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Retention of Accomplished Veteran Social Studies Teachers

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RETENTION OF ACCOMPLISHED VETERAN SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS

Russell Brett Hardin
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This dissertation RETENTION OF ACCOMPLISHED VETERAN SOCIAL STUDIES
TEACHERS, by RUSSELL BRETT HARDIN, was prepared under the direction of the
candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as
representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all the standards of
excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of
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ABSTRACT

RETENTION OF ACCOMPLISHED VETERAN SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS
by
Russell Brett Hardin

Almost 30 percent of new teachers flee the profession after just three years, and

more than 40 percent leave after 5 years (Allen, 2005). Studies conducted by Borman

and Dowling (2008), Guarino et al. (2006) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003) indicate that

teacher attrition rates are also high in the later years of teaching careers. While these

rates of attrition reflect both public and private school teachers, numerous studies have

found that private schools see higher attrition rates, potentially damaging an independent

school's ability to fulfill its stated mission (Ingersoll, 2002; O'Keefe, 2001; Provasnik &

Dorfman, 2005). While research exists about teacher attrition and retention issues in the

early years (Borman & Dowling, 2008), limited research exists about the factors that

impact retention of veteran teachers. The purpose of this study is to examine a specific

school context in which many successful, veteran, social studies teachers have remained

in the same school setting while teaching the same age groups and to determine why

those teachers have returned to their classrooms each year. The focus of this study is:

What are the factors that keep veteran social studies teachers engaged and excited about

teaching and learning?

To examine why veteran teachers have stayed in a specific school context

teaching the same age groups, I used interviews, informal conversations, and document

analysis to build narratives that reflect on the career paths of six teachers. Each of the six

teachers who participated in this study taught at the same institution for over 15 years and

has at least 20 years as a full-time instructor in the classroom. The qualitative research

methodology of grounded theory provided the most appropriate guidelines and tools to examine this group of veteran teachers. The results of this study indicate that to retain veteran teachers, schools may want to consider providing teachers with substantial autonomy over curricula and actively support teachers in discerning and pursuing their own goals for professional development. Schools that are able to build a learning rich environment for their veteran teachers may be more likely to retain an engaged and successful faculty.

RETENTION OF ACCOMPLISHED VETERAN SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS
by
Russell Brett Hardin

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
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in
the Department of Middle and Secondary Education
in
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I began my teaching career in 1996, full of optimism that many new teachers can

have when they first walk into a classroom. Like many of those new teachers, over time,

the challenges of being in the classroom forced me to adjust my expectations and adapt to

the pressures of mandated curriculum, school administration, colleagues, parents and

students with different learning styles and backgrounds. After working at three different

high schools and one university, I have not only survived, but also still enjoy spending

part of my day in a high school social studies classroom.

As the latest numbers from the National Education Association indicate, I

overcame some large obstacles to still be in the classroom. Almost 30% of new teachers

flee the profession after just 3 years, and more than 40% leave after 5 years (Allen,

2005). Also, as studies on teacher attrition conducted by Borman and Dowling (2008),

Guarino et al. (2006) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003) indicate, teacher attrition rates are

not only high in the early years, but also the later years. While these numbers reflect both

public and private school teachers, numerous studies have found that private schools see

higher attrition rates with the potential to severely damage an independent school's

ability to fulfill its stated mission (Ingersoll, 2002; Keigher & Cross, 2010; O'Keefe,

2001; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). Therefore I am an atypical, veteran, high school

social studies teacher, with no intention of leaving, who still wakes up every day excited

to walk into the classroom. My path to becoming a fully engaged, career long teacher is

full of twists and turns, ups and downs, and shifts in my role in education. Looking back

on my journey, I have reflected on what I can learn from an 18 year path on which I

progressed from novice to experienced educator, the kind of educator that I used to seek out for guidance. In a field where so many professionals leave within 5 years, it would be beneficial to ask those who stick around with successful classrooms a simple question: What makes you stay?

The purpose of this study is to examine the retention of veteran social studies teachers and to determine the factors that have not only kept them in the classroom, but also those that kept them engaged in the process of teaching and learning. Examining the teachers who are still excited about teaching and learning is essential to understanding teacher retention and improving it. Day and Gu (2009) found that even defining what it means to be a veteran teacher can be challenging, and after a review of the literature, they defined veterans as teachers in the later stages of their careers (24 plus years). Day and Gu also discovered that teachers in the late stages of their career can often begin a negative trajectory on how they view their lives in the classroom. Therefore, the focus of this study is teachers who have spent 20 plus years in the classroom. This study also concentrates on teachers of social studies given the fact that statistics indicate that social studies teachers are twice as likely to stay in teaching as compared to teachers in other subject areas (Hunt & Carroll, 2002). To better inform the conversation about retention of veterans, examining a subject area that is more successful in retaining teachers is necessary. Determining what helps veteran social studies teachers stay in the classroom can guide policy in schools and expand the focus from simply supporting social studies teachers past the first 5 years to keeping successful teachers in the classroom for 20 to 30 years.

Statement of the Problem

The value of a veteran professional can be the key to the success of any organization, as they are frequently the keepers of institutional knowledge. Veteran professionals have wisdom borne of years of experience that can provide inspiration and guidance to newer professionals (Kardos et al., 2001). Also, veteran professionals are often the stabilizing force in institutions that are constantly changing. In education, where teachers are managing multiple interactions with students, parents, the school and community, there is a need for a stabilizing wisdom (Kardos et al., 2001). Veteran teachers have years of accumulated content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge based on actual practice, and can offer a valuable perspective on proposed policy changes (Alvy, 2005). As a high school teacher of 18 years, I look back on my early years and marvel at how I was able to find any success at all in the classroom. With a mandated curriculum, mounting pressures of testing, and the challenges of having so many different learning styles in one room I was often in survival mode. I rarely had the time to reflect on what I was doing at any specific moment, much less on what I actually wanted to do the next day. After nearly 2 decades, my ability to reflect while teaching has been fine-tuned, and I have the time and wisdom to think, discuss, and adjust what I am doing in the classroom. The wisdom I now possess comes from a knowledge base built from attending workshops, having conversations with colleagues, taking graduate courses and, of course, interactions with thousands of students. As a result, I am better equipped to help the variety of personalities and learning styles that walk into my classroom every day. My time in the classroom also continues to help me grow both professionally and personally and, as a result, I still want to be in the classroom.

Analysis of studies and statistics from the past 20 years demonstrates that teacher attrition and retention continue to be major problems that individual schools face in the United States (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Hunt & Carroll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Keigher & Cross, 2010). With such high teacher turnover, the cost to the students, schools and community can be significant:

> Using a U.S. Department of Labor formula, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) released a national analysis of teacher attrition costs, which estimated the cost of replacing public school teachers who leave the profession at $2.2 billion per year, and when the cost of replacing teachers who transfer schools is added, that number rises to approximately $4.9 billion per year. (Shockley, Guglielmino, & Watlington, 2006, p. 111)

In a time of major funding challenges, school systems can ill afford to spend such fortunes on the recruitment and hiring of new teachers. Also, while new teachers can be innovative and bring energy to schools, more often, the veteran teachers have the time-tested skills to manage the fluid nature of life in a school and can mentor new teachers (Woods & Weasmer, 2002). Veteran teachers are the mentors for new teachers and key contributors to building vibrant learning communities that support new teachers through their early years (Kardos et al., 2001). Documenting the different paths that successful, veteran, social studies teachers have followed offers insight into what can be done to keep younger teachers in the classroom, which would enrich the entire school community (Woods & Weasmer, 2002).

A critical aspect of all veteran teachers' paths is being able to grow as professionals while staying in the classroom (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Evans, 2002; Kelly,

2006). In studying veteran teachers, it is important to understand how teachers grow throughout their careers. Bell and Gilbert (1994) developed a model of teacher growth, which demonstrates that the highest level of development is when experienced teachers are able to identify their own professional development needs. Kelly's (2006) study of teacher development notes that because teaching is a dynamic profession, teachers must be active participants in their own learning and growth. Kardos et al (2001) found that if teachers have influence over their own practice, they are committed to continually renewing their own practice and professional growth. Therefore, for veteran teachers to continue to grow, they need to have self-awareness of their needs and the necessary support to pursue those needs (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Evans, 2002; Kelly, 2006). This approach means that the schools that are able to help teachers continue to find meaning and growth in the classroom have a much better chance at retaining their veteran teachers (Day & Gu, 2009; Rosenholtz, 1991). The success stories of schools with engaged, veteran social studies teachers have the potential to highlight what is needed to support teacher growth in the classroom. These narratives can then play a role in building the necessary support network for new teachers.

While there is extensive research about teacher attrition and retention issues in the early years (Borman & Dowling, 2008), there is limited research into the factors that can create successful veteran teachers. Much of the research into teacher attrition and retention is also quantitative, and through a variety of surveys, the research literature shows general categories about the reasons teachers leave education. The conclusions are somewhat predictable: changes in life situation, low compensation, lack of administrative support, little impact on school policy and challenging students (Borman & Dowling,

2008; DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Ingersoll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Keigher & Cross, 2010; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005; Torres, 2011). There is a clear need to move beyond why new teachers leave and determine why veteran teachers stay, what resources help them stay, how they manage the challenges of the classroom, and what support matters most to them. To prevent teaching from becoming a revolving door profession with limited institutional knowledge, practitioners and policy makers need to know what veteran teachers desire and need to continue to develop as teachers and as learners. With an aging population and a steady decline in the numbers of veteran teachers (Ingersoll, 2002), schools must provide a platform for veteran educators to impart their wisdom before they leave teaching. When compared to other professions, specifically nursing, teachers retire or leave education earlier in their lives – long before health would dictate the need to retire (Borman & Dowling, 2008). This loss impacts the schools, students, and their communities (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). In an age in which fewer teachers are finding education worthy of a lifetime commitment (Borman & Dowling, 2008), schools and communities need help finding ways to retain their best and brightest educators.

Purpose of the Study

As with any qualitative study, the researcher's personal journey will have an impact on the study selected and the course of the study (LeCompte, 2000). As a veteran high school teacher myself, my own story about staying in the classroom led to me to conduct this study. Initially, like many young teachers, I almost permanently left the classroom. After 10 years of successful teaching, I walked away from it, disillusioned, frustrated, and a bit lost. I had entered the field full of energy and committed to being a

lifelong educator. After the inevitable struggles associated with a profession that lacks a clear identity in the workplace, I was wearied by battles over curriculum, student discipline, and unrealistic expectations of teachers as superhumans who should overcome all student inequities. After two years away from the classroom, working solely with adults, I missed being part of a school community and returned to teaching, but not to the school environment I had left. I returned to a school that embraces a teacher-driven curriculum where the teacher determines the social studies content to be taught. This move to a school that allows me to be the primary decision-maker about what happens in my classroom has been life affirming for me as a teacher and professional. A review of the research on teacher retention shows that a key factor in retaining teachers is having some autonomy over what is taught (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Certo & Fox, 2002; Day & Gu, 2009; Guarino et al., 2006; Rosenholtz, 1991). Five years later, after returning to the classroom, my personal path has led me to the same conclusion about teacher-driven curriculum. I have rediscovered all of the reasons I first entered education, and I no longer feel any pull to leave the classroom. The joy I feel from walking into a classroom sustains me in ways I never thought possible when I walked away 8 years ago. In a school where what happens in the classroom is ultimately my responsibility, I am reminded on a daily basis that I am the professional I thought I was going to be when I started teaching. While daily success is never guaranteed in the classroom, I am now part of a community of teachers that embraces and honors life in the classroom, and we find ways to learn every day. My journey to this point in my career has raised new questions: What is it about my current school environment that rejuvenated me? Is it just the freedom I have to write my curriculum? Is it the administrative support? The committed

faculty? The students? The level of parental involvement? The absence of high-stakes testing? Discerning the answers to these questions is the driving force behind the subject of my dissertation.

The purpose of this study is to examine a specific private school context in which many successful, veteran, social studies teachers have remained in the same school setting, teaching the same age group, and to determine why those teachers return with zest each year. A foundational layer to any successful school is retaining its best teachers, therefore, education leaders must discover what has made those teachers stay in the classroom and what helps them continue to grow as professionals. The focus of this study is: What are the factors that keep veteran, social studies teachers engaged and excited about teaching and learning? To answer this question, the following research questions are embedded in this study:

What are the benefits of social studies teachers being primarily responsible for their own curriculum?

What role, if any, does social studies curriculum play in supporting teacher development?

What are the professional development needs of veteran social studies teachers?

How can a school support veteran social studies teachers' professional development?

Theoretical Framework

Given that the list of potential reasons for why some teachers stay engaged and excited by teaching is numerous, to build a theory, I must be open to analyzing every interaction in a school context. Therefore, I have chosen social constructionism and

symbolic interactionism for my theoretical framework, as they support a study of how teachers make sense of their individual realities in a school. Social constructionism and symbolic interactionism also reflect my view of how knowledge is constructed in the classroom and support a micro study where the focus is teachers' stories. As Embree (2009) notes, social constructionism recognizes the significance of every interaction on constructing knowledge, and as Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine (2001) point out, symbolic interactionism provides insight into the processes teachers experience as they interact with their students and school. A qualitative approach with a social constructionist framework provides the support needed to determine why veterans stay and develop as teachers and individuals.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism has its immediate origin in *The Social Construction of Reality* by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, but it is derived from the work of Alfred Schutz and Edmund Husserl (Embree, 2009). Social constructionism recognizes that taken-for-granted realities are developed from interactions between and among social agents, which means reality is not some objectifiable truth waiting to be uncovered through positivistic scientific inquiry, but rather that multiple realities compete for truth and legitimacy (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). This means our realties are constructed through social processes in which "meanings are negotiated, consensus formed, and contestation is possible. Such a view shows us how meanings that are produced and reproduced on an ongoing basis create structures that are both stable and yet open to change as interactions evolve over time" (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p. 174). This process of evolving realities accurately reflects the lives of teachers. In any specific moment of

time, we have set realities, but as we all move through our careers in education, our

original realities about curriculum, schools and students can slowly shift to the point

where some of the original realities of one generation look nothing like the realities of the

next generation. These realities are what form the basis of everyone's knowledge of the

world and are at the core of what social constructionists believe. Every day, students and

teachers are actively engaging with each other and the world around them, and this

process of constructing knowledge is what a qualitative researcher strives to understand

(Hurby, 2001). The social relationships in classrooms are complicated as each social

interaction and the resulting experience impacts our beliefs and understandings of the

world around us, while in turn the beliefs we carry with us to each interaction will

influence the interaction (Liebruks, 2001). Social constuctionism's perspective on social

interactions not only clarifies how we construct the meaning of reality, but also that there

can be multiple sources of reality, as we build our realities through interactions with

people and institutions. In turn, these interactions create the institutions and thereby

influence how people interpret the interactions and the institution.

    While manipulatives and real world examples can be basic tenets in many

classrooms, careful use of language is a key element in most classrooms. Social

constructionism recognizes the role of all three in the process of constructing knowledge.

As Hurby (2001) discusses:

> Centrally important to Berger and Luckmann's framework is the use of language as
>
> a sign system that allows the objectification of subjective meanings as well as the
>
> internalization (and subjectification) of social meanings. Moreover, the capacity of
>
> language to signify themes that span, directly or analogically, various spatial,

temporal, causal, and conceptual domains frees subjectivity from the immediacy of

the embodied here and now to entertain more distant or abstract spheres of

meaning. This detachability is what allows for externalization and the transference

from subjective meanings to objective meanings and back again (p. 52).

Fairhurst and Grant (2010) also note the importance of communication in the

construction of knowledge and that the interaction of people with words and objects is

part of what helps us build our realities. In any classroom observation or interview with a

teacher, the language and manipulatives that the teacher uses will become a focal point,

and every effective teacher has a long list of stories in which the right phrase or example

can provide the light bulb moment to help a student comprehend a new concept or idea.

Social constructionism is the epistemology that not only explains this general process, but

it also explains the key details of knowledge forming–something that concerns every

educator.

Because teachers work in an environment full of interactions with students,

parents, colleagues, schools, and the community at large, social constructionism is the

epistemology that best explains their professional experience and growth. Social

constructionists believe we construct meaning from the people and objects we encounter

in the world around us (Crotty, 2005). Crotty's (2005) description of social

constructionism also can be used to describe the process of teaching and learning. As

educators, we are constantly interacting with people and objects, trying to construct

meaning and explain the experience to others. What makes teaching so exciting is that,

even as we are explaining the meaning we have constructed, we are making a new

meaning with our students. This process can be fluid, as a person's interpretation one

day can change the next day when more information becomes available or a different

group of students is in the room. While most teachers teach universal truths that students

must know for the next test, we also must be open to changing these truths to reflect new

scholarship, new experiences or new political realities. This process is clearly social

constructionist, and as Crotty (2005) describes it, "Objectivity and subjectivity need to be

brought together and held together indissolubly. Constructionism does precisely that" (p.

44). Educators must be prepared to teach objective realities in a subjective environment,

and the only way to balance these two forces is to construct meaning that addresses both

forces, and in the end, also creates an entirely different reality for the teacher and

students. Throughout a teacher's and student's time in school they are reframing their

realities, developing new theories, evaluating the theory and then eventually creating a

new theoretical outlook. This process of creating knowledge must be identified and

analyzed when researching what occurs in a classroom and school. By analyzing this

process, insight can be provided into what can engage a veteran teacher who is

constructing knowledge with students year in and year out.

To answer questions related to veteran teachers' experiences, it is necessary to

study each individual educator with the recognition that each teacher has constructed his

or her own reality in the school. Therefore to determine what teachers collectively need,

it is first necessary to understand each individual experience and build narratives around

those experiences that can accurately describe how each teacher has constructed

knowledge over his or her career. Social constructionism, which considers knowledge

that is developed among people rather than within an individual, is best suited for such

analysis. Also, to create a picture of any classroom, a researcher must be able to offer

insight into how the teacher teaches and how the students learn. In any classroom, a teacher is building a model for the students to use, and the teacher recognizes that each student will have some individual twist on that model as the student brings his or her own individual realities to bear on the learning process.   This customization by students and teachers does not preclude the class or teacher from having distinct agreed upon facts; it just means that when learning occurs in a school, the learning is socially constructed, and is part of a creative interpretation process that is carried out through student-to-student, teacher-to-student and teacher-to-teacher interactions (Liebruks, 2001). In the end, there will be some agreement about what everyone is learning, and it is this process that can continue to make teaching exciting and challenging. Teachers must identify their students' realities to help them manage the new information so that the students can create a new, agreed upon reality. To effectively research this process, there must be an appreciation for how knowledge is created in a classroom. As Hurby (2001) notes, social constructionism indicates that the models we create help us manage the world, possibly even improve our condition, and this is how our subjective understandings of our world can move to the objective realities that guide our actions. This process is exactly what happens in schools across the country and potentially why some veteran teachers return to the classroom every year.

For qualitative research in education to be effective, it should be conducted from a social constructionist perspective, as social constructionism allows for researchers to look at all of the variables and the subsequent interactions to then interpret what has happened.

Perhaps the most generative idea emerging from the constructionist dialogues is

that what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human

> relationships. What we take to be true as opposed to false, objective as opposed to subjective, scientific as opposed to mythological, rational as opposed to irrational, moral as opposed to immoral is brought into being through historically and culturally situated social processes. (Gergen, 2010, p. 109)

Social constructionism allows for the freedom to build new perspectives, which creates the space for researchers to analyze the many forces influencing what is happening in the classroom. Any positivistic perspective on a classroom can cause researchers to focus on one truth and end up missing the fact that although each lesson can be taught and interpreted in multiple ways, it can still conclude with everyone in the classroom sharing a similar reality about what just happened. We all construct knowledge when we engage the world around us, and the trick for any researcher is to be able to break down the experience and put into context how it is that we interpret our world and, amazingly, come up with similar perspectives on it (Gergen, 2010). This ability to tie together individual realities of veteran social studies teachers to describe a common experience is how this research can take the stories of different teachers, tie together the common threads and then propose approaches schools could use to retain their veteran teachers.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism allows for researchers to design the appropriate research study to understand the theoretical process teachers undergo in designing curriculum. As Sandstrom et al. (2001) notes, a key premise of symbolic interactionism is that people are conscious and self-reflexive beings who shape their own behavior. Humans are "purposive creatures who act in and toward situations" (Sandstrom, 2001, p. 219). Symbolic interactionism explains that one's behavior is a response to specific contexts,

structures, and people. Therefore, to understand behavior, the researcher should not only develop an understanding of his or her subjects, but also how that person relates to and understands the structures of his or her community (Gusfield, 2003). This process is described by Snow (2001):

> When confronted with the challenge of articulating the core premises of symbolic interactionism, scholars generally refer, almost in the fashion of liturgical recitation, to Herbert Blumer's conceptual distillation of the perspective into three core principles: (1) that people act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings they have for them; (2) that these meanings are derived through social interaction with others; and (3) that these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds. (p. 367)

These principles offer researchers an approach to study the path teachers take to become quality educators to help their students construct knowledge. More specifically, symbolic interactionism can ask the key questions about education: What does preparing for class mean to a teacher? What tools and structures do they use? What does it mean to reflect on one's practice? How does the structure of the school, the background of the students and the level of community involvement impact what teachers do in the classroom? What interactions impact teachers positively and keep them coming back to the classroom? These questions do not have universal answers, but how each teacher answers these questions can shed light on why teachers enjoy preparing for class and what engages teachers year in and year out. As Sandstrom et al. (2001) describes it, "Our behavior then, is not determined by the stimuli or objects we confront in our

environment. Rather, it is built up and constructed, based on which stimuli and objects

we take into account and how we define them" (p. 218). The experiences, struggles,

needs, and hopes of teachers can often be misunderstood by researchers who design

studies that try to isolate and control the variables in a classroom. Symbolic

interactionism recognizes that as every individual plans, sets goals and interacts, he or

she is also actively shaping his or her identity and behavior (Sandstrom et al., 2001). As

Snow (2001) notes, people must be able to interact to have a context in which to

understand their world, and our actions are based on our perceptions of the world and

how we are able to interact in it. Symbolic interactionism highlights that any study of a

teacher must include a discussion of the school, its students, its community, and, more

important, how each teacher perceives his or her role in the school and community. No

interaction occurs without preconceived notions impacting what happens, and how

schools manage this impact requires researchers to develop a broad perspective about

what they observe.

Besides interactions, symbols in schools also matter and carry with them implicit

and explicit meanings that can impact how teachers feel about their job. This role of

symbols is a fundamental part of symbolic interactionism (Dingwell, 2001).

In the course of action, then, I produce a symbol that I expect you to read in a

particular way, based on my knowledge of the symbolic system and my empathic

understanding of your position. You similarly construct your reading of the

symbol and response to it, based on your empathic understanding of my probable

intentions. Regardless of my intent, I learn what my use of the symbol means in

practice from my observation of your response, the "looking glass self." … This

system is a social phenomenon, something that we learn in the course of

socialization. (Dingwell, 2001, p. 238-239)

Historically, schools have been a source of socialization, therefore, understanding how

and why socialization occurs must be a consideration when studying schools (Urban &

Wagoner, 2004). Schools, like most institutions, have conscious and unconscious

structures and symbols that are created to guide the students and teachers. Actions as

simple as when and where to schedule meetings or the language used to describe the

work in a school impact how teachers view their work. Simple or complex, these actions

are a way to not only socialize the students and teachers, but also to remind everyone that

they are a part of a larger structure. The resulting actions and interpretations of structures

and symbols can vary by person, and symbolic interactionism provides the theoretical

basis to varying interpretations (Snow, 2001). Symbolic interactionism also provides the

theoretical framework to explain how individual actions and interactions within specific

structures can create collective behavior, which is a form of socialization (Snow, 2001).

Socialization is a goal of many schools, and the complexity with which any broader

curricular goals impact a single classroom teacher can be understood through in-depth

applications of symbolic interactionism. While humans are not passive by nature, we can

be limited by cultural and social factors and these limitations can cause parts of our lives

to become routinized (Snow, 2001). These routines are not always noticed until a change

in an aspect of the institution occurs, which forces a reevaluation of the structure and

change can happen (Snow, 2001). Every school can build its own set of routines,

traditions and mandated curriculum that can make the school unique. How to manage

these routines is part of any veteran teacher's career and it is these routines and changes

that are the focus of much of education research. The use of symbolic interactionism gives the researcher the necessary theoretical basis to focus on a school's routines and the impact of possible changes to routines on teachers.

Symbolic interactionism provides the researcher with many tools when entering a school. One such tool guides the researcher to take the role of every subject in the study (Gusfield, 2003).

> Symbolic interactionists hold firstly that the researcher needs to explicate the process by which meaning is developed and the nature of meanings that are represented in interactions between or among human beings, and second that these meanings are understood only through interpretation. (Jeon, 2004, p. 250)

Who we are in our world is always evolving, and our definition of self is going to be significantly impacted by interactions and our understandings of the interactions (Jeon, 2004). This constant and interdependent change means that researchers must not only determine the many forces at play in an interaction, but they must also discover each individual's perception of the interaction. Part of what happens in every interaction is not only a response to stimuli, but is also influenced by the internal conversations we all have in our heads before and after the interaction (Jeon, 2004). Because schools are full of interactions a researcher must not only be cognizant of those conversations, but must also create ways for teachers to share those internal conversations. Symbolic interactionism provides the framework to study schools that are consistently constructing knowledge in response to stimuli and internal conversations. Symbolic interactionism provides the necessary tools to study the twists and turns of any veteran teacher's career path.

Overview of the Study

To examine why veteran social studies teachers have stayed in a specific school context teaching the same age group, I spent 10 months with six selected teachers at an independent school in a large, southern city in the United States. I used interviews, informal conversations, and document analysis to build narratives that reflect on the career paths of each teacher. After analyzing each teacher's story, I constructed a theory that links the essential factors that allowed each teacher to develop while staying in the classroom.

Participants

Each of the six teachers selected for this study have taught at the same institution for over 15 years and have at least 20 years as a full-time instructor in the classroom. Three of the teachers work in the elementary school, two in the junior high, and one in the high school. In addition to having extended tenure at the same school, each teacher has the primary responsibility of designing and implementing the social studies curriculum in his or her room. Also, all six teachers are recognized by the school community and administration as being successful educators sought out by parents and students who hope to have them during their time at the K-12 school. Because this school does not have formal evaluations or high-stakes testing, which may be influential factors in retention, I used interviews with school administrators to define who is a successful teacher. Selection of the six teachers was also based upon availability and variability in his or her career experiences. Some teachers have spent almost their entire careers in one school context, while other teachers started in other schools and ended up at this specific school. The variety in past experiences and grade levels taught provide a

broader range of data that strengthens the credibility of the study (Anderson & West, 1995).

Data Collection and Analysis

All participants had an initial interview during which they discussed their career paths, the reasons they started to teach, and why they continue to teach (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The teachers also talked about how their teaching and professional development goals evolved over their careers and whether there were moments when they questioned their decision to stay in the classroom. Effective interviews helped me learn more about the nuances of what each teacher believes about his or her teaching and what he or she gains from staying in the classroom (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I did not rely on just one method. As Cunningham (2006) points out, it is important to tie individual interviews to document analysis. Once I was familiar with each teacher's story, I asked each participant to provide at least three documents detailing lessons or communications with the community from his or her early years to compare with what the teacher uses today. By conducting three interviews and comparing and contrasting the interviews with analysis of multiple documents, I was able to verify the data provided by each teacher to develop a picture of how he or she has changed over the years and what aspects of his or her job continue to sustain him or her.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note that the use of different research methods to confirm the validity of data is a major strategy used by qualitative researchers. Besides using multiple research methods, it is also necessary to be transparent about how the data was analyzed, therefore, all data were carefully documented and included in the final analysis (Freeman et al., 2007). I used grounded theory as the guiding methodology by

transcribing each interview and memoing throughout to find common categories of experience that guided each subsequent interview (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). Over the course of the study, I was able to build themes that connected the professional lives of the six teachers. All conclusions of this study were based solely on analysis from the narratives and documents of the six teachers and these conclusions are a reflection of the teachers' beliefs about why they have stayed in the classroom.

