build connected relationships. I enjoy sending 'sunshine texts' telling parents specifically how their child made me laugh by saying something cute, or helped make a new student feel welcome, or just had a great day. I also know that while sometimes the parents and I will have to team together to address a behavior or concern and while these are not the easiest conversations, often a stronger relationship can come as a result of lovingly working alongside them to help their child grow. The time and effort that communication takes is always worth it in connecting to students and families.

3. **Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your students and/or their families. SQ1**

Prior to covid many of our families would park in the morning and walk their kids to the classroom. This was an opportunity to daily greet the parent/person dropping the child off. It was also an opportunity to ask and answer any questions that may have come up. The same was true of dismissal. Our classes used to gather outside and could catch parents at pickup time or at least smile and wave. Now most children are dropped off in the parking lot in the morning (greeted by the principal or pastor - which I guess gives them daily contact with parents that they might not have otherwise gotten). In the afternoon all students remain in the classroom until their names are called over the walkie-talkie and then they walk out to their cars. I miss having this daily contact with the families. I often don't know who dropped off or picked up the student each day.

4. **Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your colleagues. SQ1**

I feel very connected to my colleagues. We like each other, we laugh together, we support and encourage one another, we jump in and help each other when needed. We often grab dinner together on a Friday night or have get-togethers at someone's home. We carpool to conferences. We play trivia together on Wednesday nights. We share our lives with one another and pray for one another. When my father died, my staff made it very

easy for me to be with my family for the time needed and even sent flowers to the funeral which touched me deeply. I love my colleagues. I am so very blessed to have them.

5. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your colleagues. SQ1

The only thing I can think of is when communication might break down. I think we do a very good job communicating with one another, but sometimes things will slip through the cracks unintentionally and then it can be frustrating when you don't know something - for example someone might be out of town over the weekend and you didn't know about it or someone is off campus for the afternoon.

6. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling connected to your neighbors or people in the community. SQ1

I feel that we are constantly building more and more connectedness to our community. Our big opportunities to get our community onto our campus would have to be our Vacation Bible School and our Fall Festival. Our Vacation Bible School has routinely brought in right around 100 kids from our community. The feedback we have gotten from our VBS is that it is one of the favorite VBSes in town. The children actually learn Bible stories and Bible passages. We have built a good reputation in our community and with the community moms who spend the summer VBS hopping to keep their kids busy. In the fall our church and academy host a fall festival open to the public. This is an opportunity for people to see our campus, see what we're all about, meet some of our members, and have a fun time. This event is entirely free and is advertised at the community Trunk or Treat event a week or two prior. Our preschool teacher also hosts an interactive Story Walk in the spring which is geared towards families with young children looking for a preschool. This event is becoming more and more attended each spring. Through these events (and a few others where we host a booth at a community event) we are getting to know different families and recognize them.

7. Describe experiences (in detail) of feeling disconnected to your neighbors or people in the community. SQ1

We still will get people who tell us that they had no clue we were here even though they drive past our campus every day (or frequently). Our academy building is set in the back of our property and can be easily missed. Because of local building restrictions, our church does not appear to really look like a church from the road. We are still working to remedy these perceptions and get our name out there. Most of our referrals come from happy families' word of mouth.

8. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had at your current place of employment that caused you to feel that you are a good fit for the school where you work by providing examples of experiences that led you to how you perceive your level of fit in the organization. SQ2

