

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT SUSTAIN EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN HIGH-
NEED, LOW-PERFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Michelle Stanley Casey

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe factors that sustained public school teachers in high-need areas. Teacher sustainability was generally defined as teachers who remained in a high-need public school located in southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching. This study explored the following: (1) How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina? (2) How do public school teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact retaining their profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school? (3) What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors do public school teachers describe as encouraging them to sustain their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school? The theoretical framework that guided this study was mindset and motivation theory proposed by Carol Dweck, andragogical adult learning theory introduced by Malcolm Knowles, and transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow. A detailed analysis revealed five descriptive themes derived from the participants answering the interview questions, focus group questions, and completing the photo-narrative documentation. Themes that emerged included (a) colleagues as family, (b) sense of calling, (c) love for children, (d) contribution to community, and (e) service to others. Recommendations for future research included exploring experienced teachers who teach in non-high-need public schools within North Carolina and surrounding states, replicating the study in an urban school district, conducting the study with charter schools and parochial schools that serve students in a high-need educational community, and conducting a quantitative study that explores the effectiveness of teacher sustainability and student achievement in a high-need public school.

Keywords: motivational factors, sustainability, novice teachers, experienced teachers, low-performing public schools, growth mindset, phenomenology

DEDICATION

It is with great gratitude and appreciation that I dedicate my dissertation journey to my family, friends, and educational family. An ultimate feeling of gratitude to loved ones present and to those who have gone on beyond this earth. My husband, who has to be the most patient man on earth, for enduring the time away and fast-food meals when I was consumed with writing and research.

I also dedicate this dissertation to many friends and colleagues who have supported me throughout the journey. Thank you for all your prayers, support, lunch dates, and encouraging words of wisdom. My infinite appreciation to Martha—an incredible friend, humor buddy, and a consistent ear to listen.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the participants who were willing to share their life's journey, for me to hear their voices and share with the educational community, their dedication to children.

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List of Abbreviations

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)

Beginning Teacher (BT)

End-of-Grade (EOG)

End-of-Course (EOC)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Nationally Board Certified Teacher (NBCT)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

North Carolina (NC)

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

During the progression of educational psychology, research, and theory, students' academic achievements are governed by the quality of their teachers. However, a mounting conflict arises each year among public education indicating teachers are leaving the profession and pursuing an alternate career. This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological design to describe the experiences encompassing the motivational factors that sustain teachers in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching.

The problem is that research has explored teachers' attrition, retention, and burnout. However, minimal qualitative research exists in acquiring an understanding of the factors that sustain public school teachers beyond the first three years of teaching in a high-need school (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Synder, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe motivational factors that sustain public school teachers in high-need areas in southeastern North Carolina. This particular study focused on listening to the voices of teachers who had been teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school beyond the initial three years in an effort to identify how they distinguish their sustainability in their teaching careers.

In this chapter, the research background as well as the researcher's situation within the study is described. Additionally, numerous components of the study encompassing the problem, purpose, significance of the study, research questions, research plan, delimitations, limitations, and pertinent definitions are explained. Open-ended interviews, collective documentation, and an online focus group discussion were used to collect data. Data was analyzed through open

coding, axial coding, theme analysis, and member checks of the collective documents, interviews, and focus group discussions. In addition, continual comparison was conducted with the emerging data collection. Memoing, researcher reflexivity, bracketing, triangulation, and peer reviews were also utilized to report conflicts of trustworthiness. Thus, the following research questions were explored: (1) How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina? (2) How do public school teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact in retaining their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school? (3) What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors do public school teachers describe as encouraging them to sustain their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

Background

Sustaining teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need public educational community is essential to student achievement, budgetary needs, and teacher education programs. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "30% of novice teachers resign within their first 3 years in high-need, urban public school districts," associated with the high costs of teacher turnover, estimating the nation's cost of "approximately seven billion dollars annually" (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010, p. 2). Additionally, Aloe, Amo, and Shanahan (2014) explained in their research relative to teacher burnout, ". . . teachers tend to have slightly higher scores of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization and a lower sense of personal accomplishment relative to workers in other human service fields" (p. 103). Further research indicated that a "lack of school support along with changing standards may lead to exhaustion, uncertainty, and burnout" (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014, p. 103).