Significance of the Study

This study's aim is to document how six veteran social studies teachers have managed to develop professionally, stay continually engaged by the complexities of working with children, and are able to do so while staying in the classroom. Veteran teachers need a way to share their voice, in their communities and to develop without having to leave the classroom to find the next challenge or opportunity for growth. This study will hopefully spur more research toward documenting what supports veteran teachers in the classroom and inform schools about strategies to retain their own veteran teachers.

It has been well documented that teaching is a profession that loses far too many of its young educators (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Hunt & Carroll, 2002; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Keigher & Cross, 2010). As noted above, this attrition has raised many valid questions about why teachers leave in droves, but there are other important questions. We must consider a broader perspective on teaching as a career and ask what sustains our veteran teachers. As Borman and Dowling (2008) note,

> Beyond personal and family factors that can affect new teachers' career decisions, another reason new teachers leave is that teaching, as a profession, has been slow

to develop a systematic way to induct beginners gradually into a highly complex

job. (p. 398)

Teaching the same concepts to the same age group for years has the potential to be

repetitive and lack the challenges most professionals crave. After 18 years in the

classroom, I have seen how rare it is for someone at my stage to be motivated about and

by life in the classroom. Since there are other teachers like me, this study provides them

the opportunity to communicate what it is about their experience in classrooms and in the

school that has kept them coming back.

The use of qualitative methods is also significant. While there is obvious value in

quantitative studies that use surveys to gain broad insight into teacher attrition,

quantitative studies cannot dig deeper to discover the personal success stories of veteran

teachers. By interviewing and documenting the lives of six teachers, this study gives a

small voice to the teachers that are rarely studied. The current era of reform has

significantly diminished the autonomy many teachers have in the classroom, and this

study analyzes how important teacher-driven curriculum is to teachers' professional and

personal development. This study is not only a reflection of my personal journey, but it

is also a study that uses the lessons of six veteran, social studies educators as a guide for

schools to keep their best and brightest teachers in the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As is the case with most professions, many educators are required to receive ongoing education if they want to maintain certification. Therefore, ongoing professional development is an important part of any public or independent school system, which must offer substantive, educational opportunities to teachers to help them grow as professionals. As the purpose of this study is to examine why successful veteran social studies teachers have remained in the same school setting, teaching the same age groups, I first review the literature on teacher development. The research into teacher development provides insight into teachers' needs as they move through their careers. After a discussion of teacher development, I then move to an analysis of the emerging research on the impact of limiting teacher autonomy through standardized curriculum and high-stakes testing. In studying veteran teachers it is critical to understand how important it is for them to have autonomy over their curriculum. I will then review the research into teacher attrition and retention and conclude with a discussion of institutional factors that support retention of veteran classroom teachers. Together these four areas of the literature can create a picture of how teachers develop, the impact of the current pressures caused by the standardization of curriculum, the key factors that influence teacher retention, and, finally, how some specific schools retain their veteran teachers. The literature sources in this review include studies based on public and private schools, as there is a paucity of literature on private schools alone, and the challenge of retention of veteran teachers impacts both types of schools.

Professional Development of Teachers

To determine the best ways to support teachers, researchers must analyze how teachers develop intellectually, how they form the knowledge that guides their teaching, and how they see themselves as learners. A brief discussion about the development of adults helps inform this issue. As Torff and Sternberg (1998) point out,

> because certain abilities develop over the life span, and because the cultural contexts of abilities keep changing, attaining a specific body of knowledge is less important than the ability to learn. In a nutshell, the alternative model encourages people not to "get an education" but "stay in education." (p.110)

This development fits the life of a teacher, who is constantly in an academic environment and is required to seek out educational opportunities. Teaching is a profession full of variables with no one way to teach or learn, which means teachers must develop a variety of teaching strategies. Torff and Sternberg (1998) would define this process as an example of practical intelligence. Practical intelligence is built over the years and includes such ideas as common sense and problem solving, which are key parts of teaching (Torff and Sternberg, 1998). The problem is that even though teachers can build a wealth of practical intelligence over the years, they could still encounter a new problem or an old one with a unique twist. Because teaching is fluid, teachers' development is fluid as well and cannot be easily generalized into categories for which everyone who has taught for 4 years would have the same needs. Therefore, there is a need to create learning opportunities that address the many potential issues that arise in classrooms.

As Torff and Sternberg (1998) note, as adults develop, they learn a wide variety of coping skills to understand how to work with others, solve everyday problems and

make important life decisions that could never be taught in school. This type of informal knowledge is called tacit knowledge, and in a profession like teaching, where so much of the day requires thinking while working, with little time to research the best response, tacit knowledge must be a core component of any teacher's career. Building this tacit knowledge is an important part of the development of teachers, and it is imperative that educators have opportunities to work together to discuss, learn and build a larger base of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge and practical intelligence are important aspects of any job, and both must be considered when looking at teaching.

Another important part of adults' development is how they are influenced by the onslaught of cultural forces they encounter such as race, class, gender, and others' expectations (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999). These cultural forces are all important factors for teachers, as they are constantly being watched and judged by their students, the parents, the community, and their supervisors. Teaching is a profession that requires educators to interact with a wide range of people, and as Caffarella and Merriam (1999) note, these socio-cultural factors must be considered when building a model of adult development. Therefore, in planning ongoing educational opportunities for teachers, issues such as expectations, race, and gender of the teacher and the teacher's students must be taken into account. bell hooks (1994) has written extensively about the need of teachers to be responsive to their audience.

> To teach in varied communities not only our paradigms must shift but also the way we think, write, speak. The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself. (bell hooks, 1994, p. 11)

There cannot be one prescribed way to handle every classroom, and the ability to expand a teacher's practical intelligence requires teachers to be skilled at adjusting on a moment's notice.

This brief discussion of issues to consider when analyzing adult development engenders more questions that need to be answered in the dialogue about teacher development. How do teachers incorporate expectations into their development? What cultural factors influence teachers' ability to be successful? And, most importantly, once in the classroom, how do teachers construct knowledge and learn? While general answers to each of these questions can be inferred from research into adult development, researchers must also consider the context of teaching in order to create a clearer picture of how teachers develop and the best ways to structure ongoing learning opportunities for contemporary educators.

While acknowledging the general developmental issues encountered by adults is helpful, building a specific model of how teachers develop throughout their careers is more relevant. Understanding teacher development is critical to understanding the factors that influence veteran teachers and can help schools build the support networks needed to retain their veteran teachers. There has been some research into what is meant by teacher development and, while there is still debate over definitions, researchers have begun to lay out how teachers' needs change during their careers. Evans (2002) provides useful definitions as the starting point in discussing teacher development. She defines teacher development as "the process whereby teachers' professionality and/or professionalism may be considered to be enhanced" (Evans 2002, p. 131). According to Evans, professionality is "an ideology-, attitudinally-, intellectually- and

epistemologically-based stance on the part of an individual, in relation to the practice of

the profession to which s/he belongs, and which influences her/his professional practice"

(p. 130). Evans contrasts professionality with professionalism, which she defines as the

status-related aspects of a teachers' work compared to the status of other professions in

the community. These two definitions focus on development as a process that can

continue or be completed. Teacher development, like adult development, can be fluid.

Evans also notes that teachers are influenced by a variety of sources, and that sometimes

the process of enhancing a teacher's professionality can fail. In the efforts to influence a

teachers' professionality, Evans notes that there are two basic elements involved:

functional development, which is when a teacher's performance in the classroom is

improved, and attitudinal development, which is when a teacher's attitudes about work

are changed (Evans 2002). Functional development is further divided into procedural

and productive. Procedural refers to the procedures that teachers use in the classroom,

and productive refers to how much teachers are able to produce or do at work (Evans,

2002). One unique aspect of Evans's (2002) definition of teacher development is that the

development must be positive, therefore, any process in which a teacher may become

demotivated is not considered development, as development means moving towards

expertise. Evans (2002) also emphasizes, like Caffarella and Merriam (1999), that

cultural or role changes for teachers can have a strong influence on development.

> Once again, within my over-arching definition of teacher development, I define
>
> each of these. Role development is: *the process whereby the accepted*
>
> *parameters, remits and responsibilities of specific recognized specialist*
>
> *professional roles may be redefined and/or modified* and I define cultural

development as: *the process whereby teachers' professional culture is redefined and/or modified.* (Evans, 2002, p. 132)

The focus of these definitions is how teachers change over their careers and where that change may manifest: teaching procedures, attitudes, roles, culture, and of course, production. While it is important to have clear definitions, all of these aspects of a teacher's development can occur simultaneously, which is why it is difficult to quantify how teachers develop and what their needs may be at any particular moment in their careers.

Teacher Learning

Kelly (2006), recognizing the difficulty to quantify development, builds on Evans's (2002) definitions of teacher development and teacher professionality by focusing on the process of teacher learning and knowing. Kelly (2006) notes the fluid nature of teaching by describing teacher learning as a dynamic process in which teachers are constantly constructing and reconstructing professional knowledge using experience, research, and collaborative actions of teachers and students. Kelly (2006) and Lortie's (1975/2002) studies found that a teacher's work is an important part of his or her identity, and that it can influence a teacher's approach to learning and development. Kelly's (2006) study, which offers a socio-cultural perspective on teaching, points to the importance of teachers identifying closely with their schools and community. If teachers identify themselves as integral to a school in which they are encouraged to think, then teachers will be fully engaged in their own learning and committed to learning and knowing. Lortie's (1975/2002) extensive study of almost 100 teachers in the Boston, Massachusetts area found that, because teaching can be isolating, teachers often

developed their own identities based on life in the classroom and a constant struggle to have control over their workplace. Teachers' identities can largely be based on self-assessment, and the impact of a teacher's own definition of success must be acknowledged in any study of teacher development. Therefore, for any learning experience to be effective for teachers, it must consider how teachers identify with their jobs and their schools (Kelly, 2006). Teachers' knowledge base will be influenced by their schools, communities, and their own assessments of how they fit into those schools and communities (Rosenholtz, 1991). Thus, teachers need ways to engage with their specific surroundings in order for them to be successful in their schools. Kelly (2006) describes what this can mean for a teacher:

> Teachers' identities are neither located entirely with the individual nor entirely a product of others and the social setting. They can be regarded as the ways in which practitioners see themselves in response to the actions of others towards them; that is they are constantly changing outcomes of the iteration between how practitioners are constructed by others, and how they construct themselves, in and away from social situations. (p. 513)

For a teacher to transition from novice to expert, he or she will need to engage in activities that enhance professionality and help discern his or her identity while continuing to learn in the dynamic world of education within the context of his or her individual school and classroom.

Bell and Gilbert (1994) build a model that dovetails with Evans's (2002) view of teacher development and Kelly's (2006) view of teacher learning. Bell and Gilbert (1994) conducted a 3-year research project on teacher development of science teachers in

New Zealand and discovered, that over time, teachers' needs change. As a result of the

dynamic process of teaching, teacher development can be broken down into three unique

aspects, each with three stages. The first aspect is social development, which looks at

how teachers develop their ability to work with other educators, while the second aspect,

professional development, is how teachers move from accepting that there may be a

problem in their teaching to actively seeking out professional development opportunities

that will improve their teaching. The third is personal development, which looks at how

teachers feel about their jobs and ability to succeed in their jobs (Bell & Gilbert, 1994).

An important aspect of the model is that all three features can interact with each other

throughout the teacher's career, as there is no clear step-by-step process in teacher

development (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). Below is a representation of their model.

Social Development	Professional Development	Personal Development
Social #1: Seeing isolation as problematic	Professional #1: Trying out new activities	Personal #1: Accepting an aspect of teaching is problematic
•Social #2: Valuing collaborative ways of working	•Professional #2: Development of ideas and classroom practice	•Personal #2: Dealing with restraints
•Social #3 Initiating collaborative ways of working	•Professional#3: Initiating other development activities	•Personal #3: Feeling empowered

Figure 1. An overview of the teacher development (Bell & Gilbert, 1994, p. 485)

This model is compatible with Kelly's (2006) idea of teacher learning being dynamic,

and that, because there is no clear path, teachers must be active learners to be successful.

Using Bell and Gilbert's (1994) model, the height of teacher development is when

teachers are able to identify their own needs from professional development activities,

feel empowered, and find collaborative ways of working (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). For

Evans (2002), this stage would mean the teacher is enhancing his or her professionality by working on process and production, and it would be at this point that teachers could clearly articulate what they need to support their work in the classroom.

Teachers having the time and space to reflect on their own teaching and learning is a key support that helps them effectively identify their professional development needs (Leat, 1999). Leat's (1999) study of why a successful program occasionally is not implemented found that if teachers are not given the space and support to reflect on new ideas, they will not change how they teach. Leat agrees with much of the previous research discussed as he views teacher development as being dependent upon interconnected forces and believes that, for new ideas to be implemented, all of those forces must be taken into consideration (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Evans, 2002; Kelly, 2006). Leat describes teaching as being full of complexities and states that as teachers develop, they are able to narrow the complexity and acquire a better sense of what it means for them to be effective teachers. This explanation meshes well with Bell and Gilbert's (1994) model in which experienced teachers are able to verbalize their needs, but newer teachers are only aware of a problem. This awareness is an important aspect of teacher development because it points out that novice teachers are less likely to be able to identify their professional development needs, while experienced teachers can express what they need. Leat (1999) also notes that teacher development is complicated by several interconnected types of teacher knowledge, such as teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and student developmental knowledge, all of which must be used to teach. Leat bases his conclusions on his analysis of why promising curriculum innovations, specifically *Thinking Skills* programs in Great Britain, neither flourish nor

remain in the schools in which they are originally successful. As Leat discusses, for any given lesson, teachers must know the content, understand how their students learn, have a sense of the appropriate pedagogy, know their own style, and manage all of these parts in a way that engages the students. After analysis of in-depth interviews with novice and expert teachers using a new curriculum innovation, Leat (1999) found that for any in-service to be effective, all aspects of a teacher's job must be addressed, and teachers need the time and space to reflect while implementing the new ideas.

In addition to the importance of teachers using reflection in their practice, recognizing teachers' preexisting beliefs about teaching and learning is essential to supporting teacher development (Tillema, 1994). Tillema's (1994) study, which used a pre-test and post-test experimental model with 146 teachers who were part of a five-week workshop, found that if workshop leaders are aware of teachers' beliefs and backgrounds before a workshop, the teachers' learning experience can be much more successful. While it can be difficult to know before a class begins where one's students come from, this study supports the idea that teacher development is a process, and teachers can come to a workshop or an in-service with preformed beliefs about teaching. Therefore, for teachers to learn effectively, it is necessary to bridge the gap between teachers' preexisting beliefs and any new knowledge about teaching so that teachers can move forward without feeling the need to reject the lessons from past experiences (Guskey, 1986; Tillema, 1994). Guskey's (1986) confirms the need for teachers to have time to apply new knowledge in the classroom and see how it impacts learning outcomes before their perspective on teaching can change. Another way to bridge the gap is to build a community of teachers who work together toward a common goal and have time to

reflect as a group on what they are learning (Rivero, 2006). This idea is a reoccurring theme in the research into teacher development. Teachers need a community built upon mutual respect for each other's preexisting beliefs (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Kelly, 2006; Rivero, 2006; Ross, 1994; Tillema, 1994). Tillema (1994) notes that teaching knowledge-building does not mean replacing previous beliefs but is more of a restructuring and fine-tuning of a teacher's knowledge and belief structure. This approach supports Torff and Sternberg's (1998) definition of tacit knowledge. Once teachers have been in the classroom for a while, they develop their own ideas about what does and does not work. This tacit knowledge becomes the base of their beliefs about education, and as Tillema's (1994) study points out, for in-services to be effective, this base must be discovered and connected to the new ideas being taught.

Effective Professional Development

When considering teacher development, it is also important to know what the research indicates are effective types of professional development. Rathgen's (2006) study, in which she conducted six extensive interviews with five middle school teachers in Great Britain who had participated in research in their classroom, found that being involved in research could have an enormous impact on a teacher's professional learning. Participating in classroom-based research can help build the bridge between theory and practice that so many researchers regard to as a key for educators to improve their practice (Rathgen, 2006). This teacher development or professional growth occurs because the teachers are now an active part of building theory. The research process also encourages teachers to be reflective, as they have to explain their actions to someone else, therefore, the teachers engage in productive self-evaluation (Rathgen, 2006). In fact,

having time to reflect and work with colleagues is a key part of Bell and Gilbert's (1994) model, and participating in research gives teachers that kind of time. Also, as Labaree (2004) discusses, many teachers are not trained in research; therefore, the experience of working with a researcher can be a valuable opportunity. Obviously, not all teachers would be able to have such an opportunity, but Rathgen's (2006) study shows that some key issues, like connecting theory and practice, having time to reflect, and connecting to what is happening in the classroom, can be addressed if teachers are given the chance to be active participants in the research.

While Rathgen's (2006) research highlights the benefits of teachers being active participants in professional development through hands-on research, Tillema, Dejong and Mathijssen (1990) offer insights into how teachers learn when participating in professional development opportunities. Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen researched what might be the most effective professional development format by comparing conceptual learning, in which teachers attend workshops or lectures, with experience-based learning, in which teachers are provided materials that they quickly try to incorporate into the classroom. They concluded that most teachers prefer conceptual learning. This finding is rather surprising because much of what teachers initially learn is actually experience-based from being on the job in their classrooms. What Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen (1990) found is that teachers actually prefer conceptual-based in-services, in which they are introduced to new information, provided time to reflect on the information, and then build their own conceptual understanding of the material based on their preexisting beliefs. Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen did note that, along with the concepts, teachers want the appropriate teaching materials and time to implement and

reflect. The desire for opportunities to reflect on one's teaching and think about the bigger picture is a universal theme throughout the research (Kelly, 2006; Ross, 1994; Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen, 1990). The need of teachers to reflect on their work makes sense, as during a school year, there are few opportunities for teachers to work together and develop theories about their practice. For teachers to continue to grow, they need time to try the new idea, reflect, and then meet with their colleagues to share their experiences (Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen, 1990).

Research by Ross (1994) expands on Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen's (1990) work, as he studied the impact of cooperative learning on teachers' efficacy. In his study, he found that if teachers are given the opportunity to choose the lesson, implement it, and return to reflect on the lesson, the material taught in the original workshop would have a much larger impact. Interestingly, Ross also found that if teachers are given the time to experiment with new ideas that work, it will only impact their professional efficacy, not their personal efficacy. Moreover, Ross discovered that new teachers care most about successful classroom management and that a teacher's personal efficacy is largely set in the early years. These findings reinforce the idea that teachers' needs in the early years differ from those in the later years, which, again is an issue that must be addressed when building learning experiences for teachers.

There are two questions that the research into teacher development and growth is beginning to address. First, who will provide the ongoing education? Second, what are some of the best models for effective in-services? In order to address these questions, Anderson and Olsen (2006) studied 15 full-time classroom teachers in the U.S. who had all attended the same school of education. Anderson and Olsen used stratified random

selection to choose the practicing teachers who, as a whole, represented the over 1000

graduates of one university school of education. They used three 2-hour semi-structured

interviews, classroom observations, and observations of professional development

experiences to determine the major factors that influence a teacher's professional

development. Anderson and Olsen found that the four major factors that influence

teachers' professional development needs are: school context, desire to collaborate,

interest in experimenting, and the development level of the teacher (Anderson & Olsen,

2006). Of these four factors, school context has an enormous impact on what teachers

need. Teachers can be strongly influenced by the students they teach, the community and

the administration of the school. Their needs will be tied to the specific issues they

encounter in their schools, and while some of the needs can cut across schools, others

will be unique to a particular school and teacher (Anderson & Olsen, 2006). The

researchers also found that, like much of the other research, veteran teachers are more

deliberate about their professional development needs, as they prefer to attend workshops

that match an aspect of his or her own teaching that the teacher has already determined

needs improvement (Anderson & Olsen, 2006). According to Bell and Gilbert (1994),

this self-awareness would mean these teachers have reached the final stage of

development and are empowered enough to seek out their own professional development.

Anderson and Olsen (2006) point out that it is critical for teacher educators to recognize

these varying needs of teachers if they are going to provide in-services. They

recommend that universities create a menu of options for teachers to better match the

program with their needs. To do this effectively, universities would need to conduct

more research to know what the individual schools are like in their areas and what the teachers actually need (Anderson & Olsen, 2006).

A more recent analysis of teacher development literature and its application to four teachers highlights the complexity of teacher development in the context of individual schools. Tsui (2009) conducted a study to determine the key factors that distinguish expert from non-expert veteran teachers in Hong Kong.

> From the analysis of data, it appears that the *critical* differences between expert and non-expert teachers (including novice and experienced teachers) are manifested in three dimensions: first, their capabilities to integrate various aspects of knowledge in relation to the teaching act; second, the way they relate to their contexts of work and their understanding of teaching so constituted; and third, their capabilities to engage in reflection and conscious deliberation. (Tsui, 2009, p. 424)

Tsui's (2009) work emphasizes the importance of teachers having the space to reflect on what is happening in the classroom and to incorporate new theoretical knowledge into what they do in the classroom. This approach again points to a key aspect of teacher development: the ability for a teacher to be an active participant in his or her development and to have the time and space to process how outside theories or reflections impact the actual practice of teaching and learning in the classroom (Kelly, 2006; Ross, 1994; Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen, 1990; Tsui, 2009). While Tsui's (2009) discussion of expertise and reflection is not unique, her discussion of school context is significant as it points to the uniqueness of teacher development. Even though the four teachers she studied were in the same school, Tsui found that each teacher's

expertise and growth was expressed differently in the classroom, with each expert teacher using different techniques to manage the classroom, to teach the same concepts, and to assess the students' work. These findings highlight how individualized teacher growth can be and that while generalizations such as reflection, ability to integrate knowledge, and having agency in one's development as a teacher are important, the individualized nature of adult and teacher development must be understood when designing ways to support teacher growth.

Berg's (2002) conceptual analysis of teacher development also points to the individualized nature of teaching and the importance of considering the interaction of external forces and a teacher's internal identity when analyzing the impact of a new policy on a teacher's development. Berg (2002) points to the emotional nature of teaching and the need for schools and districts to consider how each teacher defines teaching before a system implements a new policy or requires any new professional development:

> That is, most changes deeply affect teachers: how they perceive themselves, how they present themselves, what they consider important—in short, their entire professional identity. In addition to this, it is typically assumed that the professionality of teachers is largely shaped by the continual interaction between their beliefs, attitudes, and emotions—on the one hand—and the social, cultural, and institutional environment in which they function—on the other hand. As a result of their interactions with the environment, teachers also construct specific meanings with regard to themselves and their profession. (Berg, 2002, p. 582)

Because teachers' identities and, in turn, efficacy are based on numerous variables

beyond their control, Berg (2002) argues that teachers' needs and wants must be considered by schools. This idea underscores the reason that teachers must have agency in their workplace if they are going to continue to grow as professionals. As Lortie (1975/2002) discovered in his study, teachers are consistently seeking psychic rewards from their classrooms, as they can have very little influence on so much of their day. Lortie broadly defines these psychic rewards as, "subjective valuations made in the course of work engagement" (p. 101) and furthers clarifies psychic rewards in teaching as, "that satisfaction accompanied by desirable results with students" (p.104). In the end teachers receive psychic rewards when they feel they have positively influenced students (Hargreaves, 1998; Lortie, 1975/2002; Rosenholtz, 1991). Berg's (2002) analysis of teacher development highlights the importance of teachers having agency because, if teachers feel significant pressure to do specific things in the classroom, they can withdraw from any attempts to learn and grow as a professional. Rosenholtz's (1991) study of over 1,200 elementary teachers from 78 different schools in Tennessee also found teacher agency in the how and why of what to teach, is a major factor in commitment to a school and development as a teacher. The recognition of emotion, need for psychic rewards, and the relevance of a teacher's own definitions of his or her role in a school point to the complex nature of teacher development and the need to have studies that reach or investigate deeply personal aspects of life in the classroom.

The research to date has begun to define how teachers develop and provides suggestions for effective professional development programs. Classrooms should be places that promote student exploration and growth, and for this growth to occur, schools must have teachers who also explore and grow to identify what both the students and

teachers need. The research also confirms that there is no distinct path for teachers to develop as professionals and for teachers to reach the final levels of the Bell and Gilbert (1994) model, they must have agency in their own growth process. Because professional growth is on a continuum, it is impossible to isolate any one variable, but thus far, the research indicates a need for teachers to be active participants in their course of development and for schools to provide teachers the necessary agency so that they can pursue their individual needs.

Teacher-Driven Social Studies Curriculum and Teacher Development

The standards movement in education is well documented, and the shift in Georgia to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), district written curriculum frameworks, and high stakes testing are changing the role of the teacher in the classroom. As Goodlad (1984/2004) noted in his extensive study of schools in the United States, most teachers enter the field expecting to be part of a profession but quickly realize that they are only being asked to practice a trade. The GPS are causing Georgia's education professionals to become technicians more than professionals. Identifying more as a technician is problematic, as many teachers teach because they feel a calling and want to make a difference; they can become frustrated with the limitations on the decisions they are allowed to make in the classroom (Goodlad, 1984/2004; Rosenholtz, 1991; Santoro, 2011). Standardization limits the time or opportunity teachers have to actively participate in designing their own curriculum, which not only limits the teachers influence in the classroom, but can also limit the intellectual aspects of teaching (Clayton, 2007; Lortie, 1975/2002; Santoro, 2011). Lortie's (1975/2002) extensive study of 94 K-12 teachers from five different school systems highlights this struggle, as he found that teachers want

autonomy and desire opportunities to make the decisions, and they become frustrated by the realities of the limitations placed on them by the school system and parents. Teachers feel conflicting emotions of desiring control but also accepting limitations, knowing that it may be easier to manage the mandated curriculum (Lortie, 1975/2002). Rosenholtz's (1991) extensive study of elementary teachers confirms Lortie's (1975/2002) findings that in schools where teachers feel they have a voice in curriculum, teachers are more engaged in their work and able to better facilitate student growth. Santoro's (2011) meta-analysis of recent research into the demoralization of teachers, connects Lortie (1975/2002) and Rosenholtz (1991) to the current climate of mandated curriculum and high-stakes tests, and concludes that many veteran teachers are demoralized by the new directives in education. This struggle with mandated curriculum and testing can impact a teacher's professional development, and there is a growing body of research into the potential impact on teachers (see Clayton, 2007; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Fairbanks, et al., 2009; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Pajak, 2001). This issue raises the question of how much influence district policies and mandated curriculum have on a teacher's development. Grossman and Thompson's (2004) study found that district policies can have a significant impact on a new teacher's beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy. Once a teacher is in the classroom, district mandated policies and curriculum can become a major force, and Grossman and Thompson noted that, often, district frameworks and support structures are the first place teachers reference when they need help.

> Beginning teachers may be more open to curricular and instructional guidance provided by districts. In addition, they are still in the process of developing their ideas about teaching, which may make both their beliefs and their practices more

malleable. From this perspective, districts can serve a powerful role as teacher

educators, even if first-year teachers are only dimly aware of formal district

policies. (Grossman & Thompson, 2004, p. 298)

As Kelly (2006) discusses, teachers are constantly adjusting their identities to the many

forces they encounter, and the school district can be a powerful force as a teacher's

employer. Because of the potential impact on teachers, districts need to carefully design

the support structure for teachers and should be aware of the potential impact of

mandating a curriculum.

Crocco and Costigan (2007) conducted a larger study of 200 teachers in New York

City (with 115 of the 200 teaching social studies) to document the impact of districts

mandating a curriculum. Their findings were consistent with Lortie (1975/2002),

Goodlad (1984/2004) and Rosenholtz's (1991) earlier studies that teachers' initial

decisions to enter education are often driven by a desire to make a difference and give

back to one's community. However, they discovered that a mandated, narrow curriculum

can severely damage job satisfaction and job retention in New York City's schools.

Social studies teachers were particularly dissatisfied as they felt the curriculum forced

them to just cover the material and made it almost impossible for teachers to feel like

they were making a difference. Bell and Gilbert's (1994) model of teacher development

requires teachers to build self-awareness about what students are learning in the

classroom, identify problems and provide solutions. As Lortie (1975/2002), Goodlad

(1984/2004) and Santoro (1991) note, teacher job satisfaction can be significantly

impacted by the simple positive interactions with students that occur when helping

students, but these interactions can be hampered by a narrow curriculum that does not

adjust to what is happening in the classroom.