I am a good fit here because I have figured out how to adapt to needs of the community and area around me. Having been raised in the midwest (specifically Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan) where people seem to be more familiar with Lutheran churches and schools and who Lutherans are. Here in [Redacted], there is a lot of education that goes into who we are as a parochial school. It is my impression that many

parents in our area are looking for a private school education (as a status or prestige factor), a safe place for their child (smaller enrollment and student to teacher ratio, where their child won't be bullied or made fun of), and finally, they may also wish for Christian values and morals to be taught. I have had to adapt a bit to meet families where they are and also keep giving them the Word of God which is the purpose of our existence as a school. One example of this is memory work. In the midwest it is not unusual for our schools to require two or three bible passages to be memorized and recited each week. I found that this is overwhelming for the students and families here, so I do only one Bible passage a week and we practice it together many times and with actions. By the end of the week they have a Bible verse committed to memory and it becomes quality over quantity. It is hard to describe how teaching outside of the midwest is different, but it is and not everyone can adapt. I have known a number of teachers who have been overwhelmed at the great responsibility and workload and have resigned or headed back to the midwest. I think because of the amount of work and different hats worn by the teachers of our schools our time away at conferences is even more special. It is a time for us to collaborate, vent, be built up, encourage one another, and come back strengthened to keep at it.

9. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had at your current place of employment that caused you to feel that you are not a good fit for the school where you work by providing examples of experiences that led you to how you perceive your level of fit in the organization. SQ2

I guess when I look at the shortcomings we've had in the community (they don't know who we are, where we are, our presence in the community is not seen and heard). I think our school has a great reputation with our school families and those who have interacted with us, but could we do more to put ourselves out there? Could our students be more visible in the community? Yes, but I don't know how to do that or if I am the person to do that. As an introvert I struggle to put myself out there or strike up conversations at an event. Could our school benefit from someone more outgoing? Sure.

10. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had outside of your place of employment that caused you to feel that you are a good fit for the local community where you live by providing examples of these experiences that led to how you perceive your level of fit in the local community. SQ2

Hmm ... I really don't venture out much to interact with the community. I guess I will just have to say that I'm a good fit because I am a good citizen. I try my best to drive safely and obey the traffic laws. I pay my bills on time. I take care of the apartment I rent. I don't steal. I try to help others who need help. I donate food to the food drive. I tip the waiters and waitresses. I am kind to others. If I am walking at the park or in the neighborhood I will greet people. I'm patient, I smile, and I don't complain. I always try to remember that I am reflecting Christ wherever I am.

11. Describe experiences (in detail) that you have had outside of your place of employment that caused you to feel that you not are a good fit for the local community where you live by providing examples of these experiences that led to how you perceive your level of fit in the local community. SQ2

I guess I should be more involved in the community around me. I'm usually so busy at school, so I don't do much outside of work. I guess I would be a better fit for my community if I volunteered more or was involved in a community cause/project.

12. Describe any experiences (in detail) you have had that you would miss at your current place of employment if you were no longer working there. Be sure to provide examples of experiences you would miss and explain why you would miss them. SQ3

I would miss the people. My church is my family. I know and love the members of our church and they love and care for me. I am blessed with wonderful colleagues and friends. I would miss the [Redacted] conferences and the warm camaraderie experienced there. I would miss the families who bring their kids to our school and the opportunity to teach another generation of their family. I would miss my students and watching them grow as they move through the upper grades and still getting to see them for art. I would miss my principal. He is a kind, thoughtful leader who is able to teach and coach teachers. I enjoy learning from him and collaborating with him. I would miss the fun traditions at our school (our spring musical, spirit week and team building, water fight on the last day, etc...)

13. Describe any experiences (in detail) you have had that you would miss outside of your current place of employment if you were no longer living in your current community. Be sure to provide examples of experiences you would miss and explain why you would miss them. SQ3

I would miss the university medicine at [Redacted] - all my doctors in the same place in the same system. I would miss the local ice cream shop—[Redacted]—so many flavors! I would miss the warm winters, the palm trees, the beaches, the Greek gyros in [Redacted]. I would miss the convenience of being so close to so many places—[Redacted]. I would miss trivia nights at [Redacted] Pub.

Interview – Martha

Researcher: Please introduce yourself and tell me about your experiences that led you to working at your current school.

Martha: Okay, um, my name is [Redacted]. I go by [Redacted]. Um, I graduated in 2020, and I went to [Redacted], for my first 2 years of teaching and then this was my assignment. So that's how I ended up in [Redacted].