Equally important, teacher education programs often under-prepare student teachers who eventually begin their careers in high-need schools, providing minimal clinical teaching opportunities for low-achieving diverse populations within high-need school districts (Anderson & Stillman, 2011; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010). Cooper and He (2011) advocate that teachers are required to attain an understanding of their own identities so they can adequately meet the individual needs of students within a diverse school environment. Researchers suggest various factors for retaining teachers within high-need educational communities relative to administrative support and leadership (Cooper & He, 2011; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Vaughn & Saul, 2013). Thus, educational school board members must employ administrators with a forward-thinking mindset, acknowledging the need for administrative staff who possess a curriculum background, increase the recruitment of hiring minority educators, offer mentoring programs for novice teachers, and incorporate internship experiences in high-need schools (Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010). Furthermore, "Our teacher education programs should encourage building of such communities among our graduates and support such sharing and reflection in their first year" (Cooper & He, 2011, p. 112).

While specific studies investigated the encounters encompassing teachers and their retention, attrition, and burnout experiences within the initial years of teaching, the conflict remained relative to sustaining teachers beyond the first three years of teaching (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Likewise, Burton and Johnson (2010) utilized a metaphorical perspective of teacher preparedness and perception relative to the educational profession by describing the links in the chain:

The first link in the chain is related to the fact that low-income students of color who

attend underresourced and high-need schools generally have access to the least qualified and most poorly prepared teachers. The second link in the chain concerns the relationship between teacher preparation and student achievement. The third link in the chain concerns the relationship between student achievement and teachers' job satisfaction The issues related to teacher retention only intensify in high-needs schools, where up to 50% of teachers leave teaching within the first five years. (pp. 376-77)

Thus, researchers challenged educational leaders to discover teacher identities, conceptualization, and contextual influences, which could postulate the greatest outcomes for sustaining teachers in the educational community (Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2011, 2012; Young, Chester, Flett, Foe, Marshall, Moore, et al., 2010). As articulated by Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012), the educational concentration requires a mindset transformation, “the need to shift the conversation from one focused only on retaining teachers toward a conversation about sustaining teachers throughout their careers” (p. 118). Consequently, this study sought to capture the voices of teachers who taught in low-performing public schools located in southeastern North Carolina and the motivational factors that sustained them in their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching.

Situation to Self

My inspiration in conducting this study was to explore the factors that sustained teachers who taught in high-need areas in a southeastern North Carolina school district. As an educational leader who is employed in the College of Education at East Carolina University (ECU), with a focus on novice teachers in the teacher education program, the primary goal is to

sustain teachers and continuously enhance the clinical teaching experiences and the sustenance within the teaching profession. I hoped to promote the sustainability of teachers who teach in high-need educational settings and to better equip myself with an understanding of the pulse of teachers. Specifically regarding the motivational factors that preserve their desire to sustain their educational careers when numerous opportunities arise that present discouraging and overwhelming reasons to leave and to become a statistic of attrition.

Serving as an educational leader, I permitted the participants to construct the meaning of their motivational factors in sustaining their educational careers by interviewing them and capturing their lived experiences while serving as teachers. As a Christian, I advocate an axiological belief in positioning myself within the phenomenological study, acknowledging the participants' lived experiences and my personal biases while exploring the research (Creswell, 2013). Likewise, I believe the participants are created by God with an ultimate goal to serve Him in all capacities. As articulated by Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012), "How common a sense of calling is among teachers is unclear, but it appears to be more common than generally recognized in the research literature" (p. 8).

Problem Statement

The problem is that research (Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013) has explored teachers' attrition, retention, and burnout. However, minimal qualitative research existed in acquiring an understanding of the factors that sustained teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching in high-need schools (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Barnhardt (2012) defines teaching as a multistep interchange where teachers are consciously aware of their surroundings and the wellbeing of others. Heineke, Mazza, and

Tichnor-Wagner (2014) share their explorations noting “One third of the teaching force in the United States turns over each year, with the highest attrition rates occurring in high-need schools—urban and rural schools with low-income and minority populations” (p. 751).