> The critical factors influencing their decisions about staying or leaving reduce to a
> calculation concerning (a) finding space for creativity and autonomy so as to
> allow for (b) personal and professional growth, which depends, in part, on (c)
> forging meaningful relationships with students. (Crocco & Costigan, 2007, p.
> 526)

The love of one's subject is a reason many teachers decide to teach social studies, and if they do not have control over what is and is not taught, one of the major reasons they entered the profession becomes irrelevant (Rosenholtz, 1991).

As noted earlier a key aspect of teacher development is tacit knowledge (Torff and Sternberg, 1998). Clayton (2007), Fairbanks, et al. (2009), and Pajak (2001) all found that standardization can have a negative impact on teacher development and, in particular, standardization hurts a teacher's ability to learn on the job. Clayton (2007) found that the inherent tensions that emerge when a teacher designs curriculum fosters professional development and causes the teacher to make conceptual shifts in teaching. These conceptual shifts made by the teacher represent professional development and are harder to accomplish in the midst of a high stakes testing environment in which the stated goal is to limit flexibility in curriculum design. As is discussed by Fairbanks et al. (2009), a sense of agency provides teachers the motivation to develop the necessary skills to create an effective learning environment.

> As we describe below, talking across and through these perspectives led us to the
> hypothesis that teacher educators must develop teachers' self-knowledge and
> sense of agency in addition to developing standard forms of professional

knowledge. … In short, successful teachers must recognize that virtually every

situation is different, must see multiple perspectives and imagine multiple

possibilities, and must apply professional knowledge differentially. (Fairbanks, et

al., 2009, p. 161-162)

The variables a teacher may encounter in just minutes in the classroom are difficult to

quantify and for teachers to manage these variables, they must consistently enhance their

tacit knowledge and professionality. Without agency in the classroom, teachers have less

desire to reflect on how to handle the issues that inevitably arises (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Two significant parts of teaching are the design of the curriculum and the pedagogy used

to deliver that curriculum. If these two pieces are controlled by external forces, then

teachers are unlikely to develop the self-awareness, self-knowledge and reflective nature

necessary to be successful and, therefore, stay in the classroom (Clayton, 2007;

Fairbanks, et. al., 2009; and Pajak, 2001).

A four-year longitudinal study of 150 elementary teachers conducted by Valli and

Buese (2007) confirmed that over the past 10 years, teachers have lost flexibility as

schools are increasingly more hierarchical, but that instructional quality has been

negatively impacted by the changes. The logistics tied to recent reform initiatives have

caused a decline in time available to reflect on teaching and learning (Valli and Buese,

2007). As noted earlier, time to reflect is key to teacher growth and limiting this time

will inevitably stagnate possible professional growth for classroom teachers.

We find that rapid-fire, high-stakes policy directives promote an environment in

which teachers are asked to relate to their students differently, enact pedagogies

that are often at odds with their vision of best practice, and experience high levels

of stress. The summative effect of too many policy demands coming too fast often resulted in teacher discouragement, role ambiguity, and superficial responses to administrative goals. If policy expectations for teacher role change had benefited students, one could argue that the toll on teachers, although unfortunate, was for the greater good of students. But that did not seem to be the case. (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 520)

Valli and Buese's (2007) four-year longitudinal study confirms that highly regulating the life of a classroom teacher can increase job dissatisfaction, lack of commitment to teaching, and eventually, teacher attrition.

Like so many aspects of K-12 education, social studies curriculum is under increasing pressure to standardize and create a universal curriculum and testing regimen to guarantee that all students are receiving the same educational opportunities. As education moves further down this path of mandating what happens in a classroom, decision makers need to understand the impact on those being asked to implement the standards. The research demonstrates that an effective teacher needs consistent reflection, access to resources, collaboration, empowerment, and the ability to adjust while teaching (Kelly, 2006; Ross, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1991; Tillema, DeJong, and Mathijssen, 1990; Tsui, 2009). These skills are difficult enough to develop even with the multitude of resources available, but teacher development becomes further damaged when a teacher's opportunities to test new curriculum models and take risks are completely eliminated. The early results of the impact of the standards movement on teacher development are not positive and raise serious concerns about the retention of veteran teachers.

Veteran Teacher Attrition and Retention

As the purpose of this study is to examine why veteran, social studies teachers have stayed in the classroom, it is important to have an understanding of the obstacles they have had to overcome to remain in the classroom. One initial area of exploration should be how veteran teachers lasted beyond the first 5 years when so many young teachers quit. Allen's (2005) review of the statistics found that 30% of new teachers leave the profession after just three years, and more than 40% leave after 5 years, while Ingersoll and Smith (2003) found that by the end of the first 5 years of teaching almost 50% of teachers have left the profession. In separate studies, Borman and Dowling (2008) and Guarino et al. (2006) note that teacher attrition is U-shaped, with high percentages of teachers either leaving within their first five years or in the later years (20 plus years). When teacher attrition numbers are weighed against comparable professions, such as nursing, teaching has a significantly higher rate (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Certo & Fox, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001). Many studies have also confirmed that the main reasons new teachers leave are: low salary and benefits, lack of administrative support, challenging students, lack of say in school policies, and lack of access to colleagues (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Certo & Fox, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001). These studies of teacher attrition paint a dismal picture of the early years of teaching, and all note that high rates of early departure only increase the challenges school face today (Ingersoll, 2001). Considering the recent research into the impact of high-stakes testing and standardization of curriculum on teachers' job satisfaction, there seems to be little hope that conditions will improve.

Ingersoll's (2001) detailed analysis of the national statistics on teacher attrition

and retention offers critical insights into the problem. Ingersoll points out that much of

the research on teacher retention focuses on the individual characteristics of teachers who

stay and those who leave, with the implication being that to improve teacher retention,

schools simply need to identify the correct personality traits and recruit stronger teachers.

Ingersoll argues that a careful examination of the statistics indicates that the problem is

not individual personality traits, but that there are organizational issues within schools

that need to be analyzed. Therefore, Ingersoll (2001) points to a need for more research

to be conducted into the working conditions teachers face. Just as Tsui (2009) pointed

out in his case study of four high school teachers, Ingersoll (2001) notes that so much of

teaching is influenced by external factors beyond a teacher's control, and that to truly

understand teacher retention, the impact these factors have must be understood.

> As a result of an emphasis on individual-level factors, much less is known of
>
> whether teacher turnover is disproportionately concentrated in particular types of
>
> schools and, also, which aspects of schools affect turnover. Moreover, little is
>
> known of how the organizational conditions of schools both impact and are
>
> impacted by turnover. In addition, about half of the overall turnover of teachers is
>
> migration from one school to another (Ingersoll 1995a). Hence, the research
>
> emphasis on attrition has meant that much less is known of the magnitude and
>
> causes of the totality of employment instability, turnover, and inter-organizational
>
> mobility in schools and their consequences for school staffing problems and
>
> teacher shortages. (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 7)

Broad analysis of teacher retention statistics indicates the multitude of concerns about

schools. These concerns include issues such as a need for teachers to have a voice in

school policies, control over curriculum, and support for their professional development needs (Ingersoll, 2001). The problem is that without enough studies of specific schools that actually have good retention rates, there is no way to determine which policies actually work and keep teachers in the classroom.

Certo and Fox's (2002) qualitative study of 42 teachers from many different schools confirmed that the teachers studied want more say in what happens in schools, and that, when they do not have a say, they often question their abilities in the classroom. Whereas Rosenholtz's (1991) earlier study found that teachers who have agency over what happens in the classroom seek more professional development and are more likely to find creative solutions to student struggles. As already has been noted, teachers need to have a voice in their needs as professionals, and when teachers are insecure about their teaching, it is difficult for them to identify their professional growth needs (Clayton, 2007; Fairbanks, et. al., 2009; and Pajak, 2001). As Ingersoll (2001) aptly concludes, teacher staffing issues are significantly impacted by teachers fleeing poor working conditions, which means the demand for teachers is mostly due to the revolving door nature of education. Therefore, school openings are not caused by a limited number of people who initially want to teach, but rather by having so many teachers leave too early (Ingersoll, 2001). Therefore, increasing the supply of people interested in teaching will not solve the problem. The problem is the short tenure of the people who enter the classroom, and a key part of the solution is teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2001).

Using the reasons for teacher attrition as a framework, it is also helpful to know the factors that keep teachers in the classroom past the first five years. Certo and Fox's (2002) study concluded the three main reasons are: a commitment to the profession,

quality administration, and an appreciation for relationships with their colleagues. The

keys for many new teachers include mentorship, being respected enough to have

autonomy in the classroom, and having access to colleagues (Guarino et al, 2006). The

issue of having access to colleagues arises in many studies, as teachers consistently

discussed their desire to interact with other teachers to share ideas, commiserate over

struggles, and just to have time to interact with other adults (Borman & Dowling, 2008;

Certo & Fox, 2002; Guarino et al., 2006; Lortie, 1975/2002).

> When veteran teachers and novices share their ideas/practices, benefits are
>
> reciprocal. The beginning teacher gains a clearer awareness of the school culture
>
> and a stronger sense of what is expected in planning, evaluating, and managing
>
> the learning environment. The veteran teacher is afforded fresh perspectives on
>
> contemporary practices and has the opportunity to reflect and to validate his or
>
> her teaching strategies. (Woods & Weasmer, 2002, p. 187)

To increase job satisfaction, the literature indicates that teachers desire shared leadership

in which they contribute to the school culture and receive positive support from the

building administrators (Woods & Weasmer, 2002). The literature also indicates that

while increases in salaries and having committed students would help teacher retention, it

is more important to work in a school with strong, positive relationships with the other

adults–especially with administrators (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Certo & Fox, 2002;

Guarino et al., 2006; Kardos et al, 2001; Woods & Weasmer, 2002).

While the literature on teacher retention and attrition documents the many reasons

new teachers may leave or stay in the classroom, there are only a few studies that focus

specifically on veteran teachers. Day and Gu (2009) conducted a large, mixed method

study of 300 veteran teachers in England. Using a series of interviews, document analysis, and student testing data to determine effectiveness in the classroom, they found that veteran teachers with over 20 years in the classroom struggle to maintain their commitment to teaching, which in turn limits their effectiveness in the classroom. With these data in mind, Day and Gu (2009) then wanted to know how the veteran teachers they determined were still effective had been able to maintain their commitment to classroom teaching.

> It is the interactions between teachers' internal values, sense of professional competence and agency and the external environments in which they work and live that determine the extent to which teachers are able to draw upon positive emotional and professional resources, and exercise their resilient qualities, rebounding from disappointments and adversity, sustaining their commitment to the profession, and with this, their effectiveness. (Day & Gu, 2009, p. 449)

Day and Gu (2009) further concluded from their study that in-school support from the administration plays a major role in helping teachers maintain their commitment to improving their knowledge and being able to incorporate new ideas into the classroom. Veteran teachers can often see new ideas as direct challenges to their own beliefs about teaching and learning. They need support in how to mediate new reforms and make appropriate adjustments to what they do in the classroom (Day & Gu, 2009). The process of how to mediate change was a key theme for the veterans studied by Day and Gu (2009). Successful teachers were able to balance the professional and personal aspects of their lives and maintain a healthy outlook on changes in the profession and what they could accomplish as a classroom teacher. While Day and Gu's (2009) study offers some

general insights into how veteran teachers can continue to grow, the study does not offer the necessary specific narratives to highlight exactly what each teacher did to adjust to change and remain successful. Teacher attrition studies continually highlight the need for supportive leadership, but thus far, the literature does not delve deep enough to describe specific policies or actions that have helped veteran teachers.

Two smaller qualitative studies offer some insight into what keeps veteran teachers in the room. Meister and Ahrens (2011) spent time with four veteran teachers to determine what keeps veterans from plateauing. Meister and Ahrens' definition of plateauing is similar to Day and Gu's (2009) discussion of a loss of commitment. Meister and Ahrens argue that teaching is, by nature, a static profession, and teachers are susceptible to plateauing or becoming frustrated and disillusioned by life in the classroom. Meister and Ahrens' found that three keys to sustained development for the veterans they interviewed were: the feeling that they were still making a difference in their students' lives, that they were integral to their school's health, and that they had strong support systems throughout their careers. A central theme from their study is that teachers need regular indicators that they are doing good work, and interestingly, all four teachers interviewed had a system in which they kept notes from students thanking them for their hard work (Meister & Ahrens, 2011). The importance of having a positive support system was also discovered in Cohen's (2009) study of two veteran teachers. Most of Cohen's (2009) findings were contrary to the rest of the literature on teacher retention, as the two veterans she interviewed were prima donnas who continually noted that the main reasons they still taught were the attention they received from the students and their love of teaching literature. While Cohen's (2009) study does not build much on

the literature about teacher retention, she does note the importance of teachers having a voice in school policy. While Meister and Ahrens (2011) and Cohen (2009) provide more detailed insight into retaining veteran teachers, they do not use their data to construct any models for further research. As the teacher development research notes, a teacher's career path is not linear, and schools need to have a better understanding of how to give teachers a voice in their own growth. Much of the literature on retaining veterans focuses mostly on the personal characteristics of veteran teachers or the general descriptions of what types of schools veterans prefer. To have a fuller picture of teacher retention, it is also necessary to review the research on how the structure of specific schools can influence teacher development and teacher retention.

Institutional Influences on Teacher Retention

In the current climate of educational reform, there is a focus on the individual character traits of successful teachers and a sentiment that student growth is largely dependent on the specific teacher in the classroom (Kennedy, 2010). This focus on the teacher discounts the impact of how school organization, building leadership, social economic status of the community and resources available can impact a teacher's ability to effectively educate his or her students (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Kennedy, 2010). As Kennedy (2010) notes,

> we have veered too far toward the attribution of teaching quality to the characteristics of teachers themselves, and are overlooking situational factors that may have a strong bearing on the quality of the teaching practices we see. (p. 591)

This focus on the individual teacher often disregards the impact of reform movements, mandated curriculum, student backgrounds and specific work conditions on how teachers

are able to develop as professionals (Kennedy, 2010). As Sloan (2006) discusses, even the implementation of mandated prescribed curriculum and high-stakes testing can vary a great deal from school to school. In discussing the factors that impact teacher retention it is necessary to analyze the impact of each institution on a teacher's desire and ability to stay in the classroom.

Loeb, Darling-Hammond and Luczak (2005) conducted a study of the many possible factors that impacted retention and turnover of over 1000 veteran teachers in California. Loeb Darling-Hammond and Luczak find that while racial, ethnic, and social economic status of a school's student body can influence a school's retention rates, the working conditions at individual schools have a larger impact on turnover rates. Loeb, Darling-Hammond and Luczak (2005) tease out the many variables that can cause teachers to leave a school and find:

> Among the strongest predictors of these [turnover] outcomes is a factor representing teacher ratings of their school conditions including on one hand tangible supports for teaching in the form of teachers' working conditions, physical facilities, and availability of textbooks and technology and on the other hand the kinds of conditions that impact on the substantive aspects of teaching including the quality of professional development, the involvement of parents, and the quality and appropriateness of tests teachers are required to administer.
> (p. 65)

Allensworth, Ponisiciak and Mazzeo (2009) had similar results when they studied retention in Chicago Public Schools. They note in their study that teachers leaving schools cited poor relationships with colleagues, lack of collective responsibility and poor

school leadership as more important factors for leaving than the racial, ethnic or economic status of the student body (Allensworth, Ponisiciak and Mazzeo, 2009). Teachers are more likely to stay where they feel they are making a difference, where they have good working relationships with colleagues and where the school has a spirit of innovation (Allensworth, Ponisiciak and Mazzeo, 2009; Rosenholtz, 1991). The results of Allensworth, Ponisiciak and Mazzeo's (2009) study also indicate that because teacher retention rates can see another drop off when teachers are older than 55, institutional factors that can support growth and collegiality are key to retention of veteran classroom teachers. Kardos's et al. (2001) study provides further support for the idea that the culture of a school can impact teacher development and either foster a teacher's commitment to a long career of learning or create a feeling of isolation that causes young teachers to leave the profession. Kardos et al. (2001) discuss the need for schools to foster an integrated culture of veteran and new teachers that collectively share the responsibility to teaching. Schools with strong collegial relationships and a commitment to professional development have more success with their students and can build a cadre of dedicated teachers (Kardos et al. 2001; Rosenholtz, 1991).

> Expert teachers understood the importance of mentoring their novice colleagues and often found that they, themselves, benefited from the exchange. All teachers, veterans and novices alike, were regularly engaged in deliberations about curriculum, instruction, and their shared responsibility for students. Novice teachers found opportunities to develop their teaching, easy access to others' classes, clear expectations, and organized discussions about the needs of students and the improvement of practice. (Kardos et al., 2001, p. 262)

Kardos et al. (2001) describe successful schools as ones whose culture effectively integrates the energy and innovation of new teachers with the wisdom or veteran teachers. The combination of the two can invigorate both novices and veterans, while also building an enriched learning environment that greatly supports student achievement (Kardos et al., 2001). The ability for schools to be structured to foster professional development for educators who are still in the classroom is a key factor to retaining veteran teachers and building a core of committed young teachers (Kardos et al., 2001; Peske et al., 2001; Rosenholtz, 1991, Schneopner, 2010).

Besides building a school that supports professional growth, schools should also have a structure that provides feedback and opportunities for teachers to receive the psychic rewards of teaching (Rosenholtz, 1991). Because so much of what it means to be a successful teacher is hard to quantify, it is important for teachers to feel like they are making a difference (Schneopner, 2010). Schools that are able to consistently help teachers feel the psychic rewards of teaching are more likely to retain their teachers (Hargreaves, 1998; Peske, et al., 2001; Rosenholtz, 1991; Schneopner, 2010). As noted by many studies into teacher retention, poor working conditions are a major factor in why teachers leave (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Torres, 2011). Studies with more detailed analysis of what is meant by working conditions, have found that teachers leave dissatisfied with a lack of autonomy in the classroom and their inability to influence school policy (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). In part, because teaching is not a high paying career, teachers want to know they are making a difference and can continue to grow in the classroom (Peske, et al., 2001; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990; Schneopner, 2010), and if they are unable to find a school

that supports these desires, they will leave (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005).

Rosenholtz's (1991) study of 1200 elementary teachers from over 78 elementary schools in Tennessee offers a comprehensive view of how the structure of the workplace can have dramatic effects on the success in the classroom and, in turn, the commitment teachers have to the school. Rosenholtz's mixed methods study offers a view into the importance of schools supporting the development of both the students and teachers. The structure of any school influences how teachers approach their work (Kardos et al., 2001) and Rosenholtz's (1991) research indicates that if schools do not support continual professional development, teaching often becomes defined as a profession with discrete definable skills. If teaching has discrete definable skills, then it is not a fluid career with ever-changing needs and room for continual growth, but instead becomes a career with a ceiling for growth that once mastered can quickly become routine. By defining teaching as a profession that can be quantified, teachers can become bored and frustrated with their career–especially when they encounter a problem that cannot be solved by the skills they have mastered (Rosenholtz, 1991). In the end, schools that approach teaching as a job with definable and discrete skills deprofessionalize the work of teachers, which hampers teachers' ability to creatively respond to the changing needs of their students (Rosenholtz, 1991). For schools to build a collegial culture where teachers have the space to try new approaches and rethink how to handle challenges that arise in the classroom, they should promote teacher-driven professional development (Rosenholtz, 1991). By defining teaching as a profession that requires constant professional development, with no clear end point, teachers have space to continue to grow and

improve (Rosenholtz, 1991). This also means teachers are more open to working together and sharing because if there is no one right answer that any teacher should know, it is not a failure if something does not initially work (Rosenholtz, 1991). In learning rich schools teachers are more prepared to handle the fluid nature of the profession because they are more willing and able to use a wide range of resources to solve the problem. Schools that embrace teaching as an ever evolving profession create rich, fulfilling careers for their teachers (Rosenholtz, 1991).

> All of this means that what teachers perceive as real in their workplace circumstances tends to become real in their consequences. Where teachers collectively perceive students as capable learners, and themselves as capable teachers vested with a technical culture to help them learn and grow, they seem more likely to persevere, to define problem students as a challenge, to seek outside resources to conquer that challenge, and, in this way, to actually foster students' academic gains. (p. 138)

Any study of retention of teachers should consider the organizational structure of the school. Because schools must manage the interplay of so many constituencies (i.e. teachers, students, parents, building leaders, and the community at-large), a research study into teacher retention should consider the interaction between the individual teacher and his or her school.

> In short, successful organizations must have the capacity for regulation and self-renewal. Organizational renewal results in large measure from contextual variable–those processes and structures set in place for purposive experimentation, change and continuous growth. … Finally, it reflects the view

that even for organizations that are performing adequately or superbly, as

conditions change, there is need for still further improvement. (Rosenholtz, p. 71)

Like many other studies into teacher retention, Rosenholtz (1991) found, "evidence that

professional autonomy and discretion increases motivation, responsibility, and

commitment, and a lack of workplace discretion is often cited as a reason for their

disaffection, absenteeism and defection, particularly for the most academically talented

teachers" (p. 140). The literature into the organizational structures of schools highlights

the importance of not only honoring the teacher, but also the need for schools to build in

structures that support and encourage teacher professional and personal development.

Reyes and Pounder's (1993) study into school structures noted that schools need

to be fluid enough to respond to the differing needs of new teachers and veteran teachers.

New teachers tend to focus on needing support on issues such as student management,

basic content and control over the classroom (Reyes and Pounder, 1993). Reyes and

Pounder found that veterans care more about the core issues of teaching such as: task

autonomy and discretion, the extent of their performance efficacy and psychic rewards.

Therefore, schools should be flexible enough to have structures in place to respond to the

wide range of needs of their teachers and not only provide learning opportunities, but also

make sure the learning opportunities match the needs of each teacher (Reyes & Pounder,

1993). The findings from the research indicate that teachers not only need to be active in

their own learning and have agency in school policy, but they also need to be in a school

that has the appropriate structures in place to foster appropriate teacher development and

growth. The next step is to study a specific school with numerous veteran teachers who

still embrace teaching and learning. In studying those teachers, the key question to ask is: What has kept them engaged?

Response to Literature

The literature indicates a growing conflict in schools that could be impacting teacher development and, in turn, teacher retention. In any discussion of teacher development and growth, there is recognition of the individual nature of a teacher's development and the inability of any one study to definitively define how to support teacher learning. There are patterns in the research that point to the importance of teacher autonomy over curriculum, teachers having voice in school policy and, in the end, teachers having some agency over their work. The research also indicates the importance of schools to have structures in place to foster the intellectual growth of both the students and teachers. Any discussion of teacher retention must move beyond an analysis of individual characteristics and consider the interaction of the institution with the individual.

The discussion of the research also considers the complexities of studying a profession that is decidedly fluid and emotional. Effective studies are most often based on in-depth interviews in which teachers can discuss how they developed and which factors matter most to them when analyzing why they enjoy teaching. The research also clearly shows that effective classroom teachers have built strong identities around the many interactions they have both inside and outside of the classroom. These identities are key to understanding why some teachers stay engaged and others become disengaged and demotivated. As Evans (2002) discusses, teacher development is a positive progression in which teacher knowledge is always expanding. This teacher learning and

development can best occur in a school that engages both the students and teachers. The question at the core of what this study is trying to determine is: How do we build schools in which this development can occur for most teachers?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Design of the Study

Denzen and Lincoln (2000) describe qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (p. 3). Further, they note qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings in an attempt to make sense of the phenomena. This structure means that a qualitative study often requires the researcher to interact with the subjects of the study in the subjects' natural setting. By studying each subject in his or her context, each subject's story becomes a core aspect of the data collected, and the subject's own views and beliefs become a driving force behind any conclusions (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research offers the necessary tools for a researcher to delve into a community to study it and subsequently explain that community to the outside world. To understand the complexity of why a veteran social studies teacher would stay in the classroom for over 20 years, it is important to examine all aspects of each veteran teacher's journey and to do so at the teacher's school. The qualitative research methodology of grounded theory provides the most appropriate guidelines and tools to examine a group of veteran teachers at their school. Grounded theory allows the researcher to have flexibility in building a theory, while also providing the researcher with access to analytical tools to scrutinize the data throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). Grounded theory is flexible because the data drives the theory building as opposed to previous theories. As defined by Glaser and Strauss (2011):

grounded theory is an approach for generating theory that is grounded in and

systematically derived from data, with an emphasis on the comparative method of

constant, concurrent data collection and analysis. The aim is to develop a well-grounded theory that describes, explains, interprets and predicts the phenomenon of interest. (p. 4)

Grounded theory best fits my study because theories about why a veteran teacher is still in the classroom must be built from the ground up, with data that comes directly from the teacher.

The guiding question for this study is: What are the factors that keep veteran, social studies teachers engaged and excited about teaching and learning? To answer this question, I will also ask: (1) What are the benefits of social studies teachers being primarily responsible for their own curriculum? (2) What role, if any, does social studies curriculum play in supporting teacher development? (3) What are the professional development needs of veteran social studies teachers? (4) How can a school support veteran social studies teachers' professional development? To answer these questions, I collected data from multiple sources such as: informal and semi-structured interviews, casual interactions on campus and teacher-made documents to determine why each of the six research participants is still in the classroom. Because I am a social studies teacher at the same school in which I researched, the research participants and I are linked, and together we constructed, interpreted, and refined meaning until some consensus was achieved about the important factors that motivate them to return to the classroom each year (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There is also some individual variation that highlights the complexity of teacher development and the importance of recognizing the inevitable variation present in any qualitative study must be noted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This significant issue of the role of the researcher is further discussed toward the end of this

section.

Selecting Grounded Theory Methodology

To understand the complexities of interactions and knowledge building in a classroom, a researcher needs a methodology that provides the space to analyze what is happening and that has the tools to allow the data to dictate the theory that emerges. As symbolic interactionism is the appropriate theoretical framework for this study, grounded theory is the best methodology. Grounded theory allows for a model to be created based on successive collection of data, such as interviews and document analysis. Grounded theory requires extensive inductive reasoning and reflection on the data to build a model that explains what is going on in the field. As Crotty (2005) notes, grounded theory "seeks to ensure that the theory emerging arises from the data and not from some other source. It is a process of inductive theory building based squarely on observation of the data themselves" (p. 78). As social constructionism and symbolic interactionism both discuss, a positivistic approach to research in which the researcher seeks a universal truth does not reflect the realities of how people grow and develop as professionals. We are constantly interacting with each other, judging what has happened and using our interpretations to come to a conclusion about what realities make the most sense. A strength of human nature is the ability to adjust to our situations, and social constructionism effectively explains how our knowledge is based on using interactions to develop knowledge of the world that fits into our current reality. Grounded theory is one of the qualitative research processes that provides a methodology with the necessary research tools to get to the core of what is happening because the researcher does not start the study seeking specific data to confirm a predetermined theory. As there is limited

research into what helps veteran teachers continue to learn and grow, it is important that I started with an unanswered question and then used all of the data to build a new theory that explains why some veterans stay in the classroom. As is noted by Jeon (2004), grounded theory allows for a deeper exploration of social phenomena.

> Hence, the application of qualitative research methods, a grounded theory approach in particular, has enabled the exploration of the subsidiary, implied questions within the study as to why, how, where, when, under what conditions, and with what consequences the phenomenon unfolds. Grounded theory research aims to develop substantive or formal theory, and thus a means of explaining social processes. Symbolic interactionism is one of the interpretivist perspectives in research and, according to Schwandt is the theory and approach for the study of individuals' social and psychological action/interaction "in search of portraying and understanding the process of meaning making." The goal of this tradition is to understand "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it." (Jeon, 2004, p. 250)

As Jeon (2004) further notes, grounded theory allows the researcher the flexibility to develop a theory along the way by comparing the data and shifting the theoretical sampling as necessary, instead of waiting until the end of data collection to consider a theory. Because coding, categorizing, memo writing, and theory generation are happening throughout the research process, the resulting theory is built from the ground up and is grounded in the data collected by the researcher.