Researcher: Awesome. Um, I'll have to ask you about [Redacted] later. Okay. Next question, please describe in detail your specific role at the school.

Martha: I teach second and third grade. That was my call, but I also have taken up piano lessons this semester.

Researcher: Okay, perfect. Thank you. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected to a colleague.

Martha: The fourth and fifth grade teacher was a year below me at [Redacted], and we knew of each other then, but didn't really know each other. So this summer when I moved here, I flew to [Redacted], and we had our professional development there and so she was the one that I sat by because she's the only one I knew. And, um, yeah, from there we just kind of started hanging out and talking, stuff like that. Uh, another one I would say was during conference in October. It was just my vice principal and I that went. And so I stayed with her family in the, I guess it was a suite, but, you know, their, their room, and so that was nice because I got to spend time with her mom and her and her kid and her husband. When we had those breakout sessions, whatever, it was always just us two. And we, we just talked about things. So it was nice to get to know her because that was right away in my first year.

Researcher: Awesome. Thank you. Um, next one. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected to a colleague.

Martha: Our school has like two wings, the early childhood wing and the elementary wing. And we don't get to see the early childhood people too much. Just different schedules, and we don't really get to have recess or lunch or anything like that together. So I know them, but not really.

Researcher: That makes sense. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected with students and or their families.

Martha: Um, so I have a few parents who will come into the classroom to drop off their kids. And some parents are just like, all right, you're in, "Bye!" And I have one parent, her son has autism. And so she walks him in the classroom and she gets him set up and makes sure that he has everything he needs, you know, sharp pencils and, you know, will kind of talk to him and remind him of things and we'll chat every now and then. And our school had offered her a position, and then she ended up not taking it. Um, so, the chairman, our education chairman, said, "Hey, talk to her, get her more involved in the school." So, um, she's helped me with different art projects or things for the classroom, um, book fair. And so she'll ask like, if there's anything I need for the classroom and she can go find it for me or different things like that. So, um, I talk to her quite a bit.

Researcher: Perfect. Thank you. Any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected with students and or their families?

Martha: Not really. Okay, I know there's a few parents that I don't see a lot but I don't feel like I'm disconnected from people.

Researcher: Okay. Describe any experiences you have had where you felt connected to people outside of your school or work setting.

Martha: I don't really have that. I haven't gone out and done much.

Researcher: Describe any experiences you have had where you felt disconnected to people outside of your school or work setting.

Martha: I guess there really hasn't been a time where I've tried to connect and then felt like it didn't work. I don't do much outside of school to have a relationship with anyone in the community.

Researcher: Okay. Um, describe experiences when you felt like you were a good fit for your school.

Martha: Um. So my student with autism, he, I think he's been in the school since kindergarten and he's in second grade. So they told me about him. They warned me about him and said, "You know, we're not sure if we want to keep him this year because he's quite the disruption." And anyway, so they kind of talked about it and they were like, well, you know, [Redacted], , it's your choice. You know, do you want to just kind of nip it in the bud and not do anything? Or do you want to give him a chance? And so I said, you know, let's give him a chance. And so we set up some tiers and different ideas and levels on what to do if things don't work out. They didn't think he'd make it to September when we started in August, but he's still here and he's doing really well. Um, I don't want to toot my own horn, but, um, people have said that the way that I handle him is working really well with him, so that's awesome.

Researcher: And I'm sure his family is very grateful. Describe experiences when you have felt like you maybe were not a good fit for your school.

Martha: Don't think I've had one that I don't feel like a good fit. More so I came to school, I came to [Redacted] in July and then was gone for, um, about a week so that I could move all my stuff down. My sister got married, and so I felt a little like thrown into everything, which isn't, you know, that's, that's expected. Um, and so sometimes I just, it's just that feeling of I'm new and I don't know, so I don't want to overstep or say something and then have people think, "Oh, Martha, that was stupid." So I think that's kind of where I'm at with not, I don't feel like I don't fit in, but I don't want to say something or do something just because I'm new, and I feel like I should be here for a year before I do certain things.