Thus, the current research proposed to describe factors that sustained teachers who taught in high-need public schools in the southeastern region of North Carolina. The high-need, low-performing public schools were identified as Title 1 schools associated with the public school system where the student populace consisted of 61% minority enrollment with the majority of African American students, denoting this is greater than the North Carolina state average of 49%. Interestingly, Vaughn and Saul (2013) signified that educators who possess a vision strive with conscious efforts to meet the individual needs of all students across environments even when confronting adversity. Comparatively, as noted with Levine’s (2013) studies, the continual “high-stakes” requirements mandated of teachers create increased stress and higher teacher attrition with the accountability of standardized testing and the responsibility of moving students forward without adequate academic preparation.

Likewise, various factors were measured distinguishing the interchanges of teachers’ retention and sustainability in the educational community through intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, interchangeable with a growth mindset of learning, inclusive of adult learning theory. As Dweck (2006) advocates, “Growth-minded teachers tell students the truth and then give them the tools to close the gap” (p. 199). The problem is that research has studied teachers’ attrition, retention, and burnout, yet minimal research exists in acquiring an understanding of the motivational factors that sustain teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching in high-need schools (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe factors that sustained public school teachers in high-need areas in North Carolina. The sustainability of teachers was generally defined as teachers who remained in a low-performing public school located in southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching. For the purpose of this study, public school teachers were identified as those who had been teaching beyond the initial three years of their profession, recognizing the literature indicated a gap in research with teachers who remained beyond the first three years of teaching (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013).

The setting was four large K-12 rural public schools within one public school district located in the southeastern region of North Carolina. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report (2013), 31% of children, five to 17 years old, live in poverty in this county, with a poverty rate of 24.9% compared to 16.8% poverty rate ([www.http://quickfacts.census.gov/](http://quickfacts.census.gov/)). In 2014, the local school board voted to adopt the Community Eligibility Provision, an amendment to the National School Lunch Act that deems all students who live in high poverty districts eligible for free lunch and breakfast. Cooper and He (2011) posit the necessity of preparing teacher candidates for the current shift in the classroom and to disseminate challenges and conflicts among all stakeholders within the K-12 educational system in preparation of today's societal context. The theories guiding this study were motivational and mindset theory proposed by Carol Dweck, andragogical adult learning theory introduced by Malcolm Knowles, and transformative theory developed by Jack Mezirow. Thus, this study proposed to describe the motivational factors and contextual influences public school teachers preserved to sustain their dedication to teaching.

Significance of the Study

Describing the motivational factors that sustained teachers in low-performing public schools in the southeastern region of North Carolina is significant to the educational community in numerous ways. According to Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012), “The discourse around teacher attrition and retention has kept the focus . . . seeing the problem as one of only retaining teachers, rather than sustaining beginning teachers” (p. 117). The significance of this study is fundamental for the professional educational community because the lived experiences provided a better understanding of the motivational factors that sustained teachers who taught in high-need areas.

In addition, the shared phenomenon will be communicated among other educational communities, which has the potential to increase teacher longevity with less teacher turnover, reduce financial costs, yield teacher job satisfaction, enhance teacher education programs, and ultimately create higher student achievement (Anderson, & Stillman, 2011; Bernhardt, 2012; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010; Levine, 2013; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Shernoff, Mariñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011). Exploring this particular phenomenon was essential in acquiring an understanding of how to enhance support, advocacy, transformation, and resilience for teachers who taught in high-need educational communities and sustained their careers beyond the initial three years of teaching (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Levine, 2013; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Shernoff, Mariñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011; Synder, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013; Wang & Fulton, 2012). Finally, the theoretical significance of this study was how adult learners transformed (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; McGrath, 2009; Mezirow, 1997, 2003) their contextual influences aligned

with their growth mindset and motivational factors (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012) to sustain their teaching careers beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need school (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Levine, 2013; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Shernoff, Mariñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011; Synder, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013; Wang & Fulton, 2012).