While some methodologies provide a strict order for the research process, beginning with collection, then coding, and finally analysis, grounded theory requires the

researcher to continually compare data, build categories from the data, and use the

emerging categories to generate the theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2011). This use of the

constant comparative method is described by Jeon (2004):

> Whilst the constant comparative method is characteristic of social science
>
> research, its principles and application are different in grounded theory research.
>
> In grounded theory, the making of comparisons is not aimed at describing and
>
> verifying comparisons themselves; rather its purpose is to assist conceptualization
>
> and categorization in the course of data collection and analysis. It also differs
>
> from other approaches to research in that in most other research approaches data
>
> collection and analysis occur in stages, and data collection is influenced by the
>
> research question which is clearly defined and stated at the beginning. The
>
> constant comparative method, on the other hand, is a much more open approach
>
> where the final research questions in fact emerge through data collection. (p. 252)

Glaser and Strauss (2011) argue that the constant comparative method turns the data into

a guide for building a theory and eventually creates the final research question. This

flexibility allowed me to enter the school with broader questions and to have an open

mind about what was happening inside and outside of the classroom. After using a

constant comparative method that analyzes all the variables in the classrooms, the school,

and the community, I reformed my questions and developed a theory that accounts for the

interactions and forces at play in their entirety. This all-encompassing view of education

is social constructionist in nature and recognizes the importance of interactionism. While

I have my own story as to why I am still teaching, it is important that I avoid becoming a

doctrinaire, and grounded theory allows the collected data to create the theory. As Glaser

and Strauss (2011) describe, a researcher should immediately start coding, and while still collecting data, the researcher should create as many categories as possible, continue to collect data, and reorganize the categories until a theory is generated that explains all of the data. The two keys of grounded theory methodology are that all parts of the research process are occurring at the same time and that by not having preset codes, categories, or theories, the research process will create a theory at the end, rather than at the beginning.

The Research Site: Site Selection and Description

To examine how one school is able to retain its veteran social studies teachers, I selected Southern School (pseudonym), which is located within the city limits of a large, southern city and is surrounded by five major universities. Southern School is an independent school in its 42nd year. I have taught there for 6 years, and it is also where I attended elementary school. Before I arrived at Southern School, I had taught for 11 years in public schools. When I left public school teaching, I thought I would never return to any classroom. After a year at Southern School, I rediscovered my love of teaching and, more importantly, I found ways to continue to grow while also teaching. As I became more integrated into the community, I realized that Southern was full of veteran classroom teachers who not only enjoy the classroom, but who also continue to grow as professionals. I began to wonder what it was about Southern School that could attract and retain so many veteran teachers. I selected Southern as a research site because it has such a noticeable population of engaged, veteran teachers.

In 42 years, Southern School has grown from 100 students into a pre-K through 12th grade population of 991 students. For the 2012-13 school year, 28% of the student population are students of color. Of the 991 students, 13.5% receive financial aid awards

ranging from 40% to 99% of tuition. The school has 103 full-time teachers and 21 part-time teachers with 78% of the teachers having advanced degrees and 20% of the teachers are people of color.

Southern School was founded by a small community of parents in 1971 who were unhappy with the public school options in the area. The school then hired a head of school who is still the headmaster today. Because parents founded the school, there is a high level of parental involvement, and the school has a full-time staff position dedicated to coordinating parent volunteers. Also, because of the culture at the time Southern was founded, it is an informal school with no dress code for students or faculty, and all students call their teachers by their first names. Southern's professional development philosophy is also unique in that the school supports all teachers exploring their own interests, even if their interests are not directly tied to a specific curriculum initiative. While there are boundaries that define acceptable professional development, Southern encourages teachers to be life-long learners and offers financial support each year for teachers to determine and pursue their own professional development interests. Finally, Southern does not have a formal evaluation system or curriculum set by the administration. The curriculum is written by the teachers as a community, and while the school does determine graduation requirements, it is the teachers who are almost solely responsible for what is taught in the classroom.

Southern's unique approach to education and professional development make it an appealing institution to examine when trying to determine the factors that help veteran teachers stay in the classroom. Southern is also an interesting institution to study because it is where I rediscovered my desire to continue spending time in the classroom.

Moreover, my wife is the assistant coordinator of the junior high school, and all three of our children attend the school. As a former student, current parent, current faculty member, and current administrator, Southern is a school with which I have been connected in one capacity or another for most of my life. In-depth knowledge of one school, coupled with my experiences at past schools, informs my research into what it is about Southern that helps it retain so many veteran teachers.

Selection of Participants

The six teachers for this study were selected based on purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009) with the study having maximum variation (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). The criteria for teacher selection were set to create a study with teachers who represent variety in backgrounds and teaching styles. Therefore, three teachers come from the elementary school, two from the junior high school, and one from the high school. Each teacher has at least 20 years in the classroom and 15 years at Southern School. In addition to having extended tenure at the same school, each teacher has the primary responsibility of designing and implementing the social studies curriculum in his or her classroom. Also, all six teachers are among those recognized by the school community and administration as being successful educators sought out by parents and students. Because Southern School does not have formal evaluations or high-stakes testing, I used interviews with the administration to define who is a successful teacher. To determine the variability of teaching career experiences, I conducted preliminary interviews to ask each teacher about his or her reasons for teaching, why he or she still enjoys teaching, and how he or she ended up at Southern. Five of the six teachers are teachers who began their careers elsewhere and then came to Southern, while one has spent his entire career

at Southern. The variety in past experiences and grade levels taught provide a broader range of data to strengthen the credibility of the study.

Another criteria for selection was availability and willingness to participate. In the elementary school, there were 14 potential participants, in the junior high school, there were 7 potential participants, and in the high school, there were two potential participants. I know all of the potential participants and because one of my job responsibilities is student admissions, I have observed each of them teaching. Five of the potential participants in the elementary school have taught one of my children, and their stories are already familiar to me from my time as a parent at Southern. I approached all potential participants to determine availability and willingness to participate, and from that initial pool of possible participants, I conducted interviews to gain enough data to create maximum variation.

Data Collection

To gain a complete picture of each teacher's career, multiple data collection methods were used. The major method was informal and semi-structured interviews. I also used document analysis and field notes. These methods were used to confirm the validity of the data on each veteran teacher's story and determine where patterns emerged that connect the teaching careers of all six teachers and where each teacher's story may be unique.

Informal and Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted over a 10 month period to allow enough time between interviews for each participant to tell his or her entire story. Interviewing research subjects is complicated, and a researcher must carefully design the questions, as

every question implies a viewpoint. The interviewer must also listen carefully to the subject, adjusting and asking the right follow-up questions to get to the core of what the subject believes and views as the important aspects of his or her teaching career (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Effective interviews can help researchers learn more about the nuances of what someone believes, how he or she teaches, and what each teacher values most about his or her professional life (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As grounded theory is the guiding methodology, informal and semi-structured interviews provided each research subject the most space to describe his or her story and explain why each participant returns to the classroom each year.

Each participant was interviewed three times. The first interview was 60-70 minutes in September, the next two interviews lasted 45 minutes and were conducted in October through December. The second and third interviews were tied to data from the first interview and from the documents each teacher provided. The final interview was 50-70 minutes and was conducted in early February. As each story is unique and the purpose of this study is to examine the story of six veteran teachers, informal and semi-structured interviews were used. As Merriam (2009) notes, informal or unstructured interviews are best when the researcher is trying to learn enough about a phenomenon to begin to build categories and develop questions for future studies. Therefore, the first interview with each participant was informal (see Appendix A for interview questions). The goal was to learn more about each teacher's past and begin to understand why he or she became, and still is, a classroom teacher. Rubin and Rubin (2005) lay out a structure for informal interviews in which part of the goal of the initial interview is to empower and respect the participant so that trust is established and the participant is comfortable

telling his or her story. By conducting an informal interview, each teacher built the context for his or her career path, and this data became the basis for future data collection and analysis.

Once each participant had the opportunity to discuss his or her background, I used semi-structured interviews in which the prompts were a mix of structured and less structured questions (Merriam, 2009). The structured questions were based on analysis of the initial interviews in order to determine if any of the emerging categories from the first set of interviews applied to the individual participant (see Appendix B for interview questions). The semi-structured interviews still had some unstructured time that allowed me to respond to any new issues raised by each participant. Throughout the interview process the focus question was: What are the factors that keep veteran, social studies teachers engaged and excited about teaching and learning? Finally, the last interview (see Appendix C for interview questions) was an opportunity to follow up on categories that had developed and to conduct an informal member check to confirm that the teacher agreed with my analysis.

Because I am a full member of the Southern community, I am a full participant observer as defined by DeWalt and DeWalt (2002). I have been a teacher at Southern for 6 years, and I also work in the elementary school admissions office. In the admissions role, I conduct tours for prospective families and I am often in and out of classrooms. Therefore, I am familiar with all of the elementary teachers, and I am a familiar sight in the elementary classrooms. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) point out that, as a full participant observer, I have the benefit of already knowing the school dialect, context, and language. Also, as an active participant familiar with the school, my interviews had

the benefit of understanding a context beyond the one created by three hours spent with each participant.

Documents

A solid qualitative study does not rely on just one method, and Cunningham (2006) points to the importance of linking interviews to document analysis. A good researcher will listen during the interview, observe carefully in the school context, and then study all relevant documents (student work, lesson plans, and assessments) to build an in-depth understanding of the data and to get a true picture of what is happening in each teacher's classroom. During the course of this research study, I asked each teacher to provide at least three documents for analysis. Each research participant was asked to provide a lesson plan or classroom description that reflected the structure of the veteran teacher's classroom in the early years of their teaching career. I also collected one piece written by the teacher about his or her teaching. At Southern, all teachers are, at some point, asked to give a short talk to the entire faculty titled "Why I Teach." For the second document, I asked that each teacher provide a copy of his or her speech or a summary of what he or she said (some of the older speeches were not available). The third document was what each teacher sent home to parents at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year to describe his or her classroom. Besides the documents I requested, three of the six teachers provided me with copies of articles they wrote in the school newsletter or in education journals. While there are many possible documents I could have requested, these documents were used to support the analysis of what I had learned from interactions with each teacher. The focus of the study is how these teachers grew and stayed engaged, therefore, I wanted documents that could be compared with what the teachers said in the

interviews. I needed two documents demonstrating growth and change to compare with each teacher's actual view of how he or she had changed, as well as one document, not related to this study, that reflected each teacher's views about teaching in general. Collectively these documents effectively supported the extensive analysis of three interviews.

As Prior (2003) notes, "Documents make 'things' visible and traceable (p. 87)." Documents actively place each research subject into a specific context at different points in his or her career. By asking for documents that reflect past and current views of life in the classroom, the documents can provide a richer portrait of how a teacher has evolved over his or her career. As Prior (2003) discusses, documents are social products and should be considered in context, and "documents function not merely as simple repositories of facts and detail (about subjects), but actively structure the nature of subjects." (p. 91) Asking a teacher to reflect and write about why he or she teaches requires the teacher to explain his or her story to a larger audience, and the process of determining key moments that explain one's teaching story provides insight into what the teacher believes is important about teaching. The variety of each veteran teacher's story is important, and because this study is attempting to determine what commonalities exist, these documents provided insight into each teacher's identity (Prior, 2003). As noted by Kelly (2006) and Rosenholtz (1991), a teacher's identity is not wholly something determined from within, but is also based on how a teacher interacts with his or her surroundings. Documents used to structure classrooms, explain a professional career, and describe a classroom to the outside community helped enrich what I had learned from the three interviews.

Field Notes

As there were 18 interviews and informal observations, extensive field notes were generated. As Merriam (2009) notes, "Field notes should be highly descriptive. … By highly descriptive I mean that enough detail should be given that readers feel as if they are there, seeing what the observer sees." (p. 130) With so many interviews and interactions, time was allotted after each interview and interaction for me to write down initial observations and reflections. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe, "The point to be made is that if a researcher is out in the field collecting data, theoretical ideas will be stimulated by data and it is very appropriate to jot those theoretical ideas down before the researcher forgets them." (p. 123) As I am a full participant observer in this study, my initial reflections were included in the field notes. Just like the veteran teachers in this study, I am an active member of the community at Southern School; my insights into the school were valuable data and also must be acknowledged as the data is analyzed. All field notes were kept in one notebook that has all initial notes taken during interviews, along with the reflections written after the interviews and interactions.

Data Analysis

To build a theory from the ground up, the researcher must simultaneously analyze data and develop a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). Grounded theory requires the researcher to use extensive inductive reasoning and reflection on the data to build a model that explains what is happening in the field. The process of analyzing the data drives the creation of the theory, which means that the way the data is analyzed is key to effectively implementing grounded theory (Crotty, 2005). The basic stages of data analysis are: collection of data, coding of data, development of categories based on the

coding, and, finally, the creation of a theory. Using grounded theory methodology as a guide, I used this four-step data analysis process in this study.

The three data sources in this study were coded according to the system described by Corbin and Strauss (2008). As data were accumulated, I began the process with open coding, in which data was broken apart and examined for initial categories through careful item analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During open coding, I accumulated and repeatedly read all of the data and engaged in memoing on the margin of the interview transcripts and field notes when I encountered something interesting, significant, or surprising. In other words, because I examined factors that influence veteran teachers staying in the classroom, I looked into potential categories during open coding. As preliminary categories were developed, I used axial coding to begin crosscutting the data and tying concepts together into more advanced memos that spelled out the links between the concepts. This process allowed me to start organizing the emerging codes into a hierarchical structure and to discover the emerging patterns of the data. As additional data was collected, the coding scheme was revisited, revised, and refined.

More specifically, I began with open coding and especially memoing. I used memoing to reflect and write out my thoughts about the codes, the data, and crucial moments throughout data analysis that highlighted potential connections. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Glaser and Strauss (2007) discuss, to support analysis, memoing while collecting data makes it easier to see direct connections, as the data will create the theory, and any connections between the data and theory will be readily apparent.

If data are the building blocks of the developing theory, memos are the mortar.

The analyst must write out their memos because unwritten inspired theorizing at

night wafts away, the next morning it's gone, and the grounded theory never

materializes. Making memos goes on throughout the study. Once categories have

been developed, clustered, and expanded, the analyst needs to sort them according

to categories and properties. (Stern, 2007, p. 119)

The process of generating theory is fundamental, and stronger connections are made if

the data drives the process and if the data is actively used by the researcher. Therefore,

data analysis was ongoing throughout the research process, which allowed the theory and

data to be intertwined in a significant way (Glaser & Strauss, 2011).

Once I finished open coding, I used conditional matrices to stimulate analysis of the

emerging categories and build a clear idea of each teacher's context, as suggested by

Corbin and Straus (2008). Using a conditional matrix helped determine the key day-to-

day aspects of each veteran teacher's work and put those day-to-day aspects into a macro

context in which cultural, institutional, and historical forces could be considered. During

the research process, it is important for the researcher to carefully review the data on a

line-by-line basis to ensure that all possible patterns are noted and categories can be

created and recreated (Holton, 2007). This process of questioning also allows the

researcher to build a conditional matrix to move beyond micro analysis and look at the

macro impact of the data (Hildenbrand, 2007). All interactions in this study were seen as

data, and by considering all micro and macro interactions, I built a matrix that

demonstrated the role of small and large structures in each teacher's life (Hildenbrand,

2007). This approach allowed me to include issues such as organizational structure,

societal expectations, race, class, and gender in the analysis and the eventual grounded

theory.

Throughout the coding process and development of categories, I used the constant comparative method, first designed by Glaser and Strauss (2008). "The purpose of the constant comparison method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory more systematically than allowed … by using explicit coding and analytic procedures." (Glaser & Strauss, 2011, p. 102) Each incident, story, or idea was compared with other incidents, stories, or ideas for similarities or differences in order to obtain a stronger grasp on the meaning of the events in each teacher's life, events that might have seemed obscure (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

During the data collection process, I used open coding, memoing, axial coding, matrices and the constant comparative method to condense, collapse, and reconfigure the data into emerging categories. Themes then emerged that explained the major factors that influenced each veteran teacher's growth, and, in the end, each teacher's desire to return to the classroom for over 20 years. Once these themes were consistently supported by the data, a theory emerged with a data based explanation for how Southern School has retained six veteran social studies teachers.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, and teacher and parent at the Southern School, my position in the framework of this study is significant. VanSledright, Kelly, and Meuwissen (2006) point out that researchers must be aware of the influences of race, gender, and age when studying social studies classrooms. A researcher is not immune to the multitude of variables that influence teachers and students, therefore, a researcher must carefully account for everything he or she brings to the interviews, informal interactions, and analysis of documents. I am a white, middle-class male, and my

interpretation and construction of knowledge in this study can be seen as coming from a position of power. My approach to this research has also been shaped by my experiences as a high school social studies teacher for 18 years and administrator for 4 years. I am a teacher who has lived many of the experiences that this study examined, and the initial interest in this research was prompted by my own reflection on why I am still an engaged classroom teacher. Finally, my role as a researcher is influenced by being a full participant in Southern School's community. My formal job titles are Assistant Coordinator of the High School, Faculty Admissions Assistant, and Coordinator of the Social Studies Department. While none of my roles put me in a direct supervisory position of any potential research participant, I am seen as an administrator who has immediate access to everyone's direct supervisor, the Headmaster. Southern is a community that embraces informality, but a hierarchy with power focused at the top does exist, and I am seen as someone with access and influence.

Moreover, as a full participant observer, I needed to use reflexivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 2011; Mruck & Mey, 2007). Reflexivity should be considered in any study in education, as the interviewer may impact the actions of the teacher being interviewed, and my own bias about schooling and effective teaching surely impacted the collection and interpretation of the data. I have always found autonomy in the classroom to be a key component of my own development as an educator and in many ways I moved to Southern because it offers me the necessary autonomy. The importance of autonomy I the classroom is a clear bias of mine. Grounded theory provides the space for me to account for my biases, consider all interactions with the participants, reflect on the many stimuli that veteran teachers

encounter, and build matrices and categories that include all of the data.

As noted above, grounded theory is based on a concept-indicator model of

constant comparisons of incidents to incidents and, once a conceptual code is

generated, of incidents to the emerging concept. The concept-indicator model

requires concepts and their properties or dimensions to earn their relevance in the

theory by systematic generation and analysis of data. This forces the researcher

into confronting similarities, differences, and degrees in consistency of meanings

between indicators, generating an underlying uniformity which in turn results in a

coded category and the beginnings of the properties of that category. (Holton,

2007, p. 278)

The only way to build a solid study in education is to have the researcher confront and

account for his or her impact on all encounters so that the theory actually reflects what is

happening in the schools.

The many factors impacting me, and this research, have to be acknowledged, as

they have influenced the outcome of this study. Because the focus of this study is six

teachers' stories, it was important that I carefully consider how I interacted with each

research participant and be mindful of what I brought to every interaction and

conversation. Member checks were used after each interview was transcribed and each

participant read over the transcripts. The participants were also asked to reflect on some

of the preliminary analysis and were provided time to determine if the full transcriptions

accurately reflected their own narrative before it was included in the final study. Because

this study focuses on individual stories of success, it was less likely that any teacher

would feel threatened, but my role at the school and as a researcher was discussed with

each participant to minimize any conflicts of interest.

Issues of Credibility and Trustworthiness

As with any study, the credibility and trustworthiness of the theory must be a consideration (Merriam, 2009). Because the structure of grounded theory is a contrast to many other methodologies, it is important to note how the researcher may address credibility and trustworthiness. Credibility can be defined by how accurately the researcher's construction of each participant's reality is reflected in the research study's findings (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) has identified eight strategies for promoting validity, reliability, and credibility in a study: use of multiple sources of data; member checks in which research participants can confirm plausibility of data and analysis; adequate engagement in data collection by the researcher; acknowledgement of the researcher's position or reflexivity so the researcher can reflect on his or her assumptions; peer review/examination of the data and analysis; an audit trail of all procedures; rich, thick description of the data; and maximum variation in the selection of the research participants. The use of these eight strategies helped produce a credible and trustworthy study, and with the exception of peer review, I used seven of the eight strategies.

Part of the attraction of grounded theory is that it gives the researcher the ability to create an entirely new theory and not have to continue the process of either confirming or denying past theories. As Jeon (2004) notes, with the advent of globalization, there has been a growing demand for new theories, as so many different cultures and communities have become part of the conversation. Having a more diverse community means past theories may not be relevant, so researchers need to be more flexible and start developing entirely new prisms to view the world. Grounded theory provides

opportunities for researchers because initial generation of theories will produce

substantive theories that are directly tied to a specific event, incident or community

(Glaser & Strauss, 2011). Once there is a substantive theory, researchers can explore the

theory to see if it expands to other communities and, if it does, a more formal theory can

be developed (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). This process provides another response to

credibility concerns. Because a substantive theory is generated by data, the easiest way to

confirm credibility is to ensure that the theory and data are in fact linked (Glaser &

Strauss, 2011). If a substantive theory makes sense, explains a phenomenon, and offers

conclusions that are justified by the data, then it is credible and trustworthy in the specific

context in which the study was conducted (Glaser & Strauss, 2011). If another researcher

is able to take a substantive theory, link it to data in a different context and reach similar

conclusions, then the substantive theory becomes a potentially generalizible formal

theory. Rarely can any theory be immediately formalized and used for long periods of

time to correctly explain phenomena. Grounded theory recognizes the evolving nature of

research and uses the process of generating theories as its first way to address credibility.

If the theory was correctly generated by the data, then it can be credible and trustworthy.

Summary

This qualitative study, based in the epistemological and theoretical framework of

social constructionism and symbolic interactionism, used grounded theory as the

methodology. The main research question is: What are the factors that keep veteran,

social studies teachers engaged and excited about teaching and learning? To answer this

question, this study also asked: (1) What are the benefits of social studies teachers being

primarily responsible for their own curriculum? (2) What role, if any, does social studies

curriculum play in supporting teacher development? (3) What are the professional development needs of veteran social studies teachers? (4) How can a school support veteran social studies teachers' professional development? These questions were investigated through the use of three informal and semi-structured interviews, informal interactions, and at least three documents per participant. These multiple data sources were analyzed and compared to produce a substantive theory by using Glaser and Strauss' (2011) memoing and constant comparative method. Open and axial coding, conditional matrices, and context were used following the suggestions of Corbin and Strauss (2008). To address issues of credibility and trustworthiness, the role of researcher has been acknowledged and seven of the eight strategies of Merriam (2009) were followed. In the end, this study should generate a substantive theory about why one specific school has been able to retain six veteran social studies teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR JOURNEYS

Introduction of the Participants

Bullough (2008) argues that narratives of teachers' lives can provide insights into the difficult balance between professional and personal that teachers must maintain over their careers (Santoro, 2011). By building a narrative that connects the individual lives of different teachers, researchers can find the intersections and begin to answer questions such as: Why do teachers think and act as they do? What influences how teachers view their successes and failures? What are the factors that keep veteran social studies teachers engaged and excited about teaching and learning (Bullough, 2008)? I began my research study in late August 2012, which is when Southern School begins its school year, and I conducted my last interview in early June 2013. Over the 10-month school year, I interviewed each participant three times and had countless informal interactions about the study. I initially planned on interviewing two elementary teachers, two junior high teachers, and two teachers from the high school. After discussions with a couple of administrators, it became clear that there was only one high school teacher who fit my criteria. Therefore, I began the interview process with just five teachers, and eventually added one elementary teacher to have three elementary teachers. My first interview was with James (pseudonyms are used for all individuals and institutions identified in this research investigation). James arrived at Southern School in 1987 with two years of teaching experience at a small independent K-8 school in a large mid-Atlantic city. He began his career at Southern in a fifth and sixth grade classroom, and 25 years later he continues to work with 10 and 11 year olds. Southern has a bit of a unique structure for a

southern independent school. Southern's elementary school is for grades K-6, has a

junior high for grades 7 and 8, and the high school is for grades 9-12. Almost all schools

in the same city use a middle school model, where elementary school is K-5 and the

middle school has grades 6-8. Southern also has multi-age classrooms K-12, with all K-8

classrooms housing two adjoining grades (i.e. K/1st, 1st/2nd, 2nd/3rd, 4th/5th, 5th/6th). This

means every K-8 teacher has 27-29 students from two different grades and has a full time

teacher partner who shares teaching responsibilities for the class. Finally, the curriculum

and pedagogy in each classroom is largely set by the classroom teachers, which means

there is variability in the content taught among the classrooms. Southern has few

curriculum mandates for what must be taught in each grade, and while the skills taught at

each level are similar, the content is almost entirely under the control of the classroom

teacher. This freedom is especially true for the social studies curriculum. While there is

an agreed upon content standards for math and science curriculum for all K-12

classrooms, there are only two years of mandated social studies curriculum: 9th grade

World History and US Politics and 10th grade US History.

James, my first interviewee, is similar to 18% of the faculty at Southern in that he

was a student at Southern. As soon as James was old enough, he began working at

Southern's summer camp and knew at an early age that he wanted to work with children

as a career. For a brief time James considered being a professor, but after he took a

semester off from college to work as a 3rd/4th grade teaching intern at Southern, he knew

he wanted to be an elementary teacher. He was so confident of his decision to work with

young children that he almost dropped out of his university to stay on as an intern. James

began his teaching career at a small K-8 independent school near his university and was a

teaching assistant during his final year at the university. While James had some initial struggles his first 2 years that caused him to step back and evaluate his career path, he never thought he would leave teaching. James recalls a college course where the students were asked to reflect on why they might want to teach, and he realized everything in his life had pushed him towards education. His father had an ease with children, his mother worked in admissions at Southern, his teachers at Southern encouraged the creativity that would be key to his success in teaching, he had felt at ease as a camp counselor and intern, and he had a love of ancient history. All of these factors combined to guide him toward a career in the classroom. James feels he developed his ability to relate with students early on:

> I think it was from having worked with kids for years [at camp]. I know how to say this, I know what I want, and I know what they need to do. I now know that some of those times I must have been wrong. That was not the way to do it. But they [the students]–if you speak with confidence, you can get them to think. (James, personal communication, September 6, 2012)

James' story is full of moments that only seem to affirm his decision to be an upper elementary school teacher.

The second research participant is one of the most popular teachers in the lower elementary school. Lisa arrived at Southern in 1983 after 11 years of teaching experience at a couple of independent schools in the New England region. She also had 1 year at an American school in Eastern Europe. Lisa taught 2nd/3rd grade at Southern for over 25 years, and during the 2012/13 school year actually announced her plans to retire in June 2013. Lisa's path to teaching was not as definitive as James's, as she graduated from a

university in a time when women were breaking out of typical female career paths. For years Lisa felt she should do something "more important" than teaching. While Lisa grew up fascinated by how people learned, she feared a career in teaching would be the path of least resistance and a disappointment to friends and family who saw the changing times of the seventies as an opportunity for women to enter previously male dominated professions. A turning point for Lisa was during a summer job where she was sent to observe a teacher workshop on creativity.

> The workshop was called a workshop in creative education. It was so exciting. I went to it, and I was the youngest person, and people did not know I wasn't a teacher. I would just take all my notes and go back at the end of the day and tell the guy I worked for all about it. But I was probably–I could have been the most inspired person at the workshop. I just loved it. We did dance, we did painting, we did building things, we did you know water experiments. I just got so thrilled to watch myself learn and to see how different that was than what I was doing in college. And it started making sense to me about why I was not very happy in college. I liked abstract thinking–it was abstract for some degree that was making me feel ill.… So at the end of that I decided to study some early childhood education. (Lisa, personal communication, September 9, 2012)

This fascination with learning and creativity has been a driving force throughout Lisa's career, and most of her writings for school publications are reflections on how children learn and how to encourage creative thinking. Lisa has spent her career promoting the idea that everyone is a lifelong learner and that adults in particular can have a hard time being comfortable as learners. Therefore, while Lisa has spent her entire career in the

classroom, she has also been very involved with professional development for herself and for other teachers. While Lisa's passion for creative thought led her away from the classroom a couple of times to pursue dancing, painting, and writing, she ended up finding the classroom to be the best place to use her creative energies.