Researcher: Okay, good. Next one. Describe experiences of how the administration helped assist you in reaching any goals.

Martha: Um. I think, with how to handle different behaviors or circumstances. Uh, well, you know, we have to be careful if we say things about Santa Claus, because Santa is not the true reason for Christmas. But you don't want to say Santa doesn't exist, and so we have to watch those things. Um. And then certain behaviors on, okay, this happened. Is this bad enough that I need to, you know, make it a severe consequence or just a smaller consequence?

Researcher: Okay, good. Thank you. Describe experiences of how the administration did not help assist you in reaching your goals.

Martha: Uh, we currently are struggling with communication. So there are times when I ask something, and I don't get an answer because people don't know, or I tell one person and then they didn't tell anybody else. And so we're having a communication problem at our school.

***Researcher:* Communication is always a big one. Describe experiences you have had in your community that make you feel like you are a good fit for living there.**

Martha: Can I say not applicable?

***Researcher:* Yeah. I mean, if you don't have anything that that so far has made you feel that way, that's fair. Okay. Okay, describe experiences you have had in your community that make you feel like you are not a good fit for living there.**

Martha: Maybe because I don't do anything.

***Researcher:* Okay. Um, describe experiences you would miss if you were no longer working at your current school.**

Martha: I'd miss my coworkers and my students. I think we try to do a lot of engaging things with students and families. We have different festivals or different services to get everyone involved. I think that was fun.

***Researcher:* Good. Describe experiences you would not miss if you were no longer working at your school.**

Martha: Our bad communication. Yeah, so we are having some. We, we have three families from school that go to our church. Okay, but it is our vice principal, our education chairman, and one of our early childhood teachers. So, I know it's a goal of ours. I wouldn't miss the fact that there's, like, no school people at church. That's something that I wish we had more of. Um. And I know we're having just like miscommunication and church miscommunication at school and kind of our connectedness to each other, church and school, and so that's not fun.

***Researcher:* Yep, thank you. Um, describe experiences you would miss if you were no longer living in your local community.**

Martha: The warmth. Guess not much, but [Redacted] wise, the warmth and the constant sunshine.

***Researcher:* Good. And then last question. Describe experiences you would not miss if you were no longer living in your local community.**

Martha: Not applicable. Nothing, I guess.

***Researcher:* No worries. Okay, good. Um, well, thank you very much. I truly appreciate it. Thank you for your help.**

Journal Entry - Lily

- 1. Describe professional engagements with colleagues or members of your administration that make you feel connected to the organization. Explain all of them that are meaningful and explain in detail. SQ1**

We have regular faculty meetings. We meet to discuss happenings and events at school and we also meet monthly to do professional development together. I find our current professional development to be a great opportunity for us to talk and work together to better our school. We are working on a course with a professor from [Redacted] to work on our parent/family/school relationships. We often discuss things that are going well and things that need to be addressed and improved upon. I also enjoy when we attend conferences or seminars together and we can discuss the information we are learning as it pertains to our school and how we can best implement it.

- 2. Describe professional engagements with colleagues or members of your administration that make you feel disconnected to the organization. Explain all of them that are meaningful and explain in detail. SQ1**

There have been professional developments in the past that have not pertained to the age level of my students. There have been books on management that I've felt don't necessarily work well for me and the teacher that I am. When these professional engagements don't feel applicable, I don't feel very connected to the teachers that are excited about these engagements.

- 3. Describe the types of community activities that you enjoy and make you feel connected to the community. Explain in detail. SQ1**

I enjoy playing pickleball and softball with church members. My family enjoys being outside and biking/hiking at local parks. We enjoy the beach. We also enjoy swimming and BBQing at the homes of friends. There are lots of places with Christmas lights and events around Christmas that we enjoy participating in as well.