Research Questions

Relative to the purpose of this study, the following questions framed this research:

1. How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina?

According to Bernhardt (2012), Burton and Johnson (2010), Castro, Kelly, and Shih (2010), and Smeaton and Waters (2013), teaching is a lifestyle, incorporating morals, integrity, and humility. Often, individuals pursue a teaching career to help others as they were encouraged during their K-12 experiences. Additionally, teachers teaching in low-performing schools struggle with acquiring colleague support and resources. Therefore, one of the initial objectives is to create an atmosphere in which to serve as a self-advocate and become your own change agent.

2. How do public school teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact retaining their profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

As indicated in educational research, contextual influences such as one's cultural experiences, family, life history, aspirations, self-efficacy, and career goals directly affect the sustainability of teachers (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Bernhardt, 2012; Bridges, 2012; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Claeys, 2011; Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Orange,

2014; Synder, 2012). Specifically, this study hoped to gain a better understanding of the participants' personal interests in selecting teaching as a career by interviewing each individual and acquiring insight from the focus group discussion that showed what sustained their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching.

3. What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors do public school teachers describe as encouraging them to sustain their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

Burton and Johnson (2010), Gimbert and Fultz (2010), Meister and Ahrens (2011), Shernoff, Martiñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, and Bonner (2011), Smeaton and Waters (2013), Synder (2012), and Vaughn and Saul (2013) researched both veteran and novice teachers' decisions to remain in the educational profession and the various extrinsic motivational factors that encouraged their retention and attrition in rural and urban areas. Likewise, Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2011, 2012), Synder (2012), and Vaughn and Saul (2013), explored the various experiences of teachers and specific incentives for them to preserve their educational careers. However, the voices of teachers in high-need schools, specifically in North Carolina, continued to be unheard in the educational literature. Comparatively, teachers embrace a vital role and position in the educational community, thus emphasizing the need for their voices to be heard, denoting the significance of their lived experiences and motives to sustain their teaching careers while working in high-need schools located in southeastern North Carolina.

As indicated by Aloe, Amo, and Shanahan (2014), Dagenhart, Petty, and O'Connor (2010), Gimbert and Fultz (2010), Levine (2013), and Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2011, 2012), historical research investigated the retention, attrition, and burnout associated with teachers. However, the voices of teachers in low-performing public schools, specifically in

North Carolina, continued to be unheard in the educational literature. The teachers in this study experienced motivational factors in sustaining their careers beyond the initial years while teaching in a high-need public school in southeastern North Carolina.

Research Plan

A qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design was implemented for this study. As identified by Creswell (2013), “. . . a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). Similarly, a phenomenological research study afforded the researcher opportunities to hear the voices of the participants’ experiences and attribute meaning relative to the phenomenon and attain an understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990, 2014). In addition, the significance of interviewing public school teachers who shared their professional careers via photographs and reflective narratives was essential in conducting this phenomenological study and showing what factors sustained their educational careers in high-need public schools in a rural area of southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching. Another essential component in conducting this phenomenological study was bracketing. According to Moustakas (1994), researchers are to bracket their perceptions when conducting phenomenological research, which allows them to set aside their preconceived thoughts and continue the study void of supposition.

By exploring the motivational factors that sustained teachers in a high-need educational community via a transcendental phenomenological approach, this study offered the opportunity to analyze the participants’ interviews and collective documentation, and extend thematic analysis within a focus group for accuracy and comprehension. As described by Moustakas (1994), by utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach, the researcher seeks to

understand an individuals' experiences. Thus, the researcher sets aside preconceived thoughts and perceptions (epoche/bracketing) to view the phenomena through a different lens, allowing the phenomena to surface in its entirety (Moustakas, 1994).

Delimitations and Limitations

For the purpose of this study, the participants were identified as teachers who taught in low-performing public schools in one school district located in the southeastern region of North Carolina and who remained in high-need public schools throughout their teaching career beyond the initial three years of teaching. The rationale for this specific selection of participants was to merit that teachers had completed their initial three years of teaching within low-performing public schools within the North Carolina public education system. Thus, this criterion permitted the researcher to describe the phenomenon of motivational factors that sustained teachers who taught specifically in high-need public schools situated in southeastern North Carolina.