During my initial interview with Lisa, she suggested I also work with her husband Ralph, who has taught 4th/5th grade at Southern since 1983. I decided to work with Ralph as he met the basic criteria of years in the classroom and because he has worked in many different independent schools and could offer a perspective on what was unique about Southern. Ralph is also an iconoclastic figure at Southern whose hands-on approach to teaching elementary school is revered by much of Southern's community. Ralph has had a long career in the classroom. Before arriving at Southern he had taught for a total of 15 years at five different independent and two different public schools. Throughout Ralph's childhood, he found his teachers to be the most interesting people he knew and even had male teachers form 4th through 8th grade–a rarity at that time. Ralph cannot think of any time in his life when he did not want to teach, and he finds his curious mind is best applied to classroom teaching with 9 and 10 year olds.

> I think it really defined me having male teachers in the elementary school and also
> understanding what wealth can and cannot do. Because the biggest stumbling
> block to becoming a teacher, according to my father, you will be impoverished.
> You will never be able to support a family.… I just knew instinctively that I was
> good at this and that I wanted to stay in. I got my masters degree in secondary
> English and that was–I still had that, but I never used it. I went right into

elementary. It just seemed like a lot of fun. (Ralph, personal communication,

September 30, 2012)

Ralph's classroom reflects his passion for learning and teaching, as there is no unused

space in his entire room. Ralph's students study the Middle Ages and the classroom is

full of his own handiwork: lofts for learning in nooks, customized stools he makes each

year for each student, and a raised, table-top model of a Middle Age village that serves as

a role play activity throughout the school year. Ralph's love of carpentry has led him to

build much of the classroom and parts of Southern's playground. The potential to impact

a young child's life is a driving force for Ralph to teach elementary, and while his early

career had short stints in high school and middle school, he loves working in the upper

elementary. "Kids I teach today I teach them a tenth of their lives, which is a huge

amount. Most of their waking hours are with me. So that was one reason why I got out

of high school" (Ralph, personal communication, February 10, 2013). Ralph loves to tell

stories and use humor to engage his students and sees school as a way to engage students

with every aspect of their surroundings and begin to make sense of how they fit into their

worlds.

Southern has a unique structure to its junior high. The junior high is a hybrid of

the elementary school and the high school. Students are divided into "homebase"

classrooms of approximately 30 students with half being 7th graders and half 8th graders.

The homebase classroom has two teachers responsible for social studies, literature,

writing, and grammar. The students leave their homebase for math, science, foreign

language, music, and art, but they have the same homebase teachers for two years and

form strong bonds with them. The first homebase teacher I interviewed was Michael. In

some ways Michael became a teacher by accident. Michael moved home at the end of

his senior year in college with no idea about what he wanted to do with his life. Through

a few connections and chance encounter in a grocery store, Michael ended up applying

for and getting a job as a Junior High assistant teacher at Southern in 1981. He has been

at Southern ever since. Michael describes his early years as tough, but full of great

moments with his students. He appears to derive great joy from getting to know and

spending time with his students. While Michael is also passionate about history, movies,

and literature, Southern's culture of building close student/teacher relationships is what

keeps him coming back every year. At times Michael sees himself as a coordinator of

activities for his students and enjoys helping guide them through a time in their lives that

can be full of emotional and academic struggles.

    The second junior high teacher I interviewed also feels that focusing on the

emotional lives of her students is an important part of her job. Carol arrived at Southern

in 1992 after working as a bicycle sales rep and as a stockbroker before returning to

university to earn a master degree in education and then working two years in a public

middle school. Carol found her career as a stockbroker to be unsatisfying and quit with

few prospects of another job. Carol's old high school English teacher heard she needed a

job and asked her to finish out the year for a teacher just promoted. After her 4-month

stint in a high school, she was hooked and went back earn her master degree in education.

    And these kids just opened me up, and I realized just that language was so much

    more vast and I ended up going back to school and getting a master's degree in

    English education. I focused on really writing personal stories as a bridge to

    academic writing. That was the focal point. It came from kind of developing a

writing program during that 4 months. Or just really learning to read in terms of listening to what they are saying and not how they are saying it. So it really inspired me and I felt like there was something really interesting there. (Carol, personal communication, September 20, 2012)

After completing her master degree on integrating English and social studies, Carol was offered a job in a large public middle school and grew to love working with 12 and 13 year olds. Carol is fascinated by helping students find their own voices and using social studies to facilitate a more active engagement with their worlds inside and outside of school. Over the past 5 years, Carol has worked collaboratively to create a course titled Race, Class, and Gender that builds on junior high students' ability to reflect on their role in the world and uses the curriculum to explore not only a student's personal history, but how their histories fit into today's world. Carol enjoys the ability of junior high students to engage in more abstract thinking and is also passionate about helping her students sort through early adolescence.

The only high school teacher I interviewed is someone I have worked closely with for 6 years in the social studies department. Michelle arrived at Southern in 1989 after 8 years in a large, public, suburban high school. Michelle grew up passionate about knowledge and learning and remembers wanting to be a teacher at an early age.

I knew I wanted to teach. I have my journal from when I was 11 years old and I knew I wanted to teach–it is written in my journal at 11 years old and 13 years old. At those stages the big debate was whether I wanted to teach or be an astronaut. And when I wrote about wanting to teach I wrote about wanting to teach science. (Michelle, personal communication, June 14, 2013)

Michelle's early influence was a local librarian who saw something in her and kept feeding her books about art, religion, and history. He even provided her access to the special collections room at an early age and engaged her in reading and learning. Her experiences at the local library, coupled with positive reinforcement when she knew something in school and influential early teachers, helped convince her she wanted a career in education. By the time Michelle started college, she knew she was going to be a teacher, but once she realized much of her course work had to be in education, she gave up taking all of the necessary science courses, choosing instead to major in history with minor degrees in education and literature. Michelle left college and started her career as a social studies teacher at a large, public, high school. After an up down experience for 8 years, she moved to Southern where she has been for 23 years.

Each of the participants came to teaching for very different reasons and followed their own unique path to Southern. Three taught public school before Southern and arrived looking for a better work environment, three were in different independent schools and arrived looking for a change, while one started his career at Southern and has never left. Three of the six participants wanted to be teachers from early ages, and by college had determined that teaching was the only career choice for him or her. The other three participants actively avoided a career in teaching and somewhere in their early twenties found themselves drawn to a teaching career. Lisa became a teacher because of her fascination with learning, creativity and children, while Carol and Michael were just looking for a job with decent pay and stumbled into the profession. In the end, all six of the participants found teaching to be a life-long, rewarding career, and while there are

some clear parallels in what they have gained from their lives in the classroom, each teacher has followed a different trajectory inside of the classroom.

Mentoring

Kelly (2006) and Bell and Gilbert's (1994) research highlights the importance of teacher learning as a dynamic process, as teaching is a fluid profession that requires flexibility to adjust to the needs of a wide range of students. Teachers must not only be active in their own learning to be successful, but they also need to be advocates for what they need (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Kelly, 2006; Leat, 1999). Kardos et al. (2001) also discuss the importance of the professional community new teachers enter into, and along with Rosenholtz's (1991) study, the research indicates the importance of teachers being part of a professional community engaged in their own learning. In the early years of any teaching career, a novice teacher will often seek out a mentor. A new teacher will look for a veteran teacher willing to offer wisdom and guidance in a way that not only supports a new teacher's growth, but that also serves as an outlet for a new teacher to openly discusses problems and think through solutions. In the telling of their stories, all six participants reflected on the role of mentors, and in most situations, the mentor was someone each participant had actively sought out, rather than someone who had been assigned by the school to support each teacher's growth.

Michelle's first mentor was Ben, a colleague in her department to whom, during her first year of teaching, she quickly reached out to ask for help.

> They did not assign those [mentors]–he was the teacher I knew, knew how to
>
> teach. He was like the ultimate teacher. You could tell that in the department I
>
> was hired into. He was the teacher kind of person, so I went to him and we

developed that kind of relationship as a result. (Michelle, personal

communication, June 14, 2013)

Michelle identified a specific mentor teacher who she felt knew his material, engaged the

students, and had a style that seemed to match the style Michelle wanted to have in the

classroom. Michelle asked to observe Ben, and over time they formed such a strong

bond that Michelle remembers being able to identify her "first major success" in the

classroom because of an affirming conversation she had with her mentor. Ben had

approached Michelle and shared positive feedback after he had heard from some students

about the exciting lessons happening in Michelle's classroom. To this day, Michelle

identifies that moment as the time when she finally felt confident in herself as a teacher,

that she really was figuring out how to teach. In a similar fashion, Carol does not recall

having a formal mentor, but attaches great significance to conversations with a colleague

and with her principal in her first school. Carol's initial approach to managing a tough

group of students was to create a loud and active classroom. The noise and use of active

discussions did not match with the methodology other teachers in her school were using,

but Carol recalls finding comfort in the understanding from the principal, who seemed to

grasp what Carol was attempting to do. At the end of the year, Carol's contract was not

renewed, but Carol remembers the principal telling her that she would one day be an

excellent teacher. Those moments of positive reinforcement from a colleague or an

administrator helped each teacher get through the early years.

Michael's early mentoring came in part from the junior high teacher he was

assisting, but key advice came from various administrators at Southern. Michael tells a

poignant story of an exchange he had with an administrator as they stood in front of a soda machine.

> She [Alice] would come down and do these little group things with the kids. I do not remember if it was my first or second year. It must have been my first year and she was in my classroom. I was really just trying to get comfortable with the kids–how to be around them and relax and sort of have fun. So one day I was doing this thing with all of them and there was something where they had to come draw stuff and I was kind of being the one who entered names for it. I was just very relaxed and was having fun. It was one of the first times I felt really comfortable and kidding around with them. It was really good. So Alice went over back to the high school–at that point Alice was the head of the junior high. And I walked over there to get a coke or something and she came and found me where the coke machines were and she said–well Alice can be very earnest–and she said I just wanted to tell you it is so lovely to watch you with the kids. You have such a great rapport with them–they obviously really like you a lot–you are so nice with them and you are just a wonderful teacher. You know she said all this great stuff and that was like huge. She said all of three or four sentences to me, but that she went out of her way to come tell me that was a really sweet thing. It made a big difference. It made me–I had sort of been feeling that way and to have her confirm that there was this–it was good. (Michael, personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Being noticed by a colleague or an administrator who articulated a positive observation about a new teacher's work had a profound impact on those teachers in their early years,

as each of the six tell stories about struggling in the early years and questioning his or her ability to be successful in the classroom. While each teacher had positive moments with his or her students early on, it was the affirming comments from another adult that had a long-term positive impact on each of them. A mentoring relationship with someone each teacher respected was key to helping each one push through the roller coaster of the first few years.

One source of initial support for Ralph was his own 4th grade teacher. Ralph's hands-on approach in the classroom was often at odds with what other teachers were doing, so at times Ralph was a bit isolated in his early years. Ralph was a male elementary school teacher, and there were not many role models for him in the sixties, so he eventually reached out to his own 4th grade teacher, who had been influential in Ralph entering the profession. Ralph also relied heavily on the workshops he could attend across the New England region. The workshops were facilitated by educators from Great Britain. Ralph places great value on the experience he gained from working with educators who had a similar approach to teaching, one that was full of activities, group work, and hands-on building. Ralph's approach stood out at many of the early schools he worked in, and over the first 15 years of his career, he worked at seven different schools. Ralph had a strong, internal drive to be a teacher, and he persisted through tough early trials, such as being fired mid-year at one school for using a more hands-on teaching approach that some of his colleagues found disruptive. After his many moves, Ralph finally was able to find a school community that provided the necessary affirmation he needed. That affirmation came in the form of having the school administration at Southern recruit him for his unique approach to teaching.

For Lisa and James, the mentoring process unfolded as a result of having a teaching partner in the classroom. Southern's staffing model in all of its K-8 classrooms is to have two full time teachers in the same room. Lisa and James found their teaching partners to be a great source of support and growth. James still credits his first teaching partner, with whom he worked at his first job at a small, Mid-Atlantic, independent school, for guiding him through the early challenges that had him questioning his ability to balance taking care of children while also taking care of himself. His greatest challenge as a new teacher was in managing two parents who felt that James hated their son. James has a vivid memory of a contentious parent conference in which he was aggressively attacked by the family and blamed for much of the student's academic struggles. As soon as the meeting ended, his teaching partner turned to him and said, "do not worry. That was about issues that family is having with each other and has *nothing* to do with you" (James, personal communication, September 6, 2012). It still took time for James to come to terms with the attack, but the immediate support from his teaching partner was essential. Later, when James arrived at Southern, his new teaching partner sat through every parent conference with him and helped him handle what can be one of the hardest parts of being a teacher: talking with parents about sensitive issues related to their children. James speaks of his early teaching partners in glowing terms and feels that having a teaching partner was, and still is, a significant contribution to his professional growth. "It [having a teaching partner] is really valuable. It gives me a sense of at least that I am not way off the track, because if I were, my teaching partner would say something" (James, personal communication, October 14, 2012). Having immediate access to a veteran teacher meant James did not have to go far for help and guidance.

Before arriving at Southern, Lisa worked at a New England independent school that also had two teachers in each classroom. The school's model was a bit different in that one teacher was explicitly the head teacher, while the other was an assistant studying to be a full-time teacher and only stayed for one year. This built-in, mentoring relationship was important to Lisa, and she found there was much to be gained by not just from being mentored, but also in being the mentor. As a mentor to a teacher in the same room, Lisa had to be able to explain each decision she made, which forced her to develop a clear idea about why and how she set up and ran her classroom. Michael has a similar view on being a mentor, as he distilled a key moment in his own development from his experience as a mentor to a new, young teaching partner. In explaining to his teacher partner the whys behind the structure of his classroom, Michael realized he had an in-depth understanding about what he was doing. Lisa found this lead and assistant teacher relationship to be so essential that after a few years at Southern, she organized an Assistants Group for all of the young, elementary teachers to have regular meetings with her. These meetings were a forum in which they could openly talk about their growth as teachers and their relationships with their teaching partners. As Lortie (1975/2002) and Rosenholtz (1991) noted, teaching can be an isolating profession. Therefore, schools that are able to staff two adults in one classroom who share all of the teaching responsibilities can create a substantive potential for teachers not only to share the load, but also to support each other's growth. With two adults in the room, each teacher is no longer relying solely on the students' reactions for feedback on whether something worked. As noted by four of the teachers in this study, new teachers should actively seek out a mentor, and in doing so, should try to find someone who can offer the type of

constructive feedback that encourages a new teacher and helps him or her identify lessons that have worked. Accessibility strengthens this process, which means it is easier to maintain a thriving mentorship relationship if structured within a healthy classroom teacher pairing.

Listening to each of the participants, the importance of the relationship with a teaching partner is evident. As Carol said about her first teaching partner at Southern, "it was a match made in heaven, as we both saw the importance of using writing to support emotional growth" (Carol, personal communication, December 28, 2012). Or as Michael describes it:

> I think it is hard for anybody who does a job all day long and goes home and somebody says, 'how was your day?' Like where do you begin? I think it is true for any job. But I feel like for teaching, it is even more so because it is so much about personalities. The individual personalities … especially at Southern because we get to know these kids so well, so there is this–there are all these subtleties going on; it is hard to even begin to explain to somebody else. I think the person who gets it–that is one nice thing about having a co-teacher–is the person who gets more than anybody is your co-teacher because they have the same kids. (Michael, personal communication, March 15, 2013)

And Lisa probably best sums it up:

> Another thing that has kept me in teaching, is how much fun I have with the people that I taught with. Jack and Ana and Tom and Alex. Just not Liz. It has been so much fun. That is another blessing–to be with people that you come in the morning and you are really glad to see them. Ana called me this morning

because she was having a teacher/parent conference. Her first conference as she

is running a tiny school. It is a very complicated thing she is going to try and

communicate to this parent. But I feel like those relationships with my teaching

partners.… They are really tight relationships. I feel like Tom and Alex and Ana

are like my family. (Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

Relationships with colleagues are a key factor in maintaining a commitment to a

profession and to an organization, but because so much of teaching is spent with children,

even more significance may be attached to adult relationships. All six participants

described moments in their careers when the strong ties with another adult were key not

only to supporting their growth, but also to building the resiliency to stay in teaching.

The Students

It should come as no surprise that a favorite topic of conversation for each

participant was his or her students. Certainly a love of children would be a prerequisite

for any teacher, but what stood out from the interviews and writings of each teacher was

how fascinated he or she is by the development of each, individual child. Being an active

part of a child's academic, social, and emotional development was, and for five of them

still is, a driving force for them to return to the classroom every year. James, who has a

deep passion for ancient history, still cares more about the energy the students bring to a

topic than the actual topic. "And one of the main things I love about my work is that in

these areas that I enjoy and find fascinating … they include not only Egypt and China,

but also the children and their development" (James, personal communication, October

14, 2012). For Michael, the relationship with his students is the defining aspect of his

job, and as noted before, it is such a personal relationship that he finds it hard to share or discuss it with anyone other than his teaching partner.

> By the time I had seen how the whole year went and what it was like to watch the kids change that year, I definitely wanted to come back the next year to sort of see what it would be like. And the thing you are always doing–you are always thinking about what you could do better. And then the second year, I had this group of kids that I just–the 7th graders my second year....But the ones I had were just an incredible group of kids. I just loved them. That was when I was hooked. (Michael, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

All six participants discuss the intimate nature of teaching and how important it is to see how their students respond to their teaching and how the students grow and change. As Carol observed about her early career, "I guess what I did not realize about teaching was that it was a relationship with kids. That learning actually occurred through connecting with these kids" (Carol, personal communication, September 20, 2012). These connections and interactions with students are at the core of what teachers do, and the psychic rewards received from working with students is a major reason teachers stay in the classroom (Santoro, 2011). As Reyes and Pounder (1993) found in their study, veteran teachers care most about being able to access these psychic rewards, and as Santoro (2011) notes, when teachers cannot access the moral rewards of teaching, they become demoralized and leave the profession. All six of the participants consistently expressed the psychic rewards of watching students grow as an anchor for their life in the classroom.

When I discussed with James the challenges of teaching and asked how he manages the stress, his answer revolved around the students. James told a story of a particularly complicated day, full of logistical problems for him and his students, and how that day changed for the better when he simply stepped back to observe how one of his students was completely engaged playing in a puddle during recess.

> How could I not have a good day? … Lots of parts of the day–you know we
> went through this hard thing together and did fine. It is just fun and engaging all
> the time. With the occasional little blip of frustration is just working with people
> and trying to do something. (James, personal communication, October 14, 2012)

James and Michael often discussed the "Southern student" as a key source of joy in their work and attached specific characteristics to Southern students. They find students at Southern to be engaged in their world, active in class discussions, curious, humorous with this general assumption that the teachers and students are all on the same side. James, a former Southern student himself, speculated that the culture of the school supports the growth of a student in such a way that the student feels respected and encouraged to take risks. For him, Southern felt like a safe place to grow up. Considering the quality of students at Southern, Lisa noted that being able to build one's own student body through an admissions process provides control for the school to determine who could even be in the classroom. However, even when considering those obvious advantages of being able to control who can come to your school, Michael's descriptions of the students create a picture of a community of students and teachers who share a powerful bond. This bond helps everyone get through tough times and makes the successes feel even grander.

I think we all share the assumption that the kids are fascinating. They are just so

fascinating. We could all just sit around and talk about them forever. About

trying to figure them out. That was the thing. The whole thing. How do you take

a group of them and get them interested in something. Get them to remember it–

also what is going on with them. What do they like? What is their deal? That is

just kind of endlessly fascinating.… With junior high kids you just always know

where you stand. They are just so wide open. They try to be cool, but they are

not really very good at it yet. So you can totally tell where you stand with them.

If they are into it, if they are bored. I just know how to read them so well. After

all these years. (Michael, personal communication, February 15, 2013)

This ability to get to know the students so well, coupled with the challenge of figuring

out what would best help them grow in the classroom, keeps each teacher intrigued by

life in the classroom.

This consistent desire by the teachers to engage their students in learning, in whatever

way possible, is part of what makes their jobs exciting. For Michelle, seeing that

engagement made her realize that she had begun to become a good teacher. The day

Michelle first discovered how to share the classroom and turn some control over to her

high school students was such a significant moment that she can recall it with great detail

almost 30 years later.

That day I came in and I had put together a bunch of primary sources and instead

of standing in front of the room and at kind of attention, which is what I did

because I was anxious, I handed everyone in the class an excerpt that was a

primary source and that day I had each of the them reading excerpts from leaders,

from citizens and they had to reflect on–you know what was their reaction to it

and I realized that day that, even though I was the person organizing the class, I

knew more than they did, that their contribution back to class was critical and…

that I did not have to carry the weight and I did not have to be at attention at all

the time. That was the beginning of the shift for me. It was so stressful for me

for the first 2-3 months because I had to do everything. I had to have the lecture

ready, I had to make sure the kids were interested, I had to… I was just working

and working and then I continued to work after I made this realization, but it was

different. It was more of an acknowledgement that I could be a little bit more at

ease. I could listen to what they had to say. And what they had to say furthered

the conversation. (Michelle, personal communication, June 14, 2013)

Just as Michelle recalls those great moments of student engagement and how a class

responds to what she brings in, James enjoys the energy generated by a room full of

engaged students. James particularly loves seeing how the 29 minds in his room respond

differently to and are engaged by the materials and activities he presents in the classroom.

James finds it intriguing how students can add something to a lesson he had not

considered.   Lisa feels her entire career has been about encouraging students to be

creative,

all that time I was pretty involved in the idea of creativity and how to support

kids' creativity and what that meant in terms of how people thought. I was

interested in thinking and creativity.… I really did just love being in the company

of children. (Lisa, personal communication, September 9, 2012)

In addition to gaining a lot from working with students, each participant noted how much he or she enjoyed the specific characteristics of the age group he or she taught. Ralph tried a few different age groups before he settled on 4th and 5th graders, and he sees those grades as the perfect fit for him.

> 4th and 5th graders really are smart. They can take in information. They ask good questions, they want to learn. The way that I teach, which is stories and humor really appeals to them. They are just absorbing so much, and I think that with sixth graders they are absorbing less–and I think they are absorbing more about the opposite sex or sports or whatever. I just enjoy it. Also, what I do enjoy is seeing kids change in 9 or 10 months. It is just astonishing, and as you teach older kids, you do not see as much change. (Ralph, February 10, 2013)

Each teacher had found his or her niche. Carol really enjoys the capabilities of junior high students:

> So thus began my middle school career. And slowly, you know it grew on me. To the point where I really realized what a rich and incredible age it is to teach because they have the capacity for abstraction and yet they still very much have the mind of a child. They switch back and forth and accordingly to what is going on so there is a lot of potential for fun and play. And then there is a lot of potential for a kind of deep thinking that they haven't been able to do until they are at that age. (Carol, personal communication, September 20, 2012)

With similar zest, Lisa describes working with 2nd and 3rd graders:

> Well I used to say that it is the particular combination of being–having their imagination so accessible to them–that they could be there in a flash. They show

how they feel on their faces and bodies. And their imagination is really close to

the surface. And they are old enough to be, to have hand skills and be able to

responsibly cut with a knife. They do not need a lot of that kind of handholding.

(Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

For the six teachers, the engagement of the developmental level specific to the age they

teach provides the psychic rewards that underscore why they teach. As noted by

Hargreaves (1998), Peske, et al. (2001), and Rosenholtz (1991) access to these psychic

rewards of teaching are key to school being able retain their teachers. Teachers need to

know they are making a difference in their students' lives and these six teachers all

expressed confidence they were positively impacting the lives of their students.

Following Their Passion

Though having the opportunity to work with students is certainly a foundational

reason for wanting to be a teacher, working only with students has not been enough to

sustain these six teachers over their long careers. Each teacher discussed extensively the

ability to pursue their own individual passions and find ways for their passions to

compliment, and enrich, their lives and their students' experiences in the classroom. The

ability to meld their passions with their roles as classroom teachers is a common theme

that emerged in all of their interviews and in their writings. Before Michael started

teaching, he wanted to make films and write "the great American novel." Over the years,

he has structured his classroom in a way that reflects his passions for film and writing,

and he encourages his students to find their own individual passions. In his classroom,

Michael has an entire wall filled with movies and another wall papered with cartoons and

quotations that represent the thoughts and humor of many great writers. Michael also has

a credit system in his classroom called Indies (named after Independent Films), which

requires students to teach themselves something new or try out new books, activities or

service projects. The idea is to encourage students to explore in a way that may lead to

the discovery of a new interest or passion.

> The other big thing for me is the Indies that I have done for years and years.
>
> Which is the books and movies and making things and doing things that they are
>
> interested in. And that is always kind of fresh because they bring their own thing
>
> to it. I just kind of suggest stuff that they might want to try, but they are going to
>
> try whatever they decide they want to try. And then it is just me sort of seeing
>
> what they have to say about it and reading what they have to say and giving it
>
> back to them. (Michael, personal communication, March 15, 2013)

An overview of the Indies program is included in Michael's 20-page course description,

which he sends out at the beginning of the school year to the parents and students.

Articulating and organizing the Indies is something Michael has developed over the

years, and it has become a signature aspect of his course.

In high school, the ability for Michelle to follow her passion is even more explicit.

In Southern's high school, only the first two years of the social studies curriculum is

mandated (World History and US Politics in ninth grade, and US History in tenth grade).

For 11th and 12th grade, the teachers can write their own courses, and students select

courses that interest them. For Michelle, this means she can combine her loves of

history, art, science, and literature into courses such as: Art and Society, Stealing Fire:

History and Culture, Revolution and Society, and Caste, Class and Empire. This

curricula structure also means that at the start of each school year, Michelle gets to pursue

an academic passion with a roomful of students interested in the same topic. For Michael and Michelle, their classrooms and curriculum are reflections of their personalities as well as their individual intellectual pursuits.

In addition to being able to teach a topic that one loves, five of the six teachers at Southern have been able to actively pursue interests outside of the classroom. This theme is a significant pattern that developed in the interviews. In the teaching profession, it is not unusual to find that when a teacher has strong interests outside of the classroom, they either transition to being a school administrator, education consultant, or curriculum director, or they end up leaving teaching altogether to pursue another path. The six teachers in this study have had the structural flexibility to find opportunities outside the classroom that are engaging to them intellectually and to then find enriching ways to bring those interests into the classroom. Sometimes their interests have very little to do with what is taught in the classroom, and their pursuit of the interest is mostly for personal growth. For instance, Michelle is the co-leader of Southern's very complicated graduation ceremony and also directs Southern's summer camp for almost 600 K-8 students. For graduation planning, Michelle is released from her May teaching load but is otherwise able to manage important, school wide responsibilities and remain a full time classroom teacher during the year. Lisa's passion for learning and creativity extends well beyond her young students, and for much of her career, she has been involved in adult education related to cultivating creativity. As Lisa describes, "creative is how someone thinks and not what someone produces–a curious, flexible, a mind that makes connections and solves problems, a mind that will take a risk, try out something new– that's willing to fool around" (Lisa, personal communication, November 11, 2012). Lisa

started the Assistant's Group at Southern, which not only provides an important space for assistant teachers to discuss and reflect on their classroom work, but also provides Lisa an opportunity to teach adults.

> Because all the teachers were such practiced and thoughtful people, and I remember even then thinking a lot about teacher development. I thought about how children think and teacher development.… And so I am happy to be in a place where people are learning. Where adults are so supported in learning. I mean teachers are supported. (Lisa, personal communication, September 9, 2012)

Even though Lisa retired at the end of the 2012/2013 school year, she still plans to lead the Assistant's Group. Carol's passions for writing and creating new curriculum have also helped her build an active career path inside and outside of the classroom. For example, Carol led the effort to build a camp for 7th, 8th and 9th graders 3 years ago at Southern, which she now directs. In addition, Carol began working with another junior high teacher 5 years ago to create a new curriculum called Race, Class, and Gender (RCG). A discussion of the course was recently published:

> In Inquiry into Identity: Race, Class, and Gender (RCG), an eighth grade social studies class, the students' stories serve as springboards for higher-order learning. Through sharing personal experiences and listening to one another respectfully, students form a learning community in which deep, critical thinking naturally emerges. They gain important insights about their own identities while learning about the lives of their classmates.… Through a series of projects, supplemented by readings and films, students make connections between what they already

know and the ways in which power and privilege operate in institutions like

schools, religions, governments, and businesses. (Caldwell, 2012, p. 6)

This curriculum is the social studies framework for two classes, and its success has led to

Carol and the co-authors becoming consultants to other schools on the course, as well as

how to manage race, class, and gender issues in their own school community. In the

summer of 2013, Carol will co-lead a professional, summer institute on RCG. She also

has a strong interest in the emotional lives of her students and co-authored a piece in

Southern's newsletter, Beyond Mean Girls, that looks at some of the origins of the Mean

Girl Syndrome and suggests ways to help girls move beyond aggression toward each

other. This article had an impact in the community, and Carol and the co-author have

become leaders in dealing with tough social issues that develop between pre-teen girls.