- 4. Describe the types of community activities that you do not enjoy and make you feel disconnected to the community. Explain in detail. SQ1**

Pride month is a big deal in our area and community. Because of my faith, I don't share in those beliefs and celebrations. It can feel like you're disconnected from the community particularly during the month celebrating Pride because we don't attend events or parades since they don't line up with our beliefs.

- 5. How would you assess your goodness of fit with your current school in terms of feeling valued, utilized, and needed? Please provide as many details as possible to support your assessment. SQ2**

I feel valued at my school because I have been here a long time. I have been here longer than any other person on staff. I feel that the families and students at school trust me and feel connected to me because I've been a steady and familiar face throughout the years when other teachers/pastors have left and moved on to other places.

- 6. How would you assess your goodness of fit for the community in which you live in terms of feeling like you are a true part of the community? Please provide as many details as possible to support your assessment. SQ2**

I feel like I fit in the community because I've been here so long. I know where things are and how to get around. I know how people in the community view things because I've learned a lot about this place in 17 years. I feel like a native [Redacted] because my husband and stepson were born and raised here.

- 7. Describe what you like most about working in your current school. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3**

I like the smallness of our school. It gives a family feel and you really get the opportunity to know the kids and their families well. I love that I can chat with students in a variety of grade levels and they know me and feel comfortable with me. I like that the relationships built here are strong and deep. I especially love sharing Jesus with kids and families who might not know if they weren't attending school here.

- 8. Describe any sacrifices you feel you make by working at your current school. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3**

I'm far away from my parents and family. Travel is expensive and being far away means my daughter misses knowing cousins, aunts and uncles, and grandparents as well as I'd like her to. It's hard to be so far away from the people that I love.

- 9. Describe what you like most about living in your current community. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3**

I like that I live in a place where people are active and enjoy outdoor activities. I like that pickleball, golf, the beach, and swimming are available year around. I love that my daughter is growing up with a love for outdoor activities. I also love the variety of people and their diverse backgrounds that we get to meet and share Jesus with.

- 10. Describe any sacrifices you feel you make by living in your current community. Please provide as many details as possible. SQ3**

I miss the changing seasons and snow at Christmas. Sometimes the weather here is challenging, especially hurricanes. I also miss being close to my family.

Appendix I: Initial Codes in Data Collection

Initial Questionnaire Codes	Interview Codes	Journal Codes
academic connections	academic connections	academic connections
nonacademic connection	nonacademic connection	nonacademic connection
extracurricular/school event connections	extracurricular/school event connections	extracurricular/school event connections
non-school event connections	non-school event connections	non-school event connections
drop off/pick up	drop off/pick up	drop off/pick up
formal/informal meetings	formal/informal meetings	formal/informal meetings
partnership	partnership	partnership
difficult communication	difficult communication	difficult communication
positive communication	positive communication	positive communication
departmentalization	departmentalization	departmentalization
extracurricular activities	extracurricular activities	extracurricular activities
inside classroom talents	inside classroom talents	inside classroom talents
outside classroom talents	outside classroom talents	outside classroom talents
sharing Jesus	sharing Jesus	sharing Jesus
church connections	church connections	church connections
mission opportunities	mission opportunities	mission opportunities
get-togethers	get-togethers	get-togethers
activities	activities	activities
food	food	food
family events	family events	family events
mentor/administration	mentor/administration	mentor/administration
personal support	personal support	personal support
professional support	professional support	professional support
professional development	professional development	professional development
long hours/many	long hours/many	long hours/many
commitments	commitments	commitments
too much work	too much work	too much work
weather	weather	weather