Equally, for the purpose of this study, the teachers were limited to those who taught in school districts deemed as high-need and low-performing due to student academic achievement via standardized test results, socioeconomic status, and students who received a high ratio of free lunch as identified by federal and North Carolina state guidelines. Likewise, the rationale for limiting the public school teachers to this specific selection was a focus on the phenomenon of teachers who sustained their educational careers by preserving motivational factors that enabled them to continue teaching specifically beyond the initial three years.

Proposed limitations prevalent in this study were the years of teaching with a focus beyond the initial three years of teaching in the traditional track and an alternative track. Thus, the participants' ages ranged from 31 to 62 years of age. Likewise, there was a possibility of limited diversity among the participants being centrally located in the southeastern region of

North Carolina in high-need areas. However, the researcher selected a diverse populace of public school teachers. The teachers within the school district were five traditional female participants and four female participants who completed an alternative educational track. Comparatively, the male teachers comprised of four participants, with two who completed a traditional track and two who completed an alternative educational track.

Additionally, the educational setting was public schools within one school district located only in southeastern North Carolina. Consequently, this study concedes that the motivational factors and experiences of the selected participants may not reflect the diverse perspectives and teacher sustainability of various genders, ethnicities, ages, and geographical locations. Ultimately, once the participant list was attained, the participants were explored to determine the most comprehensive assemblage of diversity from those who had experienced the same phenomenon.

Definitions

1. *Extrinsic Motivation*- Extrinsic motivation is defined as an individual's view of their behaviorisms occurring outside of the person as a consequence of external factors such as salary, principal and colleague support, educational resources, and professional development (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Hazarati-Viari, Rad, & Torabi, 2012).
2. *Fixed Mindset*- A fixed mindset is a mindset identified with people who believe that their basic qualities, such as intelligence or gifts, are fixed traits, innately given at birth (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).
3. *Growth Mindset*- A growth mindset is a mindset identified with people who believe that they can develop over time with hard work and dedication to a task (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

4. *Initial Years of Teaching*- Initial years of teaching is identified as a teacher serving in the first three years of appropriate teaching experience in their initial licensure area (sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us/policies).
5. *Intrinsic Motivation*- Intrinsic motivation is identified in people who possess an internal interest and enjoyment and feel competent and self-determined (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Hazarati-Viari, Rad, & Torabi, 2012).
6. *Novice Teacher*- A novice teacher is identified as a new or beginning teacher and an early career teacher determined by years of experience within the first five years of teaching (Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013).
7. *Beginning Teacher*- Teachers who are in the first three years of teaching and who hold a Standard Professional 1 License (www.ncpublicschools.org).
8. *Experienced Teachers*- Teachers including those with career status who have been employed for three or more years (www.ncpublicschools.org).
9. *Sustain*- To support, experience, and continue pursuant of an action or process (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Levine, 2013).
10. *Transformation Learning Theory*- Defined as a mode of learning that transforms problematic frames of reference; to make frames of reference more inclusive, open, and emotionally able to change (Mezirow, 2003).
11. *Low-Performing School*- Low-performing schools are those in which there is a failure to meet the minimum growth standards, as defined by the State Board, and a majority of students performing below grade level and schools that receive a D or F school performance grade and do not exceed academic growth expectations on state exams (<http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/>).

12. *High-Need School*- A high-need school is identified as a school where the poverty level is extremely high with unfilled available teaching positions, high volume of non-certified, non-licensed teachers, high teacher turnover, and located in an area where at least 30 percent of students are reared in families with incomes below poverty level in both urban and rural areas (www.ed.gov).