This past year, Carol led conversations with the girls of one 6th grade class that developed

such complicated social issues that the dynamic was derailing the class' ability to work

and learn together. For Michelle, Lisa, and Carol their passions have created, in a sense,

a second career, but because of the structure of the school, each of them has pursued their

interests while maintaining their roles as classroom teachers. By encouraging and

supporting each of these teacher's ability to follow his or her passions, Southern has

enriched its school community and kept these influential, inspiring teachers in the

classroom.

James and Ralph's passions have led them to actively engage in networks outside

of the school community, but their passions have also enriched their own curriculums.

James has a passion for role-play games, and James attends yearly conferences and leads

workshops on how to design and implement role-plays games in the classroom, as well as

for small, adult communities. Every year James' students participate in a yearlong role-play that compliments the social studies curriculum. James also facilitates similar games for adults and wrote a piece in a Southern publication describing his love of role-play games and how he applies it in the classroom. At a young age, James was fascinated by large role-play games like the popular Dungeons & Dragons, and in his adult life, he has been able to create a parallel career path in which his interest is not only expressed in the classroom, but for which he is also considered an expert by a community completely separate from Southern.

> I feel like I get to bring all of these other interests, these other parts of myself into the classroom and that I learn a bunch of things in the classroom that I can use in game development for groups outside of my classroom as well. (James, personal communication, February 8, 2013)

Like James, Ralph is deeply involved in other communities related to his interests. Ralph has a disparate set of passions that he somehow manages to simultaneously pursue. He has written extensively about his love, and subsequent study, of the architecture of diners and fast food restaurants. Some years ago, the city newspaper did a piece on Ralph's love of chrome and plastic, and Ralph has taught a course on the architecture of diners and fast food restaurants at a local university. Ralph is also an active carpenter and spends his summers in the New England region vacationing and doing some carpentry. Because Ralph has so much autonomy in the classroom, he has designed many units of study that reflect his passions. Over the years, his students have researched the history of commonplace food items, such as M&Ms and Twinkies, or they do a project on a local restaurant to summarize every aspect of how the restaurant works. According to Ralph,

"studying an everyday artifact is emotionally powerful, as it validates a child's experience and is constantly reinforced in daily life. Moreover, it's an interesting academic exercise, requiring problem-solving, initiative, and patience" (Ralph, personal communication, November 11, 2012). As previously noted, Ralph has conducted his own study of diners throughout the New England region and had his students visit and write about diners. He even had one class write an entire book about the history of the businesses at a specific street corner in the local community. Much of Ralph's work has received media coverage, and he even wrote a unit plan for AT&T on how to use the phone book to teach math, reading, geography, and problem solving. At some point in each interview, Ralph noted he did not feel like there was any separation between his world inside the classroom and his world outside of the classroom. One major reason Ralph loves his job is that his curious nature is rewarded and matched by his students' natural curiosity, and he feels he can bring his whole self into the classroom and authentically share with his students.

The ability to write my own curriculum has been a driving force behind me choosing to stay in the classroom at Southern. I have autonomy over my work with my students. This study has broadened my view of autonomy, and the way in which these six teachers are afforded the flexibility to build active professional lives outside of their lives as full time classroom teachers was an important finding. The relevance of this finding as it relates to the participants' longevity in the classroom became distinctly apparent in the interviews, the documents the participants shared, and informal observations about what they do on and off campus. I applied seven of Merriam's (2009) eight strategies to guarantee validity, and during each member check, I directly asked

each teacher the impact of following their individual passions. While three of the six were quick to acknowledge its importance in their lives, the other three had not spent much time thinking about how they had built an active professional life outside of the classroom. This specific finding engenders a new set of questions for a future study, as it can be a challenge for schools to create the necessary space for full time teachers to pursue other interests while staying the classroom. Lisa actually took a yearlong sabbatical to write and paint, while Carol has taken days away from the classroom to work as a consultant at other schools. By consistently comparing the data and building different matrices, it became clear that a major concept from this study is that for veteran teachers to stay engaged with their lives inside the classroom, it helps for them to have active professional lives outside of the classroom. As Ralph notes:

> I do not really see a difference between my outside life and inside life. That is
> really important to me. It is something that is not always appreciated at schools.
> When I am doing something my mind is wandering and I will think of something.
> I am sure all teachers do that. But, it does not seem like a big divide to me. I like
> learning and I like teaching. (Ralph, personal communication, November 11,
> 2012)

While autonomy provides space for teachers to incorporate their interests into their curriculum, this study has expanded my initial perception of the importance of classroom autonomy, as my understanding now includes the need for a teacher to explore, develop, and grow in areas that may seem to have very little to do with their teaching. Many studies into teacher retention have indicated veteran teachers rank task autonomy as a key reason for staying or leaving a school (Certo & Fox, 2002; Day & Gu, 2009; Provasnik &

Dorfman, 2005; Rosenholtz, 1991). The stories of these six teachers provides a broader definition of task autonomy to include not just autonomy over the classroom, but also enough autonomy to pursue their individual passions.

The Role of Teaching Social Studies

One essential question in this study was: What role, if any, does social studies curriculum play in supporting teacher development? For me, the appeal of teaching social studies has always included the ability to connect my lessons with subjects outside of social studies and teach a way to view the world that is critical while also mindful of the challenges we all face in our lives. A factor in the selection of the six participants for this study was that they design and implement their own social studies curriculum. Southern provides teachers significant autonomy to create their customized social studies curriculum, with only two years of mandated courses. Social studies is taught K-12, but as mentioned above, only 9th grade World History, 9th grade US Politics, and 10th grade US History are required. Most teachers in the elementary school have designed their classes around a central social studies subject that links to their literature, math, and science curriculums. This model allows the elementary teachers to develop a theme (or a couple of themes) that the class can explore in depth with connections being made between the central subject and which books the students read, the science projects they work on, and even some of the math they study. The central subject creates a unifying theme for a specific class, and all three of the elementary teachers in this study have a central subject. James' description captures the essence of the central subject:

Yeah, the central subject…probably starts out and would sound to somebody

coming from a more compartmentalized school curriculum, it would sound like

the social studies curriculum is the theme. But all along it felt like, to me, it is

more–there is a theme, but then we have to come up with ways to connect to

language arts, science, and we also have to come up with ways to link social

studies to that theme. You cannot just put up some posters and say our theme for

the whole year is Ancient Egypt. You have to have things of Ancient Egypt that

you are doing that are not your lit books or science projects or what have you.

These are your social studies pieces. (James, personal communication, February

8, 2013)

Similarly in the junior high, the homebase teachers write their own social studies

curriculum. The teachers usually consult with other junior high faculty, and most of the

six homebase classes try to infuse some citizenship education and basic research skills

into their courses. In the high school, students are required to take 3 years of social

studies courses (98% take 4 years), and after 10th grade, they can register for teacher

written courses such as: Economics of Globalization, 20th Century European History, Art

and Society, Modern American, Religion and Society, and more. Therefore, all of the

participants in this study write and rewrite their social studies curriculum every year.

At some point over the 10 month period, I asked each participant two direct

questions about the role of social studies:

Why do you teach social studies?

What role, if any, does social studies play in keeping you engaged?

James describes social studies as the frame of reference for his entire curriculum, and he

even goes as far as considering it the lens through which he filters his worldview.

I do tend to look at questions in the world through a lens of the humanities and human cultures and that sort of thing. At the same, all throughout every term in college, not in high school, but in college I would just sort or marvel out loud to a roommate or my mother that all of my classes are related again this year.…So I think I have a lens–a view of the world that comes through having just read a lot of history and economics and that sort of thing. But I also appreciate for myself and the kids that everything is really interlinked. Humans did not invent science in a vacuum without culture. Developments in literature affect how people talk and think–fight wars–what have you. (James, personal communication, February 8, 2013)

James loves ancient history, and his fascination with Egyptian and Chinese history have inspired him to alternate annually between the two topics as the central subjects in his classroom. James also teaches a short course on Chinese History in the high school, and every two years he leads a group of high school students on a summer trip to China. In his 5th/6th grade classroom, students not only learn Chinese or Egyptian History, but they read Chinese or Egyptian literature, learn basic Chinese or hieroglyphs, and participate in a yearlong role play in which students relive a period in Chinese or Egyptian History. James has found that these two histories are captivating for his students, and he relishes studying these histories as he seeks innovative ways to bring them to life in the classroom. For James, his social studies curriculum engages him at a deep intellectual level and informs how he teaches other subjects in his classroom.

Lisa describes her social studies curriculum as the core piece of how she develops her central subject. As Lisa explains the process of creating a central subject, "teachers

begin by mining their own interests, knowing that their passion will naturally pick up and carry along a good portion of the class" (Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013). Besides mining her own interests, Lisa looks for topics and issues that are developmentally appropriate for her 2nd/3rd grade classroom. She has found that issues of justice, fairness, and separation are appealing to her students, and she has designed a two-year cycle using Mountains and the Himalayas one year and the Pilgrims the second year. Lisa finds that teaching students how to ask questions, pursue their own interests, and engage in analysis of the past is better than students knowing any specific body of knowledge. By not prescribing a body of 2nd/3rd grade knowledge, Lisa is able to allow her students to explore what they are learning at their own pace and then apply the lessons learned from the past to current issues in their own lives. Moreover, she is a strong proponent of the central subject in elementary school and has written about it in Southern's 40th Anniversary book, led discussions about it in Assistant's Group, and led summer workshops. Over the course of her career, Lisa has changed her central subject many times and found social studies to be the easiest way to bring her own life and interests into the classroom. For instance, when Lisa and her husband first moved to Southern and were struggling to make ends meet, they designed a central subject about shelter, food, and necessities. Later, as Lisa became interested in Buddhism, she changed one of her subject years to the Himalayas. So for Lisa, social studies is an avenue by which she can connect her world outside of the classroom with her students inside the classroom.

In Carol's junior high classroom, she builds on Lisa's use of social studies to connect the teacher and students' worlds a step further and uses social studies as an

avenue help students understand their individual roles in their community. Carol's social studies curriculum reflects her passionate desire to help her students realize that they can impact the world around them. The struggle between control and independence is a typical issue for junior high age students, and Carol's description of her curriculum, specifically the Race, Class and Gender class that she recently designed with another teacher, highlights how she uses social studies to give her students the tools to steadily progress from examining one's personal identity to participating in the greater community.

> So anyway, that is kind of what I have been doing. Slowly it has evolved into where now we talk about social studies and do some of the personal exploration more in social studies than we do in writing. Well, we do use literature and writing, but it is all integrated. Social studies is really what–the Race, Class and Gender, is what pulls it all together now and makes it so interesting. Like every single kid has it without exception.… So there is a real personal reason for it. Motivation for being more involved in history. So I guess that would really be the objective for them–sounds a little arrogant to say to participate in shaping history. Rather than just being consumed by it, but to see it as something that can be affected by them. And I think they do. (Carol, personal communication, December 28, 2012)

Just as James sees social studies as a lens through which he views the world, Carol has found an integrated social studies and literature curriculum as the way to engage her students with a stimulating topic and with their realities. Like James and Lisa, Carol has selected topics that match the developmental stage of her students, who are becoming

acutely aware of how others view them as they also work to establish their own identities in the world. For Carol, social studies provides the space to analyze many parts of a student's and a teacher's world. The issues around Race, Class & Gender remain a primary, intellectual pursuit in Carol's life, and being able to explore them with her students means the classroom remains professionally attractive to her.

Ralph also built a curriculum that complements his intellectual interests and, in particular, his love of the Middle Ages. Ralph built a detailed Middle Ages Village in his room, and his museum like walls seem constructed from collections of artifacts and symbols from the past. Ralph's year is full of events and rituals from the Middle Ages, such as May Day and Valentine's Day. On almost any given day in his classroom, Ralph will spend some time telling a story or reading aloud a book about the traditions and daily activities of the Middle Ages. Ralph uses the skills students develop in studying customs of the Middle Ages to then analyze modern day customs and consider the history of the everyday items they use.

> I think it is important for kids to see they are living in history–so something like a Fig Newton has a history. That all of them have histories too. I say this is not a dress rehearsal. This is really–we are living in history. We could moth ball this classroom and replace you with manikins wearing your clothes and charge admission in a 100 years. (Ralph, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

The discussion of each teacher's social studies curriculum consistently elicited enthusiastic responses, and for each teacher, the curriculum crafted reflects personal interests, thereby providing a sense of ownership over what was being taught. If a lesson or topic does not work, it would be because of a mistake made by the teacher, not some

external force. The flip side of such autonomy is the hefty responsibility that lies

squarely on the shoulders of each teacher. The teacher is the decider on what to teach

and must be able to discern what is developmentally appropriate and engaging for their

students. While their personal interests guide the topics chosen, the teachers must

develop a curriculum that offers on-level and differentiated intellectual challenges to their

students without punching a given checklist from someone outside of the classroom.

Every teacher mentioned how freeing this felt, along with the innumerable hours and

effort dedicated to designing and refining one's social studies curriculum.

Michelle and Michael's reasons for continuing to teach social studies can be

summed up by Michelle's response to the question, why do you teach social studies?

Well, I chose social studies, in particular history, because I love the way–I love

the way things unfold, and I love knowing why things happened the way that they

do. It is interesting to me to take an event–like if you were to take WWI and then

to be able to show…why would millions of people go to war, fight, allow 10

million dead. Why would they do that? How did that happen? Questions like

that have always been interesting to me. The other thing is that I have a real

passion for fields that fall in kind of the social sciences. In the social studies

curriculum, you can teach the history of science, you can teach the history of art,

you can teach the history of a particular war. You can come at things from a

social history. You know, pulling back layers. So within social studies and

within history, there are all kinds of fields that allow my creative interests and

knowledge of philosophy, science, and culture to go in all different directions.

My guess is that it is there in literature too, but I did not see it in the way I saw it

in history. History felt like it was a natural–it was like my brain understood some

aspect of the ways I could go with history. So that is why I went with history or

social studies. (Michelle, personal communication, June 14, 2012)

For Michael and Michelle, the ability to incorporate many subjects into their social

studies curriculum allows them to bring more of their own ideas into the classroom.

Michelle repeatedly commented that the main reason she loves teaching is the

opportunity to create a new course. Michelle is continually engaged intellectually

because she is able to research and write new courses, changing what she teaches on a

regular basis. Michael has organized his 7th/8th grade curriculum into a two-year cycle in

which the students walk through all of human history beginning with the Big Bang.

Michael's curriculum chronologically moves through history with stops at major events

or moments. This approach allows Michael to determine the important events that the

students will study in depth, and as he describes it:

It is my favorite thing. I love doing it. I think of the history thing as almost

performance. Like being an actor and playing the same role on Broadway every

night for a couple of years. But really getting into it every time. It is just a

performance. (Michael, personal communication, March 15, 2013)

Both Michelle and Michael thrive in the classroom because they love being able to talk

with students about their favorite topics and then have a chance to see how the students

will respond to those topics.

As all six teachers are veteran teachers of social studies, it is reasonable to expect

that they revel in the content they teach. The discussions we had about their social

studies curriculum made it clear that they especially appreciate the flexibility they have

with their curriculum. Teaching social studies allows the teachers to explore a wide range of interests, provides room for adaption as their own or their students' interests change, and is expansive enough to allow space for subjects outside of the traditional social studies subjects. Also, social studies seems to interest students in an organic sense, as all of the teachers referenced the energy that students bring to the curriculum, the projects, and the stories. These teachers devote a considerable portion of their teaching to telling stories that highlight concepts or emphasize core values or morals so that students can consider them in the context of their own lives. These six teachers are passionate about their curriculum, have explicit agency over what happens in their classrooms, and have continued to grow as teachers of social studies. Being able to teach social studies is a contributing factor to the reasons each of them remains in the classroom.

Professional Development–Factors Influencing Their Growth

The research into adult, and specifically teacher, development addresses the importance of being a lifelong learner and having the skills to keep learning. As Torff and Sternberg (1998) note,

> because certain abilities develop over the life span, and because the cultural contexts of abilities keep changing, attaining a specific body of knowledge is less important than the ability to learn. In a nutshell, the alternative model encourages people not to "get an education" but "stay in education." (p.110)

While Evans (2002) discusses teacher development as a positive progression in which teacher knowledge is always expanding as teachers adjust to their students, new content, and school community, Kelly (2006) points to the necessity of teachers adjusting their identities to the forces they encounter inside and outside of the classroom and having the

skills to learn and rethink their approaches. The research also indicates there is no clear path or trajectory teachers must follow as they grow as professionals (Bell & Gilbert, 1994). The research into teacher development focuses more on the importance of teacher agency in his or her development and does not lay a definitive path (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1991). Finally, Berg (2002) and Kelly (2006) emphasize the emotional nature of teaching and that because teacher development can be so individualized, the impact of external and internal forces on a teacher's development must also be considered.

In discussing the path each teacher has followed, it is important to keep in mind the theoretical framework of social constructionism. All participants in the study referenced how they made sense of the particular realities in their schools, including how they manage their students, relationships with their colleagues, and the community at large. Any reflection on the past will end up elevating certain interactions or events above others as having a lasting impact, and as Embree (2009) notes, it is important to consider each interaction's impact on the construction of knowledge. Social constructionism recognizes the complexity of asking a question such as: What are the professional development needs of veteran social studies teachers? Because each teacher's needs will vary, there cannot be one objectifiable truth about the needs of a group of teachers (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Rather, there will be multiple perspectives that will compete for the truth, and determining the most relevant is one of the goals of this study (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Therefore, as a guide to my analysis, I used this idea that there are multiple, valid paths for teachers to develop as professionals.

For Lisa, professional development was a slow, steady progression with several key workshops supporting her growth, however, most of her growth was a result of working with other teachers, particularly her assistant teachers.

> In some ways maybe my biggest inspiration is with adults. Because I think it is really hard for adults to remember that they are learners. It is like I almost feel more a desire to help them find that because kids are learners and all you have to do is move a few obstacles out of the way and there they go. It is fascinating figuring out what the obstacles are, but a lot of adults, I think, have given up on learning. (Lisa, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

Lisa and Ralph talked extensively about a couple of workshops that encouraged creativity and reflection about their practice, which are two aspects of their work that Lisa and Ralph highly value.

> This couple had a theory that colleges of education were missing the boat. That they should really be using teachers' experiences too–they should be much more connected to how teachers experience the children they are teaching and supporting teachers rather than [just] researching children and then telling teachers what to do. And they started something called the Children's Thinking Seminar, and it wasn't affiliated with a university, but they were collecting all this data, and it went on every Tuesday for a year. We met and talked about the kids in our class, and they were kind of ongoing conversations, Ralph was in it and I. The teachers were gathered from–there were probably 10 or 11 of us, maybe 12, from different schools from all around the city....Because all the teachers were such practiced and thoughtful people, and I remember even then thinking a lot

about teacher development. I thought about how children think and teacher

development. (Lisa, personal communication, September 9, 2012)

As Lisa and Ralph look back over their development, they see a path peppered with

colleagues, workshops, and administrators that helped them think through problems,

develop curriculum, and encourage them to try out new approaches in the classroom.

Ralph has strong memories of a regular workshop where teachers gathered in an old

storefront and built things with large blocks and discarded tables and chairs. This

workshop inspired Ralph to build the seats he makes for his students every year, which

the kids get to customize and then take with them at the end of the year, as well as to

build large wooden blocks for Southern's playground. Lisa also discusses the importance

of having the freedom to attend any workshop she wanted with full financial support

from the school. While Ralph has stopped attending workshops, he does read a great deal

and loves the freedom to bring whatever he reads into the classroom. Ralph sees his

teaching style as one in which he is always tinkering with what he does in the classroom.

He has restlessness about him, and having the space to use his restless energy in the

classroom keeps him interested and developing as a teacher.

For James and Michael, professional growth seems to have been a slow, steady

progression as well, but with less particularly defining moments. As James notes:

I think my rewiring has happened over the long term. I look back into how I

came into classrooms at the school in Wood Valley–the school I taught at before I

taught at Southern. I came in, I do not know if it was confidence or

overconfidence or naïveté. Or some combination. I just did what I did and if it

didn't work, I think I had permission partially coming out of my schooling at

Southern to try again. I think over the years I have become more conscious about how I make decisions. And part of that has changed how I think and do my work, which has been the result of doing it, but also observing three different teaching partners and observing other teachers in other classrooms. And you know, reading and all sorts of things. I think it has been a slow refinement, a slow rise to greater consciousness about what I do. (James, personal communication, October 14, 2012)

For Michael, the realization that he really had become a thoughtful teacher occurred when his first young teaching partner arrived.

One thing about Tamera showing up is that she would ask all kinds of great questions, and I sort of discovered how much I knew by then. I did not really realize how much I knew about teaching by then. You find yourself saying all these really wise things and you realize I guess I do know something. Suddenly I felt like this wise elder even though I was all of 32 or something. (Michael, personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Michael and James both found that having to explain their decisions about curriculum and students obligated them to reflect on what they were doing, which often led to changes. Reviewing the documents provided by both teachers, one can identify how significantly each has changed over the years. While Michael speaks of his room as though it has been essentially the same over time, after reviewing his class descriptions from various years, the shifts are noticeable. In his early years, he had a classroom in which the students set the rules to govern themselves and implemented a court system to enforce those rules. Most of the homebase classes at the time used a similar approach.

That system is gone now, and his curriculum and projects have moved away from a civics focus toward a broader world history focus, with students writing more research papers. Michael mentioned that he has made a subtle change each year, but a longer view reflects a more fluid classroom with a mature, thoughtful teacher changing his curriculum and structure as needed to mirror changes in his students and in his methodology. Michael also credits three administrators with helping him mature as a teacher. Early in his career, Michael's student evaluations could sometimes tend toward comments that were perceived as emotional or somewhat harsh. He also tried to emulate the classroom structure and teaching style of the most popular junior high teacher at the time. After long conversations and gentle prodding by administrators, he found his own voice, was better able to communicate concerns about students, and created a room that was more aligned with his nature.

James' classroom also evolved over the years, as his first central subject revolved around aspects of US History, but he eventually switched it to Egypt and China. James is always reworking his role-play games and reflecting on how he works with each individual student. Like Michael, James credits the head of school with influencing his teaching through conversations and encouraging Michael to consider new approaches to teaching. As a result, Michael is constantly tinkering with his curriculum, making subtle, and sometimes major, changes every year. As Guskey (1986) argues, changes in teacher attitudes and beliefs only occur after teachers see a difference in learning outcomes. Guskey's (1986) research supports the growth and development narratives of James and Michael, as they would explore new ways to teaching, experiment with them, and then adjust their curriculum and pedagogy when they noticed a successful difference in

student learning. For example, Michael told a story about his experience at a summer teacher institute where one teacher's idea interested him so much, he tested it out the next year, and now the structure of his classroom revolves around that one idea. In a similar fashion, James discussed how the role-play workshops he attends sometimes compel him to rework whole parts of his classroom. For James and Michael, the process of professional development depended a great deal on colleagues and the ability to seek out a new idea on their own terms. None of the teachers told stories about finding value in attending required workshops. Each teacher has actively navigated and charted his or her own course for development, and most of the influential moments they mentioned were initiated by the teacher, not by an administrator.

For Michelle and Carol, stories about their professional development focus on their own intellectual development. For instance, as Carol reflected on her path, she emphasized her intellectual growth and her independence:

I was able to, you know, add some things into the curriculum that I wanted to emphasize. I would say the trajectory happened since I left that classroom, that more and more I feel like my curriculum has become more balanced between intellectual and cognitive.…I started thinking a lot about human development–particularly adolescent development. A lot of big theories about human development came out at that time–where I see adolescence as a largely unfulfilled stage of development. I think there are probably, if development were to happen as it could or as maybe intended, that people might evolve to a higher level of thinking, critical thinking or independent thinking. But I think it does not happen. I think education has a lot to do with that. I think schools are set to teach

people to consume information and not generate their own information. (Carol,

personal communication, December 28, 2012)

Michelle also talks a lot about the intellectual underpinnings of her curriculum decisions

and loves nothing more than trying to build a course from scratch. The intellectual

pursuit of researching and writing a course can completely consume Michelle, and she

loves diving into learning and then figuring out how to communicate what she has

learned to her students. The process of learning is something all six teachers enjoy, and

they all look for opportunities to learn, often just for the sake of learning, and are excited,

almost as a byproduct, by the new possibilities for their classes.

If researchers were to stand back from the close up view of individual classrooms,

education might look like a static profession, with the structure of schools remaining

constant over the decades (Lortie 1975/2002). Reese's (1995) analysis of the origins of

the American high school highlights how the history of public education is full of

reoccurring debates about testing, the effectiveness of lectures, changes in curriculum to

be more engaging, and the structure of the school day and year. By taking a micro look

at the development of these six teachers at Southern, I found dynamic educators who are

constantly rethinking and adjusting their practice. The classrooms that these six teachers

facilitated in the eighties when the began their careers look very different from the ones I

visited and discussed with them during the 2012/13 school year. Their development did

not follow a definable path lock step with major reforms. Rather, it occurred by regularly

making slight adjustments based on workshops, having conversations with colleagues,

meeting with administrators, and reading and studying on their own. The development of

each teacher reflects Kelly's (2006) description of teachers needing to be active in their

own learning. All six teachers have stories about seeking out their own development, none of which were about how a mandated workshop fit with what they needed at the time. These teachers are self-starters and reflect a culture that Rosenholtz (1991) felt was a key to successful teaching and having a successful school: teaching as a fluid profession with the possibility of always improving. If teachers believe there is always room for growth, and they have the space and support to find the necessary resources, they are more likely to stay engaged with their work in the classroom.

Why They Teach: In Their Own Words

At the start of each school year, Southern has a two-day retreat. The kickoff event for each retreat is the *Why I Teach* presentation, during which four teachers give speeches about why they teach. There is no prescribed structure to the speech, and each teacher has a unique approach. Some discuss early influences on their lives, while others discuss memorable moments from their career in the classroom. Five of the six teachers in this study have given a Why I Teach speech at Southern. One teacher, Michelle, will never give the speech, as she is too uncomfortable presenting in a theater full of adults. As some of the teachers gave their speeches many years ago, there is no copy of the speech. Therefore, at the end of the last interview with each participant, I asked him or her to give an impromptu Why I Teach speech. I did have copies of James' and Carol's speeches to compare with their answers. The answers to my interview question and the actual speeches varied in approaches, but some common themes emerged.

One major theme for the three female teachers is that, for them, teaching is a calling. Lisa explained:

But over time–especially from working with assistants at Trinity Prep–and the assistants at Southern. I just started to see teaching as a calling that had sort of a lot of deep purpose and meaning. That it did not really matter what other people thought.…I think I would have said that looking back after all those years–it is just an enormous blessing to work in the company of people who you like and respect. And that was the children and the parents. It is just a huge, it is a huge blessing to be in the classroom with kids. It is not just that it is to be among people who are so respect worthy. I really love that. (Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

Carol's perspective is similar:

I do not see what I am doing as separate from a calling I guess. And this is interesting too because even when I interviewed for a job at Southern–I remember telling Sara Davis some people are called to preach, I feel like I was called to teach. So even then there was some deeper motivation. Hard to explain–I have a sense of it being in the right place at the right time. Doing the right thing. Having this kind of evolution that is going on [in] my career means something in terms of everything that has gone on in the past.…I think if I were writing it now, I would probably start with the darkness. Like I would start with like paying the mortgage, raising 4 kids. And then I would go into like, progressively, the deeper reasons–how exciting it is and how rewarding it is. Scenes of things that happen that you know are really very magical. Probably some scenes of things that go wrong. Yeah.…Do you know right livelihood? That is the word. Do you know right livelihood from the Buddhist? One of the eight full paths to enlightenment

is right livelihood. It is finding the right thing to do to make a living. This to me

has always felt like, to me, as right livelihood. You know [you] are doing

something that even though it is hard, you know that people are benefitting from

it. It is not taking away from the world. You hope to leave something to the

world. You want to leave the world a better place. And I think I will–I hope.