Initial Questionnaire Codes	Interview Codes	Journal Codes
places	places	places
events	events	events
feels disconnected to community	feels disconnected to community	feels disconnected to community
difficult home lives	similar values	relating to staff
socioeconomic status	inexperience/being new	sharing opinions
mini-cliques	no kids/single	weekly updates
not pulling weight	not pulling weight	communication issues
different values	different values	non-relevant PD
no kids/single	different personalities	disagreements
future plans	not seeing eye-to-eye	disconnected staff
non-supportive colleagues	non-involved staff	unresolved staff problems
non-involved staff	communication issues	lack of input
communication issues	difficult home lives	cross cultural issues
transient community	socioeconomic status	different values
not feeling equipped	friendly community	lack of community events
introverted/shy	cross cultural issues	no kids/single
cross cultural issues	lack of community events	turnover issues
	raising family in location	caring church
	too strict	not feeling valued
	not feeling equipped	distance from/missing family
	Introverted/shy	
	generational issues	
	transient community	
	growth mindset	
	turnover issues	
	affordable housing	

Appendix J: Codes/Meaning Units Categorized into Themes/Sub-Themes

Sub-Themes	Codes/Meaning Units	Number of Participants
Theme 1: Strong Relationships with Students		
Classroom Connections	academic connections nonacademic connection	11
Connections Outside the Classroom	extracurricular/school event connections non-school event connections	8
Theme 2: Mixed Relationship with Parents		
Face-to-Face Interactions Affect the Relationship	drop off/pick up formal/informal meetings	8
Levels of Parental Involvement Affect the Relationship	partnership difficult communication positive communication	10
Theme 3: Strong Fit to the School		
Talents and Interests Are Utilized	departmentalization extracurricular activities inside classroom talents outside classroom talents	11
Gospel Ministry	sharing Jesus church connections mission opportunities	9
Theme 4: Strong Relationships with Colleagues		
Socialization	get-togethers activities food family events	11
Professional Support from Colleagues and Principal	mentor/administration personal support professional support professional development	11

Sub-Themes	Codes/Meaning Units	Number of Participants
Theme 5: Lack of People Connections to the Community		
Workload Is Heavy and Lack of Time	long hours/many commitments too much work	7
Non-People Connections	weather places events feels disconnected	12

Appendix K: Themes by Participant

Theme 1: Strong Relationships with Students		
Participants	Sub-Theme 1: Classroom Connections	Sub-Theme 2: Connections Outside the Classroom
Tom	X	X
Lily	X	
Beth	X	
Martha	X	
Adam	X	X
Clara	X	X
Kate	X	
Paul		X
Peter	X	X
John	X	X
Sue	X	X
Mary	X	X

Theme 2: Mixed Relationships with Parents		
Participants	Sub-Theme 1: Face-to-Face Interactions Affect the Relationship	Sub-Theme 2: Levels of Parental Involvement Affect the Relationship
Tom	X	X
Lily		X
Beth		X
Martha	X	X
Adam	X	X
Clara		X
Kate	X	X
Paul	X	X
Peter	X	
John	X	
Sue		X
Mary	X	X

Theme 3: Strong Fit to the School		
Participants	Sub-Theme 1: Talents and Interests are Utilized	Sub-Theme 2: Gospel Ministry
Tom	X	
Lily		X
Beth	X	
Martha	X	
Adam	X	X
Clara	X	X
Kate	X	X
Paul	X	X
Peter	X	X
John	X	X
Sue	X	X
Mary	X	X

Theme 4: Strong Relationships with Colleagues		
Participants	Sub-Theme 1: Socialization	Sub-Theme 2: Professional Support from Colleagues and Principal
Tom	X	
Lily	X	X
Beth	X	X
Martha		X
Adam	X	X
Clara	X	X
Kate	X	X
Paul	X	X
Peter	X	X
John	X	X
Sue	X	X
Mary	X	X

Theme 5:		
Lack of People Connections to the Community		
Participants	Sub-Theme 1: Workload is Heavy and Lack of Time	Sub-Theme 2: Non-People Connections
Tom		X
Lily		X
Beth	X	X
Martha	X	X
Adam		X
Clara	X	X
Kate	X	X
Paul		X
Peter	X	X
John	X	X
Sue		X
Mary	X	X