Summary

As indicated in this research and other educational studies, a learner's academic achievement is often accomplished through rigorous academia and motivational factors encompassing the assigned teachers. Based on the literature, the problem was identified as a lack of research indicating teacher sustainability beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in southeastern North Carolina. Therefore, this particular study hoped to enhance the educational community by highlighting the motivational factors that sustain teachers in high-need, low-performing public schools situated in southeastern North Carolina, for the ultimate goal of student success, teacher longevity, school district recruiting improvement in diverse settings and other schools, and enhanced teacher education programs via the universities. The research background, problem, purpose, significance, questions, plan, delimitations, limitations, and definitions which are all important components were explained in this chapter for this particular study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The study of teacher career status encompasses mostly attrition, retention, and burnout, denoting purposes for leaving the educational profession (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). However, no studies indicated the personal, demographic, and contextual influences of sustaining teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Bernhardt, 2012; Bridges, 2012; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Claeys, 2011; Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Orange, 2014; Synder, 2012). This chapter describes the theoretical framework which guides this study and is grounded in mindset theory studied by Carol Dweck (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012), andragogical adult learning theory studied by Malcolm Knowles (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; McGrath, 2009), and transformation learning theory studied by Jack Mezirow (Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Additionally, this chapter incorporates related literature relative to the topics of teacher retention, attrition, burnout, and sustainability in educational careers. Contextual influences encompassing leadership support, mentor programs, and advantages of professional development opportunities within a high-need school are also described. In this chapter, the advantages of understanding teachers' demographics, personal life history, and aspirations are described to highlight motivational factors in teacher sustainability while teaching in a high-need public school. Lastly in this chapter, existing literature is incorporated to explore teachers' clinical teaching and participation in teacher preparatory programs to determine if these experiences align with their teaching sustainability and their longevity beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need school in southeastern North Carolina.

Mindset theorists (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012) posit that those who possess a growth mindset often require minimal self-confidence improvements, accept challenges, strive for achievement, search for novel opportunities, and preserve humility, which are attributes that enable them to be resilient to life's encounters. Knowles (1975) and other adult learning theorists (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; McGrath, 2009) emphasize the significance of how adults learn novel content, maturation of self-directedness, planning and input in societal context, identification in reaching adulthood, and critical reflection. Mezirow (1997, 2003) studied the importance of an individual's transformation, how adults progress throughout life, and the advantages of incorporating critical reflection and discourse. Consequently, a comprehensive synthesis of literature has been formulated to advance research among teachers beyond their initial three years of teaching, preserving their motivational factors in sustaining their educational career in high-need public schools in southeastern North Carolina. In this chapter, the theoretical framework and a comprehensive synthesis of related literature provides a background for the research and the gap that has been identified in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

The axiological assumption led to the choice of this specific research study relative to motivational factors that sustained teachers beyond their initial three years of teaching within high-need educational communities. As the researcher in the present study, I advocate for both a biblical worldview and a social constructivism mindset conducive to teacher sustainability in rural areas of North Carolina.

Therefore, the theoretical framework guiding this study is grounded in mindset and motivation theory proposed by Carol Dweck, andragogical adult learning theory introduced by Malcolm Knowles, and transformative theory developed by Jack Mezirow. Likewise, the related

literature reviewed in this study is on the topics of teacher retention, attrition, burnout, and sustainability related to their educational profession. Contextual influences relative to leadership support, mentoring programs, and professional development within high-need school communities is also highlighted. Teachers' demographics, personal life history, and aspirations were explored to describe their motivational factors in sustaining teaching careers.

Comparatively, research also explored teachers' clinical teaching and teacher education preparatory programs to determine if their student-teaching experiences aligned with their sustainability and encompassed their teaching career beyond the initial three years of teaching in high-need schools in southeastern North Carolina.

Dweck's Mindset and Motivation Theory

Dweck's (2006) mindset theory focuses on a fixed versus growth mindset relative to motivation, personality, and individual growth development. According to Dweck (2006), mindsets are conventions and opportunities that learners own about themselves and others in societal context, indicating "the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life it can determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you accomplish the things you value" (p. 5). According to mindset theory, individuals who possess a growth mindset can develop over time, whereas, a fixed mindset indicates that personal "qualities are carved in stone" (Dweck, 2006, p. 6). Dweck's mindset theory emphasizes that individuals have the capacity to transform their mindset from a fixed mode of knowing to a growth mindset of learning over time (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Dweck (2006) defines a fixed mindset as what individuals believe are innate talents and/or abilities that cannot be changed; the growth mindset describes those who are considered a "work in progress" and can change over time with ongoing opportunities (p. 103).

Additionally, Dweck (2006) advocates that an individual's personality flourishes from mindset that encompasses all capacities of life. Therefore, the attributes of great teaching shifts from a fixed to a growth mindset with the ultimate goal of student achievement. Dweck (2006) signified that her research relevant to teachers "starts with the growth mindset – about yourself and about children . . . a deep desire to reach in and ignite the mind of every child" (p. 201). Consequently, Dweck has discovered from her educational experiences that a great teacher is one who constitutes lifelong learning and serving as a student first in aspiration of achievement for all stakeholders. Mindset and motivation theory serve as both foundational support for teachers who teach in high-need schools in southeastern North Carolina and a motivational factor in sustaining their teaching careers beyond the initial years.