(Carol, personal communication, February 25, 2013)

Michelle expressed thoughts around this theme as well:

Part 2 would be the love of learning and all the teachers and professors that I had

coming up through my years, and then part three would be still being able to get

to that place in the classroom when I was a child and teenager. And college

student–you know undergraduate. Of the kind of almost miraculous feeling I

would feel when there was someone that was really powerful and they had things

to teach you, and you could take it in and you could–it could change your life, it

could change the way you think. Or it could even open up your thinking. And I

just–and I think that would be thing. (Michelle, personal communication, June

14, 2013)

For these three teachers, their careers in the classroom provide them the opportunity to

enrich their students' lives and to be life-long learners.

The responses from the three male teachers were more about the school, the

process of teaching, and the positive feedback they get for their work. As James

discusses:

It is all the things we have talked about, but it is also changing all the time. I have

30 kids every year, but every year there are some new kids. I mean, every year

there are some kids that fit pretty neatly into groups of kids I have taught before. You love to read–well I have had kids that love to read and I know how to feed that beast. I can work with a kid that loves to read. Every year there are new challenges. It could be a kid that loves to something…that I have not ever worked–I have got to find resources for this kid. Or a kid who struggles in a way that I have never really had to work with before. Or families that have different needs that I have to address that I have never addressed before, and I have to find the language to talk to kids and families about. And on an intellectual level there–but that is intellectual, but on an academic/intellectual level, the kids are just asking questions all the time, and I do not have the answer to lots of them, so they are making me think about what I am teaching, why I am teaching it, how I am teaching it. All the time. It continues to be a rich place to learn. I can be myself. I can bring my passions to the classroom. I am also continually challenged. I do not just get to learn, I have to learn. (James, personal communication, February 8, 2013)

For Michael:

It is like what Charlie was saying in his Why I Teach speech last year. Although he was saying it more from [a] mathematics engineer point of view, but he was talking about how he sees every class as a problem to try to solve. For me, it was more like a psychological or literary problem or something. It was still what is going on with this group or this kid, how do you get it to work. It just kept being interesting. The other thing is that Southern was just such a cool place. Part of it was not at all about the job or the kids. It was about the community. Because…I

just remember feeling several ties that first year–these people are so cool. This

place is so great and I had–it was the first community I was ever proud to be a

part of. It is because of this place. This community feels so at home here so

quickly. And it is full of all these people who are so interesting. Both the adults

and the kids. You know, they are really interesting, and you get to know them.

You get to get to know them. Because there are not a lot of barriers and there is

not a lot of hierarchy–it is sort of bullshit paperwork and formality. It is kind of

this–if you like–you know, even though I am part an introvert. The part of me

that likes people –if you like people at all, it is kind of a feast, because there is just

all these people that you can really get to know and like. There are a lot of

interesting people and it attracts interesting faculty. I love the faculty retreat

every year because I am always like, WOW, I cannot believe I get to work here.

These people are so cool. And it attracts interesting kids who are really fun, you

know, to hang around. I do not know if you would get that in the same way at

another school. You would get parts of it, but I do not think you would get a lot

of it. And what you really do not get is a lot of a sense of humor because

everybody is so fricking serious in education these days. Yeah, so why I teach–I

think the Why I Teach would be because I teach here. It is about Southern.

(Michael, personal communication, March 15, 2013)

And for Ralph:

I would say that I really liked telling stories. And I can tell stories that kids really

listen to and remember, and I like making people laugh, and I can make my

students laugh. I think that between those two abilities they learn a lot. Their

guards are down because of the humor and from the story telling. It is not like

everybody get on page 68. It is telling dramatic stories about history. And about

other stuff too. I like the hours, I like the schedule of the year. It has been the

schedule I have had since I was 4 years old. It has been a good run and I know

that kids have…are taking away things that I have said, things that we have done

together, that they have done in the classroom. And they will remember them for

years and years. I guess that is a kind of immortality that you can sort of keep it

going. Some of them may even want to become teachers, and they will maybe

remember some of these things. As I did from my 4th/5th grade teacher. So this is

sort of continuing the gift. (Ralph, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

When I asked each teacher to revisit his or her Why I Teach speech, which, for Michelle,

was framed as considering what she would want to say in a speech, there was a quiet

moment of reflection. Then, at some point in each answer, there was an element of

playfulness about the speech. They had fun thinking about why they teach and clearly

enjoy what they do for a living. All of them included at least a brief acknowledgement of

the influence Southern had on keeping them in the teaching profession and also some

acknowledgement of the people along the way who had influenced their paths. Overall,

their speeches focused on the sheer joy they experience from being in the classroom with

their students. Teaching is deeply personal to each one of the participants, and one

reason they teach is that the personal nature of teaching has been protected, and even

honored, at Southern. The cliché answer about why teachers teach is often, "I do it for

the children." For these six teachers, a more accurate response might be, "I do it to be

part of a community of engaged learners who really enjoy being part of this school."

Response to the Results

Every professional wants to feel trusted and respected, and the six teachers in this study are no different. As each of them reflected on their veteran careers in the classroom, they referenced the joy of designing and implementing a social studies curriculum, having the autonomy to make changes to the curriculum, and being the primary decider on what course of study is best for each student in his or her classroom. Each teacher has also benefitted from being able to pursue new interests or lifelong passions and noted that, during their time at Southern, in terms of curriculum, they never felt limited by fads or the latest reform movement in education. They have all made mistakes and had to seek out advice and help over their careers, and because of the responsibility that comes with autonomy, they never blamed their mistakes on someone or something else–they shouldered and learned from those mistakes as something they tried that did not work. Each teacher has been active in determining his or her professional and personal needs along the way, and therefore, each teacher has followed a different career path. The six classrooms and teachers I studied over the past year all reflect the individual personalities of those teachers and the students in the room. The unifying themes across those six classrooms are about a shared love of learning and teaching and the development of their students. The two themes that resonated most are: a love of the developmental stage of the specific age group in the classroom and the freedom to build a professional life outside of the classroom. All six teachers have active professional lives outside of the classroom, and those pursuits continue to feed new ideas into their classrooms.

Because these six teachers can determine the content of their lessons, particularly with their social studies curriculum, they are better able to respond to the needs and interests of their students. In every discussion about effective curriculum and pedagogy, the teachers would eventually comment on how well the students had responded to what was done in the classroom. If the students did not respond well, the teachers would reflect on the experience, maybe discuss it with a colleague or attend a workshop, and then make the necessary changes. This process of making adjustments was intellectually engaging to all six teachers, and because each lesson did not always elicit the same response each year, based on different groups of students, the teachers found each year to be a new and unique intellectual challenge. There is no question that the independence over what to teach is integral to each teacher having a sense of agency about what happens in the classroom. It is also clear that each teacher placed a high value on being a life-long learner who thrives within an organization that is a learning community for students and for adults.

CHAPTER FIVE

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS ON RETENTION

A study of teachers must address the context in which they operate, including a

discussion of the school, its students, its community, and how each teacher perceives his

or her role in the community. Using symbolic interactionism as the theoretical

framework elucidates my analysis, moving beyond the list of the stimuli toward asking

each teacher to analyze the interactions at Southern and consider which stimuli factor was

an impetus for remaining in the classroom year after year (Sandstrom et al., 2001). As an

institution, Southern has managed to retain many veteran teachers, and a key question is:

What is it about Southern, as a school, that has kept these six teachers in the classroom?

Each teacher works within a classroom that has many influences coming from various

sources: the teacher, the students, the school, and the community at large. Schools have

historically been a source of socialization for students, and much of this socialization is

due to the curriculum and structure set by the school (Urban & Wagoner, 2004). Because

Southern professes to allow its teachers much autonomy over their curriculum, its

structure and leadership are important symbols for the teachers. Their interpretations of

the structures of the school and the actions of its leaders have an impact on the

curriculum and pedagogy they design as teachers. Therefore, I spent time with each

teacher asking: How would you describe Southern to an outsider? Why have you stayed

at Southern so long? How has Southern supported your growth as a professional? Have

you had struggles at Southern that caused you to question staying in the classroom? If so,

how did you overcome those struggles? These questions helped me determine how each

teacher interacted with the school and its community. Analyzing those interactions

within the context of Southern influenced how each teacher identified himself or herself as a classroom teacher and member of the school community (Jeon, 2004). As Kennedy (2010) and Sloan (2006) discuss, the school context defines each teacher's working conditions, and any analysis of longevity should consider the role of the specific institution.

In this chapter, I will examine how each teacher interacted with the school and how the findings revealed the different ways Southern was able to support the growth of these six teachers. As teachers' needs vary throughout their careers, schools must be nimble enough to support that range of needs while still maintaining a high rate of success for its students (Reyes & Pounder, 1993; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). My initial analysis focused on each teacher's career path and what lessons could be learned from the unique path each teacher followed. To effectively answer the question of how one school has retained its teachers, it is necessary to analyze how the institution is viewed by the veteran teachers and to see what patterns, if any, emerge among their responses.

Southern as an Institution of Learning for All

Describing a school as a place of learning for students is not a unique descriptor, but hearing all six of the teachers describe Southern as a place of learning for adults is distinct. As James notes in his description of Southern:

> I think it is a rich, learning environment for kids and adults, and I often mention that it is rich for the adults because I think that is valuable for the kids that go here–because they have excited, engaged, passionate guides in learning. (James, personal communication, February 8, 2013)

Lisa, a 2nd/3rd grade educator who is equally passionate about adult education, explained:

> Because I think it is really hard for adults to remember that they are learners. And
>
> I think that has been a piece for me–has been always learning–that joy of being in
>
> a community of learners, and Southern really is that. (Lisa, personal
>
> communication, February 10, 2013)

Carol and Michelle both commented on the intellectual energy at Southern and how that

energy feeds on itself and pushes teachers to keep thinking and learning. Lisa speculated

that the school looks for learners when hiring faculty:

> And I think of me hiring. I really look for, are they learners? Can I tell that?
>
> Because that is the kind of people I want to be around. I think Southern really–it
>
> draws those kind of people because I think it feels so lively when you walk
>
> around, you see so much happening. I think we go out of our way as a
>
> community to hire learners. I think that separates us from a lot of schools. (Lisa,
>
> personal communication, February 10, 2013)

Southern asserts itself as a school of learning for adults and students, therefore part of this

study required inquiry to see if, and how, adult learning is actually being supported. All

six of the participants emphasized support for teachers as a significant part of Southern's

structure. They discussed how open Southern is to the faculty learning. Each teacher

noted how he or she always felt Southern not only encouraged them to learn but also

provided the essential financial support to do so. James discussed how this worked:

> And then as a teacher, it is very supportive of anything that reasonably feeds into
>
> my classroom or work or future classroom of any kind–I get my own class
>
> budget. Tami [James' co-teacher] and I have our own class budget, and we can

spend that on whatever we want. I think if we started handing in receipts for

liquor or gambling debts or that kind of thing there would be questions raised.

Otherwise, if I say I need anything–little Buddhists statues as a token in a game or

part of a game currency. A beer making kit for 5th and 6th graders, which we will

use later this year for Ancient Egypt. That is okay. If I want to go to conferences,

the school is happy, up to my share's worth, to pay for that. And if I go to other

things, they are very supportive. If I take time from my classroom to work in the

high school for short-term part of the time–that is very supported with subs.

There is no penalty for me exploring or cross-fertilizing with other parts of the

school or areas of curriculum. I just sort of assume that. (James, personal

communication, February 8, 2013)

Michelle tells a powerful story that highlights the priority Southern makes adult learning

and how its support for individual teachers can build long-term loyalty to the school.

And then there is something else that has really touched me very deeply.

Teaching here and having my kids here–I did not have any extra income to do

things that I would like to do. It is like when I teach a subject–I am not a world

traveler. I have never had the money to travel, and twice the school has sent me–

once to Italy and once to Mexico. And it was very touching to me. … George

[the headmaster] found out Alice the art teacher was going to Italy, and he said

would you take Michelle? She needs to go see what she has been teaching for

years. And then Mexico–I applied for a Bluemental [school grant for summer

studies]. They did not pay the whole way. They paid my air ticket and my hotel.

And it was–to me that was very touching because I have not had access to that

part of my job. And as a teacher of history and art history, it completely changed

the way I taught my courses. My Art and Society course–to see the Mexican art.

To be in Mexico City, to see and feel the culture. And the same thing with Italy.

And I will be forever kind of be indebted to a school that looks at someone,

values them, and then says let's make this work because it will make your

teaching in the classroom better. And…that to me…was touching on a personal

level and a professional level. It just–what do you say about a school that says she

really needs to see it? She needs to be able to conceptualize that visually. And

they make it happen. I think that is very powerful. (Michelle, personal

communication, June 14, 2013)

Southern not only emphasizes the importance of being life-long learners, the leadership at

Southern put organizational structures in place, along with funding, to support teachers

taking the initiative to go out to learn. Teachers are confident that they can determine

what they need for development as professionals and then take the necessary action to get

the resources or attend the conference. For all six teachers, that level of support is a

motivating factor that keeps them teaching at Southern.

As Rosenholtz (1991) notes, teaching is a profession without a technical manual

or a definable path that teachers must follow to be successful. Therefore when teachers

encounter the inevitable challenges that can vary from year to year, even day to day, it is

important for teachers to have a wide range of resources available to help them.

Colleagues are a key resource for teachers, and Rosenholtz's (1991) research indicates

that schools must build the space for teachers to interact and share concerns and possible

solutions. As James discusses a few times, Southern actually has many experts on

content, different teaching methodologies, and how to work with students of all types of abilities. These faculty are available to help each other and often serve as sounding boards for one another in faculty meetings, during school wide professional development days, and even as they pass each other in the halls. Carol describes it in a different way:

> Well, just so many characters you know. So much brilliance really. So there was just a lot of intellectual energy–more than I think I had ever been exposed to probably in my life. Even in school…I had been exposed to intellectual energy– this was a kind of, I do not want to say looseness because that is a misleading term. There is nothing really loose about Southern. A relaxed and humorous approach to intellectual concepts and ideas. It was [a] very vibrant and fertile place. I was very happy–I felt like I had come home. I just really connected with a lot of people. (Carol, personal communication, September 20, 2013)

Southern has built a vibrant professional community by creating a culture and structure in which teachers can define their own needs and share individual expertise. As all six teachers noted at some point in their descriptions of Southern, the intellectual energy creates a community of learners who keep striving to learn and improve. As Lisa often mentioned, it can be hard for adults to recognize that they are also learners, but Southern is an organization in which there is an expectation that the adults want to continue to learn and will also take action to do so.

The Importance of Feedback

Teaching has the potential to be an enormously rewarding career if teachers are able to access the many psychic benefits of working with students, such as seeing them develop, knowing that he or she has had a positive impact on students' growth

(Hargreaves, 1998; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990; Santoro, 2011). All six Southern teachers discussed that opportunity to influence and observe how their students learn as one of the key reasons they return to the classroom every year. Because teaching is such an emotional profession full of personal relationships with students, colleagues, and parents, being able to access the psychic rewards of teaching can be challenging (Hargreaves, 1998; Santoro, 2011). Santoro (2011) describes the significance of access to the moral dimensions of teaching:

> The moral rewards of teaching are activated when educators feel that they are doing what is right in terms of one's students, the teaching profession, and themselves. The moral rewards discussed here encompass the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching. The ethical dimension involves teachers pursuing the good life in their professional and personal endeavors. In relation to the ethical, teachers might ask, "How is what I am doing bettering the world or myself?" The moral dimension harnesses sanctioned and prohibited activities. For instance, teachers might wonder, "Is this approach a good method for teaching my class given what I know about best practices?" (p. 2)

As institutions, schools play a significant role in helping teachers to know when they are doing good work and to build the necessary resilience to handle the inevitable challenges that arise when teachers' attempts to help their students are unsuccessful (Rosenholtz, 1991; Santoro, 2011). Rosenholtz's (1991) research indicates that schools must have a feedback system that provides positive reinforcement for teachers, along with the resources to assist teachers when they are struggling. The interactions each teacher has within the school as an institution impacts the way teachers interpret the actions of their

students and colleagues (Jeon, 2004). Symbolic interactionism frames the analysis of the interactions between Southern and these six teachers. Snow's (2001) description of the core principles of symbolic interactionism serve as guidelines for this analysis:

> People act towards things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings they have for them; (2) that these meanings are derived through social interactions with others; and (3) that these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretative process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds. (p. 367)

Each teacher's interpretation of successes and failures is colored by several lenses, including the responses from his or her students, past experiences, parents, school administrators, and colleagues at Southern School.

During the conversations about Southern, the role of Southern's leaders was often referenced as a symbol that the teachers felt supported and respected by the school community. The administration's trust that what each teacher was doing in the classroom was appropriate is one aspect of leadership that impacted every teacher. This support and trust was interpreted in different ways by each of the teachers, but in every case, it meant that the teacher felt respected as a professional educator. Ralph describes his first years of Southern:

> But what I really prized, the fact that George [the headmaster] would back us up. He really trusted us. And we got trust and we could give the kids trust.… The early years were really, really fun–to have a spirit where the headmaster trusts you so much. (Ralph, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

Michael felt that trust when he was encouraged by one of the school leaders to be himself in the classroom rather than trying to be like Pat, who was the most successful and popular teacher in the junior high at the time.

> Not all of us can be Pat. Not all of us want to be Pat. You have to figure out how to do it yourself. She was very firm, as Nellie [head of the elementary school] can be when she talks. It was kind of like her slapping me across the face–it was like totally. I have a lot of respect for Nellie, so when she told me that she gave me permission to just sort of–you have to find your own comfort level. You have to find what works. Which is kind of the essence of this place, I think. You are encouraged to figure out what works for you. And so that year I really did.
>
> (Michael, personal communication, February 15, 2013)

Southern allows its teachers the leeway to determine what works for each of them and supports them by acknowledging that a diversity of pedagogical approaches is not only acceptable, but appropriate. James offers two descriptions of how this trust plays out in his career at Southern:

> It makes for interesting people. …[T]he additional benefit is that we are talking about stuff that I want to talk about. Stuff that interests me. When I go to cocktail parties or other events, I can often can be the quietest person in the room unless it comes around to topics I have something, I feel like saying something about. Luckily in the classroom, it is all stuff I want to say something about because I plan what we are going to talk about today. But then they bring up these other tangents to it that are often at least as interesting as where I began. I am not the only one who talks about this–it is a school full of very interesting

adults who can be very articulate and thoughtful about their areas of interest,

which mostly are not overlapping mine a great deal, but they are so thoughtful

about them...it is a wonderful place to be a teacher–we have got remarkable and

varied bright colleagues, you get great kids. Lots of different types of learning.

You really do get to pursue interests and passions that you have and how you

teach. You can be yourself. You know, as long as that is working with the kids

really well. Doesn't matter how you teach it, how you dress, what you care about.

(James, personal communication, October 14, 2012)

When I asked the participants why they were still at Southern, each mentioned being

allowed to teach what they wanted to teach. Or as Michelle succinctly put it:

Oh. Easy. This school gives me autonomy in the classroom. They trust that I am

going to do my work. In general, enough time to do the work that I want to do.…

Ultimately, it is the ability to be creative and for the school to trust me.

(Michelle, personal communication, June 14, 2012)

Southern does not simply state that it believes its teachers are professionals, it provides a

structure and culture of support that communicate what it means to have professional

educators on board. Teachers have almost complete autonomy over their curriculum and

professional development. As Lisa noted near the end of our interviews:

For me…it is kind of tantamount to trusting your inner voice. And if you are

getting loud enough signals from the environment around you, it may be too hard

to trust. If you are a person like Ralph, you just go full steam ahead. But I am

really not. I am really way to easily affected by the stuff in the environment

around me. (Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

Southern encourages its teachers to listen to their inner voices, as a manifestation of their

instincts coupled with the education and experience. The school supports the idea that

each teacher needs to find one's own voice and to let that voice be the guide for one's

classroom. With this institutional structure, teachers invest in ownership over the

curriculum and pedagogy. Southern tries not to cloud a teacher's judgment by defining

successes in a prescribed manner, as it wants its teachers to be able to discern for

themselves if something is working due to their own creativity, knowledge, and passion.

This approach is a powerful motivator for each teacher to work hard at building a flexible

and engaging curriculum.

An interesting aspect of each teacher's discussion related to staying at Southern is

a strong loyalty to the institution. The community at Southern built a structure that can

respond to the personal needs of its faculty, and participants shared intimate stories about

times in their personal lives that made them question whether or not to stay in the

classroom. Southern's commitment to walking alongside its teachers through their

personal challenges has instilled a sense of loyalty among the faculty. For example,

when Carol was first hired by Southern, she had to move from a different state, and when

she arrived, she discovered she was pregnant and would need maternity leave before she

had even started teaching. Southern gave her the leave and then set her up in a part time

position until her child was old enough for child care. Carol cited this level of support as

one of main reasons she is so loyal to Southern. Lisa shared a similar narrative about

leaving for a few years to care for her young children, being rehired, and then a few years

later taking a one-year sabbatical to paint and write. Michelle discussed how the school

supported her as she worked through a serious conflict with two colleagues. That support

during the conflict, along with sending her abroad twice, convinced her that she is genuinely loved and valued by the leadership at Southern. Michael's story may be the most compelling. Early in Michael's career, he was struggling with stress, some personal issues, and a general feeling that he could not balance his personal life with the demands of teaching. When Michael considered resigning, George (the headmaster) offered Southern's financial support for outside resources that would help Michael regain his footing. These were resources Michael could not have afforded on his own, and he credits Southern's actions with preserving his professional life. In this study, each teacher noted that at critical turning points in their personal lives, Southern valued them beyond their roles as teachers, seeing them as individuals and reaching out to them as such. To be able to adapt around the personal lives of faculty and offer support outside of the classroom that helps teachers do their work inside the classroom, the leadership must maintain a communicative culture of approachability and accessibility, one in which teachers feel comfortable sharing about their personal lives, so that when challenges bubble up, the leaders of the school are aware and can offer assistance as appropriate. In turn, the teachers extend this model of communication and support to the students in their classrooms. Each teacher told stories of when Southern demonstrated respect for both their professional judgment as well as their personal, emotional health. They also noted that they carry these stories of support and trust with them every day as they go about their work at Southern.

Another aspect of Southern's culture that facilitates teacher access to the moral and psychic rewards of teaching is a realization that mistakes will be made; faculty do not

have to be frozen by the fear of making a mistake. Lisa describes this aspect of

Southern's structure:

> We…are pretty good as schools go at not trying to look like we are better than we
>
> are. But that is what so many schools do in their worry about the parent base. We
>
> still try to show things off, but it is not out of–there is not pressure to look more
>
> clean and organized that we are. There is no pressure to look more productive
>
> then we are. There is no pressure to pretend that we do not make mistakes. (Lisa,
>
> personal communication, February 10, 2013)

Both Ralph and Michael discussed an award that originally started as a joke but

eventually became part of the culture of the school. At the holiday party every year, a

group of administrators and teachers perform a skit by which they induct 15-20 faculty

actions into the "Fuck Up Hall of Fame." The mistakes can range from sending a critical

email to the wrong person, to jamming the roof of a school bus into a low ceiling garage

and having to let the air out of the tires to retreat the vehicle from its position. While

each of these mistakes was certainly managed up front with the appropriate constructive

criticism, the faculty members discussed how the use of humor and acknowledgment that

we are fallible alleviates the fear of making inevitable mistakes. Southern also

communicates to its community that the school knows mistakes will be made, and that

often, the best learning occurs when we take a risk and it does not work out. Each

participant communicated that Southern is a safe place to take learning risks as a teacher

and as a student.

Three overall structures at Southern School define for teachers, students, and

parents appropriate approaches to support student and faculty growth. First, by

recognizing that faculty members need to develop as learners just as students do, Southern provides resources for faculty to enrich their craft. Second, entrusting teachers with decision making over their classroom budgets affords faculty the freedom to obtain the supplies necessary to carry out their work. Finally, and most important to these six teachers, Southern encourages and protects individual approaches to teaching. Each faculty member goes to work each day with the knowledge that the school trusts him or her to do what is right with students, and that if a mistake is made, it can usually be repaired with candor and conversation. Ralph described how there were no favored teachers or approaches at Southern, which prevents turf wars and competition for status.

> I once said…there is no sort of ladder as in a corporation–there would be a ladder of steps you would do. For me, there is no ladder, but there is a ladder with one rung. The rung is new every year, so it keeps me fresh. (Ralph, personal communication, November 11, 2013)

Carol summarized her view of Southern's approach as:

> If it has a philosophy, [it] is individuality. Each person having the freedom to be who they are and do what they do best. And capitalizing on each other's strengths. And supporting each other's weaknesses. And I think that is what diversity is. You just have different kinds of people, but the skills. It is the same set of skills that we have learned from teaching here and being in this community. (Carol, personal communication, February 25, 2013)

The structures at Southern encourage each teacher to create a classroom that reflects one's passions, strengths and weaknesses, and, in the end, one's personality. This approach leaves each teacher vulnerable if a risk they take does not work, but all six

teachers felt that the school immensely respected them as professionals, celebrating their individual approaches and caring for each one personally, that it was safe to be vulnerable enough to try new lessons. All six teachers expressed feeling privileged to work in a school that through its words and actions communicates compassion for its teachers and students.

The Culture of Southern School

In the discussions about why each teacher has worked at Southern for so long, I asked for a description of the culture of the school community. Through the many stories each teacher told about his or her time at Southern, each revealed a clear idea about the culture of the school. This culture affected how each one viewed his or her work inside and outside of the classroom. As the discussions about Southern progressed, parallels emerged, and an analysis of those parallels provides a common language around the description of Southern's culture. Words that consistently bubbled up in the teachers' descriptions include: humor, intellectual, supportive, life-long learners, safe, passionate, affectionate, informal, and autonomy. These words offer a sense of Southern as a vibrant community embracing the messy process of education.

One such description came from James:

Um, it [Southern] was, it was, this positive affectionate place of the mind. I mean there are all kinds of things I have realized since then about a community like Southern that does operate in a fairly thoughtful, sensible way that creates this fertile safe ground…but for me it was just these kids that you get to work with who are adorable and adoring. And then we all get to keep learning all the time. I mean they are asking questions. I mean this is still what drives a lot of my

interest in teaching. You know, I get to load up with all kinds of what I think is interesting stuff and go in there, and then they turn around and ask questions that never would have occurred to me. Even if I had done everything those kids had done and read everything they read ahead of time. They just have minds that come from different angles. Those smart, sweet minds to be around [them] was just engrossing. I just wanted to be in that environment all the time. (James, personal communication, September 6, 2012)

The headmaster of Southern often states that the key to a successful school is having a cast of contagious characters. Lisa's description of Southern fits with the headmaster's casting:

Is it fun and then…other things are fun, like visual things are fun. I get a kick out of Bridget the nurse wearing her cowboy boots. I get a kick out of Ana, the 3rd/4th teacher's magnificent costumes. There is stuff every day that is light at Southern. Because there is a lot of freedom to be light. James…who dresses like that? Or laughs like that? Everybody loves it. What a gift. It is an amazingly vital place.… And I am not sure that any of this would be the same if it were not at Southern. We [Lisa and Ralph] did not plan to stay. We were going to be here a few years and then be gone. Back to New England or out west. How could you leave? (Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

The willingness of Southern to embrace the individuality of its teachers has created a lively faculty that, in turn, supports the development of a vibrant student body with a wide range of learning profiles. On any given school day, Southern has over 1,200 students and adults interacting, and the six participants consistently described how the

school harnesses the energy generated by 1,200 people in one institution, leveraging the diversity of personalities as a source of strength.

As mentioned above, one word that stood out in the descriptions of Southern was humor. From the holiday party's Fuck up Hall of Fame, giving everyone a chance to laugh at themselves and put the year's errors behind them, to how Ralph uses laughter and stories with his students, humor is seen as a core part of Southern's culture. Ralph and James discussed how humor in the classroom can relax students and open them up to new ideas, while Lisa and Michael see humor as part of what makes Southern a great school and place to work. Michael describes humor as a way to keep the school from taking itself too seriously, something he sees as unique to Southern in contrast with the culture or politics of other places he knows:

> You know, [you] could always tell there was some kind of nasty politics going on and then there was always just–I remember Ralph telling me this years ago–that one thing that almost none of these other schools have is a sense of humor. Even when there are really great schools, they very rarely have a sense of humor. But you know, we have always had [it] in spades. And I remember one time there was a later Mallory conference thing where he has people role-playing. This guy was role-playing a conversation he wished he could have with his headmaster, and so they started acting it out and it was all like "Hello, Mr. So-and-so" Why hello Mr. Smith. Thank you for coming today–well thank you for speaking to me. I was like really–that is so–I do not know, it made me realize that we would never sound like that here. It would just never be that formal. I would always come back thinking I have yet to hear of another school that is cooler than Southern,

that I would want to teach in more than Southern. (Michael, personal

communication, February 15, 2013)

Lisa describes the use of humor as cultural component that actually creates better

teaching:

I usually say it is a school that has got a lot of brains and a lot of heart and a lot of

humor.…It is so important. That is how you laugh at yourself. That is how you

make mistakes. And that is what keeps people taking risks and growing. (Lisa,

personal communication, February 10, 2013)

Humor and the informality it rolls out has kept these teachers relaxed and open to

learning and risk taking that can improve their teaching.

Southern has a framework of nine values that the school uses to articulate its

culture to the outside community. The ninth value is an appreciation of the present:

Schools, as preparatory institutions are almost always guilty of overemphasizing

the future: everything that happens is rationalized for its future benefits.

Education is not only preparation for life; it is life. That consciousness ought to be

present at Southern. The day a child spends now in school is as valuable as what

will come later. Respecting the value of the present is one way of preparing for a

healthy and productive future. (Framework of Values, Southern School, n.d.)

The six teachers I interviewed believe this value is emphasized in the way the school

honors each student for being the person he or she is in that moment. For Michael, this

appreciation of each child drew him to Southern:

Pretty quickly I found myself doing that thing that all Southern teachers do–

always talking about a particular kid and what is going on with them and what we

think. It was–that was fascinating. That there was this sort–there was a craft–

there was an art to that. It was the fascination. I do not know–it just made it seem

really cool. (Michael, personal communication, December 7, 2012)

Just as Southern honors and respects each faculty member for his or her individual

strengths and quirks, the six teachers often discussed how they appreciate the individual

strengths and challenges of their students. The six teachers expressed a capacity to

constantly think about their students, about what is going on with a child and what can be

done to engage him or her in the learning process. James feels this respect for each

student collectively builds a community of students that is exciting to teach. Carol and

Ralph address the value the school places on the intellectual aspect of a child's life as

well as the emotional aspect. All six teachers either discussed or wrote about how a

child's emotional health is a key to learning, and they dedicate a significant amount of

their time to supporting their students' emotional well being. If children are happy,

emotionally engaged, and enjoying their day, they are more likely to learn. As Ralph

said:

Mostly what I do is teach with stories and humor. That is my style. I love telling

stories. Kids like to hear stories and I am funny. I make them laugh. So they are

hearing stories and are laughing and they do not have a chance. They are going to

get that information. (Ralph, personal communication, September 30, 2012)

The school respects and supports these six teachers in developing their own approaches

to teaching, which in turn allows the teachers to respect and support the differentiated

learning styles of their students. Southern is explicit in its philosophy of maintaining a

culture that respects the personal and professional life of its faculty and its students.

The culture of a school can be hard to capture, as it is ever bending around the students, parents, and faculty, while simultaneously striving to maintain its core in the long view. Michael's description of Southern's culture and approach sums up the sentiment of all six teachers regarding their view on their work at Southern within the larger context of American education:

Even at other supposedly progressive schools, they are just as uptight in their own way. Everybody is so–this is the thing I think George [the headmaster] protects us from more than anything. Everybody is so insecure about what they are doing and what they are not doing right, what they ought to be doing and how it all looks. And does it fit whoever's idea of what education is supposed to be, and the thing about education is that it is such a bottomless pit–there is always something else that you could be doing. There is always something that you could be doing better–there is always. Education is just a mess and you can't–as soon as you try to quantify it…it is just a losing game. To jump on bandwagons to make sure you are meeting some sort of standards that do not really. You are trying to measure something that is much more qualitative than quantitative. It is nebulous, it is ineffable, and you know we are in a school that seems to recognize that. And so it is much easier. So even at another progressive school, I feel like there would be this undercurrent of anxiety all the time, and therefore what formality and lack of sense of humor because everybody is so tense about everything–we just do not do that. And we do not fall back on a lot of bandwagons, and there is not a lot of jargon–educational jargon. Whatever is the latest thing is–we do not go there much. (Michael, personal communication, March 15, 2013)

There is a continuity among the teachers' descriptions of Southern's culture, indicating that there is a core that has not, and will not, change. Though it adapts and updates, the school is not reinventing its culture or changing its basic view about how a school should treat its faculty and students.

RESPONSE TO RESULTS

Each person creates a reality that is inextricably linked to the interactions he or she has and how he or she interprets those interactions (Snow, 2001). As a school with over 1,200 students and adults, Southern is full of varying opinions about the significance of a particular policy, an aspect of a teacher's curriculum, or the success of a lesson. Southern manages this pluralism by giving credence to each view and acknowledging that, while mistakes will be made, the faculty at the school has the community's trust. This trust is communicated to the faculty through faculty ownership of curriculum and structures that financially support the professional and personal endeavors of the faculty. Agency in the classroom engenders a sense of ownership and investment in the school as a whole, fostering a culture in which each teacher is motivated to improve, seek new ideas, learn about new approaches, and enjoy the moment. In addition, Southern has built a culture that uses humor to recognize the fallibility of its students and teachers; rather than punishing people for most mistakes, the school uses the mistakes as another opportunity to learn. Southern is a learning rich school with significant resources allocated to teacher and student learning. As James noted, "Southern is a community full of people that enjoy the exchange of ideas" (James, personal communication, February 8, 2013). Southern has earned the loyalty of faculty, students, parents, and alumni through

organizational commitments, structures, and a culture in which Lisa, Ralph, James,

Michael, Carol, and Michelle wish to remain.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

What Have We Learned?

Analysis of the narratives from the six veteran social studies teachers distills the influencing factors that anchor each participant in the life of a classroom teacher and clarifies how the organizational structures of one private school supported their professional growth. These narratives share the stories of six individual lives and how those lives have been interwoven into the fabric of one school, Southern. The relationship between an institution and its employees is difficult to quantify, however, applying grounded theory methodology, one can organize the substantive theories that have emerged in this study.

The first substantive theory connects to previous research indicating that veteran teachers can have clear ideas about their professional development needs, and schools should allow them to have a voice in which opportunities to pursue (Bell & Gilbert, 1994; Evans, 2002; Kelly, 2006). All six participants in this study continually emphasized the importance they attach to having the school's support in determining their own professional growth needs, having the autonomy to find the necessary resources, and then applying the lessons learned to their individual classrooms. They also discussed the benefits of being able to seek out their own mentors. Having agency over the path of their careers both inside and outside of the classroom has been a major factor in allowing them to grow while staying in the classroom. Southern's cultural and organizational structures have facilitated each teacher's growth by professionally trusting the teacher's

ability to understand what is needed. Schools should consider this approach as a path to keeping their veteran teachers.

A second substantive theory ties into Rosenholtz's (1991) research into the need for schools to build a learning rich environment for teachers. Southern has built a community that believes students learn best when the teachers are also life-long learners. As the narratives of these six participants reflect, schools with learning rich environments are more likely to have an engaged, confident faculty with veteran teachers still deeply involved in the classrooms. Teachers also need to have access to the psychic and moral rewards of the profession to remain in the classroom over the years (Hargreaves, 1998; Lortie, 1975/2002; Rosenholtz, 1991). While each participant has faced moments of doubt and questioned his or her career choice, knowing the importance of their work with students and the respect they feel while working at Southern continues to sustain each one through the struggles. In Reyes and Pounder's (1993) work with veteran teachers, they found that veterans care most about the core issues of teaching, such as: task autonomy and discretion, the extent of their performance efficacy, and psychic rewards. The culture of Southern implicitly and explicitly provides its teachers with the space to reflect on their practice, actively pursue the resources they need to be successful in the classroom, receive positive reinforcement about the work they are doing. The structures of a school should reflect the culture of the school; and the structures at Southern appear to allow teachers the necessary autonomy over their professional lives to find success and to be able to recognize it when it occurs. If a teacher has agency over his or her classroom and the learning goes well, then the teacher can confidently assess that a significant factor in that success was his or her efforts. As the research indicates,

teachers desire access to these psychic rewards, therefore it is incumbent upon schools to structure themselves in a way that provides teachers with access to those rewards.

In addition to providing autonomy over professional growth, Southern allows its teachers autonomy over the social studies curriculum. Clayton (2007), Crocco and Costigan, (2007), and Fairbanks et al. (2009) emphasize the need for teachers to have autonomy over the curriculum to not only grow as professionals, but to develop the skills for creating an effective learning environment for the students. The narratives of the teachers in this study substantiate previous research by highlighting how teachers who have autonomy over their social studies curriculum are better able to infuse their own interests into the curriculum. Also, just as the participants in this study have brought a wide range of subjects into their curriculum, social studies teachers who have autonomy over their curriculum are more likely to infuse multiple disciplines into their curriculum, offering more diverse lessons to potentially interest students in learning along with them.

Other aspects of the results of this study do not connect directly to the current literature, but they offer substantive theories for future research. Teachers who are able to pursue their passions and interests outside of the classroom are likely to bring those interests into the classroom and remain engaged as classroom teachers. The participants in this study have outside passions that range from art or role-play games to the architecture of fast food restaurants, and all six of them continue to infuse their interests into their curriculum. If a school is able to support growth outside of the classroom, this research indicates those interests will be brought into the classroom and will create an even more engaging environment for the students and teacher.

Another substantive theory that emerged is that teachers who enjoy the specific developmental level of their students are more likely to maintain their motivation about and by working with that age group over the years. Matching a teacher's interests with the correct age group is essential. Southern provides the flexibility and individual space for the teachers in this study to find a way to work with an age group that they genuinely enjoy watching grow and develop; an age group that can share in their interests. Each teacher received the necessary support to find his or her own identity in the classroom and to determine how that identity best interacts with the students and the school. In order to retain veteran teachers, it helps to have nimble structures that allow teachers the time and resources they need to reflect and act on what is best for themselves and for the specific group of students in their classrooms each year. The teachers in this study are fascinated by the developmental level of their students, and students are better served if schools can effectively match a teacher's interests with those of his or her students.

Another notable aspect common to each of the participants' stories and relevant to teacher retention is supporting teachers through personal struggles. Personal struggles will impact a long career in any profession. Each participant experienced moments in which his or her personal life had a significant effect on his or her professional life, and they recalled how supportive and flexible Southern was in helping them regain control over their personal lives. Schools that afford flexibility in supporting faculty through personal struggles are more likely to retain the faculty.

In discussing Southern's culture, many themes bubbled up, and one of the most unique was the importance of humor. As Michael discussed:

Everybody is so insecure about what they are doing and what they are not doing

right, what they ought to be doing and how it all looks. And does it fit whoever's

idea of what education is supposed to be, and the thing about education is that it is

such a bottomless pit–there is always something else that you could be doing.

(Michael, personal communication, March 15, 2013)

The pressure to be perfect in every teaching moment can be overwhelming, and

Southern's answer to the fear of making a mistake has been to recognize that mistakes are

inevitable, instructive, and even humorous. A school culture that embraces the use of

humor, an appreciation for the present, and an acceptance that mistakes will be made

frees its faculty to take appropriate risks and to enjoy the process of learning. Fear can

cause teachers to avoid making changes or taking risks; confident teachers are more

likely to take the necessary risks to manage the fluid nature of life in the classroom. Each

school community is bound to have its defining culture, and that culture ought to be

reflected in how the school works and how the students and faculty describe the school.

Southern appears to maintain that delicate balance between articulating its goals and

operating in a way that allows its faculty to safely carve out individual goals within the

school's larger culture. Southern uses humor as a tool for helping teachers feel confident

enough to take risks and be themselves in the classroom. Other tools may be an option

for achieving that goal, but it is important for schools to minimize the fear of making a

mistake if they want teachers to be lifelong learners.

The long careers of these six teachers provide data for many possible structures

that schools could consider for retaining their veteran teachers. Just as each individual

teacher's life is complicated, each substantive theory derived from the narratives is

complex and may not be easily transferrable to another school. The lessons learned from the participants in this study can lead schools and researchers down many paths, but at the core, these lifelong educators found a school with a culture that reflects their values of life-long learning, autonomy, risk-taking, humor, and the beauty of participating in a child's academic, social, and emotional growth.

Implications for schools

Southern is a private school with a competitive admissions process and selective hiring standards. This identity affords Southern significant control over the make up of its community. In Lightfoot's (1983) analysis of six high schools, she argues, "private schools, rarely faced with a diverse range of students or the often conflicting demands of parent and community groups, are better able to focus on academic and curricular matters (p. 360)." Or as Lisa describes it:

> I do not think we are defensive. That is a good way of saying it. Yeah, as an institution. That must be so hard for so many schools in America because teachers are defending themselves to administrators, administrators defending themselves to parents. In public education, the public is so diverse, and they want so many different things, and teachers must always feel like they are fighting against somebody. But that makes me think that another thing that Southern has going for it is that we get to choose who is there. And we say this is what we can offer, and we only want you if you want what we can offer. That is amazing.
>
> (Lisa, personal communication, February 10, 2013)

As a private school, Southern has considerable advantages over public institutions in building and maintaining a healthy culture for its students and teachers. However, the

concern is that the research data continues to indicate that many private schools are not successful at building healthy work environments (Ingersoll, 2002; Keigher & Cross, 2010; O'Keefe, 2001; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). My research at Southern indicates there are some structures that are transferable to other schools, and while private institutions have unique advantages, rethinking certain aspects of how schools are structured could benefit faculty and students.

Schools are often described as institutions focused on the education of the nation's youth. Southern has expanded that focus by recognizing that if the faculty are engaged in learning, they are more likely to engage their students. As Rosenholtz's (1991) research indicates, if a teacher's curriculum is treated as a discrete, easily definable approach to teaching, then there is a ceiling that caps what teachers can gain from being in the classroom. Southern avoids this problem by giving its teachers significant autonomy in the classroom. While Southern does provide its teachers autonomy in the room, this does not mean Southern allows the teachers to solely define what is appropriate, but it does mean the teachers have the space to determine what is best for the particular group of students who are in the classroom with them. Because the needs of students change every year, having autonomy over the curriculum and pedagogy dramatically increases the potential for professional growth in the classroom. Southern's approach to hiring and professional development communicates respect, trust and an expectation of a high level of skill, talent, and drive among its faculty. The six teachers in this study responded to that approach by designing and redesigning their challenging and engaging curriculum. All the participants of this study are teaching the material different from the beginning of their careers in education, and they continue to tinker

with the curriculum they are teaching today. In other words, their teaching has evolved over the years, and they have grown both professionally and personally. Southern has actively supported this growth by delegating to teachers the micromanagement of the day-to-day running of their classrooms and by providing the necessary financial and emotional support for teachers to keep learning about their craft or other enriching interests.

Based on the findings from this study, schools should strive to provide the space for their teachers to pursue interests that may not directly tie to their curriculum. All six of the teachers who participated in this study have pursued and built healthy professional lives outside of the classroom. Finding room for this flexibility may be difficult for schools with large faculties, but finding ways for teachers to use their talents outside of the classroom while remaining full-time in the classroom appears to increase the possibility that teachers will stay in the classroom over the long term. For these six, veteran, social studies teachers, having autonomy over curriculum gave them the freedom to pursue interests outside of social studies and then incorporate what they learned into their social studies curriculum. Social studies offers more flexibility than some other disciplines, and the participants certainly leveraged that flexibility. A teacher's passion does not have to tie directly to what he or she is teaching, and schools could better serve the development of their teachers if they broadened the narrow boundaries that usually exist around what is considered to be appropriate professional development. There are obvious limitations and expectations around expertise, but allowing teachers to have a strong voice in professional development can lead to a more vibrant faculty (Rosenholtz, 1991).

One structural keystone is the way the school has embraced the fallibility of its students and teachers. Southern uses humor as a way to acknowledge that mistakes will be made, and regardless of whether or not a school embraces humor, it should acknowledge that the process of learning can be messy. Mistakes are an inevitable part of an interactive, human process with innumerable, moving and varying social, emotional, intellectual, and physical parts. Teachers have individual and group interactions with students each day, and those interactions are influenced by individual personalities, learning profiles, opinions, and the shifting moods of each student in a class. The collective of those variables, coupled with the complexity of each teacher's curriculum, creates a distinctive dynamic to which each student and teacher may have different reactions. All too often, administrators and parents do not provide teachers with enough flexibility when a mistake occurs in managing just one of the multitude of daily variables in motion while working with groups of individuals. This lack of flexibility may occur because schools, especially private schools, tend to describe themselves as having challenging curriculums that reflect the best practices, and they assert that should a student actively pursue his or her studies, he or she is more likely to be successful in school. Southern uses a different description and maintains a culture that does not take itself too seriously, acknowledging that even the best laid plans can go awry. With the acknowledgement that mistakes are a part of the process, students and faculty at Southern seem more likely to take the necessary risks to learn. Fear of making a mistake can make students shy away from taking a learning risk, and if a school community is afraid to make mistakes, it will be less willing to stretch, change, and evolve. All six teachers could vividly recall mistakes they made along the way as they tried new approaches to

lessons, and they remember how they learned and improved from those mistakes. The teachers were not afraid to saddle up again, and actually loved the ability to take risks knowing it was all right if something they tried did not work. This aspect of the culture at Southern is not reflected in the current political environment of American education, which is defined by an increase in testing, mandated curriculums, and even mandates about the appropriate pedagogy (Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Santoro, 2011). The six teachers in this study do not feel pressured by any mandates about curriculum or pedagogy. Instead these six teachers have been able to build classrooms that embrace the creativity and individualism that many corporations and communities seem to desire from students. Southern's culture is not intended to be a radical approach to education, however, over the years, Southern's focus on the present and acceptance of risks and mistakes as part of learning to be creative thinkers, the six teachers in this study noted they feel that Southern looks less and less like other private and public schools.

A key trait that ties together the six teachers in this study is their creative approach to teaching. All six noted the importance of having the space to adjust and that they varied their approach to each topic or lesson based on the learning profiles of the current group of students in their classroom. To be able to appropriately respond to one's audience, teachers' need to have agency over their work. They need to be able to make the decisions about what is best for each particular grouping of students, resting in the knowledge that any challenges in the classroom do not arise out of school structure or because someone else is dictating the best way to teach (Rosenholtz, 1991; Santoro, 2011). Because these six teachers knew that were in control of their work, they had the space for innovation and creativity. If providing a space for students to learn, explore

and collaborate is the stated goal of a school, the careers of these six teachers at Southern indicates it is also important for the teachers to have the same kind of space to explore and collaborate. While Southern's distinct culture influences many aspects of the way in which it functions, Southern is explicit that teachers should be the loudest voice in the room when it comes to deciding what is needed to support student learning. Teachers at Southern are an integral part of how the school operates, and any change in structure, curriculum, and pedagogy are either teacher driven or wholly supported by the teachers.

The six teachers in this study were provided the space to pursue their own interests, which often led to changes that have become part of the fabric of Southern. For example, Lisa's affinity for working with adults led to creation of a mentor group that helps new elementary teachers, while Carol's passion for social justice led to a new Junior High curriculum that she has been invited to share with schools across the entire Southeast. Teachers at Southern are allowed to tinker, recreate, and innovate. Allowing professionals the time and space to reflect on their practice and to create new approaches can reap enormous benefits for the students and for the school as a community. Problem solving can be fulfilling work, especially when the teacher developing the solutions can see those solutions in action in the classroom. Many teachers enter the profession because they enjoy helping students, and if schools can provide teachers with the space to identify and solve issues for their own students, those teachers will be able to access the psychic benefits they seek (Hargreaves, 1998; Peske, et al., 2001; Schneopner, 2010). Protecting a teachers' autonomy in the classroom allows for students and teachers to build knowledge together in a way that is a fit for the profiles and personalities in that particular classroom at that particular time.

Another aspect of Southern that could be considered for replication is how to manage the emotional demands of teaching. Schools need to recognize the inevitable emotional toll involved in trying to educate children (Hargreaves, 1998). Every teacher in this study accepts the reality that he or she will never get everything right in every, single moment for each of the students in his or her classroom. Schools that promote a culture promising to deliver constant success and perfection set up an environment in which teachers are therefore demoralized by the inevitable failures that occur along the journey (Santoro, 2011). A major factor in why these six teachers at Southern returned to the classroom every year is that the community saw them as leaders in child development who were doing their best every day – even when their best may have ended up being the wrong decision on a particular day. Southern's ability to build a culture that accepts human fallibility has been difficult to create, but the experiences of these six teachers appears to indicate if we want children to takes risks and learn from their mistakes, we must allow their teachers to model that for them by having the same opportunities.

One final implication of this study relates to the larger society compared with life in a small community like Southern. Explicit or implied communication from Southern's administration honors the classroom teacher. This respect for the classroom teacher reaches beyond the leadership's speeches and documents about institutional values, as Southern backs up its message with actions, structures, and a culture that provides: healthy classroom budgets, significant funds dedicated to professional development, solid middle-class salaries, public recognition of the talent of the faculty, and a parent body that generally views the parent-teacher relationship as a partnership. All six teachers are painfully aware of issues around low morale of their colleagues at other schools, and

these six mentioned numerous times how they felt respected, honored, and cared for by Southern's community. Broadening this type of respect for teaching as a profession may be an unattainable goal in a country that often views teachers as semi-skilled caregivers. Leaders of schools should recognize that a lack of respect and trust for their teachers has an impact on the efficacy of those teachers. The faculty at Southern understand that they are viewed as professionals, experts on their specific curriculum and on the developmental level of the students they teach. The teachers are seen by the school community as trusted leaders, and that trust builds bonds within the community and, most importantly, within the classroom. Shifting the cultural paradigm about teachers at the national level may be too lofty a goal at this time; however, the areas in which school leadership can actually impact the local culture, finding definitive ways to honor the teaching profession can significantly improve life in the classroom.

Implications for future research

As noted earlier, there are limited studies on the factors that could increase the career longevity of classroom teachers. The data indicates that most decisions to leave classroom teaching are tied to the specific school a teacher is leaving (Keigher & Cross, 2010; O'Keefe, 2001; Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). To respond to this problem, more studies of schools that have a significant number of happy, successful, veteran teachers could advance the discussion on how to keep our successful classroom teachers in the classroom. In the analysis of schools, it is important to ask questions about not only the teachers, but also how the teachers interact with the institution. There is a great deal of research into what makes individual businesses successful, but less into what makes an individual school successful. Every classroom is inextricably tied to the school in which

it is located, and any research into what makes a successful teacher must analyze the entire school context.

Of the essential questions with which I began this study, the one still not supported by the results is: What impact does the role of teaching social studies have on the retention of teachers? Having autonomy over the curriculum is clearly important to the six teachers I interviewed, and because all of them began their teaching careers with an affinity for social studies, it is difficult to tease out how much of an impact the social studies curriculum has had on them staying in the classroom versus the autonomy itself, subject specific or not. The question of the role social studies on teacher retention may be too hard to answer, as the bias toward the specific discipline of each teacher inevitably skews the data. If a teacher loves a subject, then he or she is more likely to enjoy teaching that subject. The larger question remains: How can a school support each teacher's love of the subject content and of the developmental age of the students they teach? This question has been partially answered by the data from this study, but the question needs to be asked again in different school contexts before more formal theories can be developed.

Conclusion

Much of what the teachers shared with me over the past ten months reflects a passion for a complex profession and gratitude about having worked in an institution that distinguishes itself structurally and culturally in terms of the current norm in American education. For over 20 years, Ralph, Lisa, Michelle, James, Carol, and Michael have started each school year full of hope for their students and fully aware that they, as creative, risk taking educators, will make mistakes. They know that not everything they

try is going to work. There is a vulnerability in teaching that can be hard to overcome, and while there have been tough times for each of these teachers, they have in their own ways been able to overcome the struggles of life in the classroom and access the joys of working with students. Several thoughts from the participants underscore this conclusion. From Lisa:

> A good day is usually that there were some moments of inspiration for me. There were some moments where I got to observe kids. There were some moments of interaction where I just really enjoyed the interaction. Often at the end of the day, I will not remember what any of those specific moments were. But I will just have this good feeling about it. (Lisa, personal communication, November 11, 2012)

From Michelle:

> I had the energy to begin to create. [In] the 93/94 school year, I began to write my first course, which I taught in the 94/95 school year, and that was a course called Revolution and Society, and it was a course I spent a year writing and was completely energized by. I could not wait to get into the classroom and pull together ideas around history, literature, philosophy, sciences–so I wrote the course. I taught the course, and I realized how empowering it was, how energizing it was, how much I learned writing the course, and that was it. I was off and have been since then. (Michelle, personal communication, June 14, 2013)

From Michael:

> I do not know what the metaphor [is]–where there is this energy level you are going for in the class. You want there to be this sort of hum–maybe the metaphor

is a guitar string. It has to be taut–you just want this certain level. You do not want it to be out of control, you do not want it to be manic, you do not want it to be so lack that everybody is bored. You want there to be a constant sort of hum and engagement. (February 15, 2013)

And finally from Carol's Why I Teach speech:

I teach because I get to touch the souls and psyches of young people. I get to witness their struggle with lofty ideas. I get to see their ideas take form and develop substance. I get to see them learn to express the better part of themselves. I get to see them grow and evolve. And my hope is that in the synthesis of energy they share with me, they learn something that will serve them in their lives. (Carol, personal communication, December 28, 2012)

After more than 20 years in four different schools, I cannot imagine a career in which I do not spend time in a classroom teaching a group of students. Being a part of Southern is a factor in why I still look forward to spending time in the classroom. Because of the supportive structures and culture at Southern, the participants in this study have built their adult lives around being in the classroom, and thousands of students have benefitted from their commitment to them. In order to increase the likelihood of retaining their successful veteran educators, more schools should find ways to build structures that develop and support teachers like the six from Southern as respected, trusted professionals who decide how and what to teach, can pursue their passions, and are treated as individuals.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: Interview Questions for Initial Interview

1. How did you initially get into teaching? Did you always think you would be teacher?

2. What do you enjoy about teaching? What are your favorite moments of the year? Explain.

3. How has your view of teaching changed throughout your career?

4. How do you manage the repetition of teaching?

5. When you first started teaching, did you have any struggles? If so, how did you overcome those struggles? If not, why not?

6. Did you ever think about leaving teaching? If so, why? What kept you in the classroom?

7. Describe other teaching experiences you had before you arrived here. How would you describe the schools?

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions for Interviews #3 and #4

1. What are the factors that have kept you engaged and excited about teaching and learning?

2. What are the benefits of you being primarily responsible for your own curriculum?

3. What role, if any, does social studies curriculum play in supporting your development?

4. How would you describe your teaching style?

5. How do you plan a lesson?

6. How do you think the lesson went?

7. How does that lesson reflect your teaching style?

APPENDIX C: Interview Questions for Final Interview

1. What does Southern School offer that supports your continued growth?

2. What advice would you give a school trying to retain its veteran teachers?

3. What do you see as your professional development needs?

4. What type of professional development experiences do you enjoy and seek out?

5. How have your professional development needs evolved/changed during your career?

6. How does Southern School support your professional development needs?