As educational research expounds, individuals can shift their mindset over time from a fixed mode of knowing to a growth mindset of learning, inclusive of their resilience when confronted with educational and societal tasks. Flexibility indicates that mindset can be positively transformed, which directly enables resilience when taught specific psychologically-based interventions and advocates pliability when addressing adversity in becoming one's own change agent (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Mindset theorists advocate that those who possess a growth mindset require minimal self-esteem boosts, receive challenges, pursue accomplishments, invite new opportunities, encourage support from others, and preserve humility, which enables them to be resilient to life's conflicts (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Dweck (2006) promotes the variations of mindset, indicating that mindset structures the continual description that occurs in the brain, directing the entire perception process, where the fixed mindset creates internal communication concentrated on judgment. Dweck advocates that individuals who possess a growth mindset attend to learning

and constructive action, resulting in the perception of what can be attained, how to self-improve, and how to help others. Additionally, Dweck has discovered that mindset is not a personal flaw or idiosyncrasy, but an overall mental capacity that helps to expand and explain how they become expectant or distrustful with life's perceptions. However, mindset determines ambition, purpose, work ethic, perspective toward others, maturity, and how to parent children (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Often, those who possess a fixed mindset tend to continuously search to prove themselves, with the ultimate goal of appearing intelligent and skilled at all costs. Whereas, individuals with a growth mindset understand that their talents and skills develop over time, and achievement is acquired during life's experiences. Throughout her research, Dweck (2006) emphasizes the growth mindset shift in disciplines such as education, science, technology, math, music, sports, literacy, and business, with the motivation to apply the growth mindset to achieve impactful outcomes. Consequently, Dweck indicates that individuals can change their mindset at any given time in life to accomplish ultimate attainment and contentment. Dweck studies and teaches educators, students, parents, coaches, scientists, businessmen, and sports players how to shift a fixed mindset, which often traps them, to a growth mindset that will help them reach their fullest potential (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Relative to sports and competitive disciplines, Dweck (2006) highlights the championship mentality, where individuals retain character and ambition. Those who possess a high quality character and the championship mentality believe in working hard, maintaining focus during conflict, and amplifying innate abilities when applicable. Likewise, those who possess a championship mentality may not be as gifted as others, but have the mindset to overcome and achieve goals and directives as well as opponents. Dweck (2006) defined

character as “what allows you to reach the top and stay there” (p. 97). Thus, individuals who work their hardest and give their best, achieve the greatest potential and acquire resilience when confronted with adversity in societal context.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) identified resilience in their research while working with both adults and youth, denoting when individuals exhibit resilience, they embrace a “behavioral, attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social challenge that is positive and beneficial for development” (p. 303). Likewise, Yeager and Dweck discovered that if the younger populace is taught early in life how to shift their mindset when confronted with adversity, their interpretations of specific situations equips them with a more positive outcome and eagerness to accept life’s challenges. Yeager and Dweck emphasize that if perceptions can be positively interrupted with a growth mindset, individuals have the potential to psychologically change their position in difficult or uncomfortable situations. Consequently, teachers who possess a growth mindset and teach in high-need educational communities, can positively impact all stakeholders by modeling and teaching students, families, and colleagues by preparing themselves for sustainability and overall student achievement. According to research (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Dweck, 2006; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Yeager & Dweck, 2012), individuals who possess resilience and a growth mindset, expound upon their ability and disengage the concept of unproductive mindset, with a determination to ignite a flame for learning, and rise to their ultimate potential to change and face life’s challenges.

Knowles Andragogical Adult Learning Theory

Knowles’ andragogical adult learning theory supports the capacities of how adults learn compared with the pedagogical approach of children and their learning processes (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; McGrath, 2009). Holton, Knowles, and Swanson

(2005) distinguished six principles of how adults learn and their assumptions: (a) the need to know, (b) the learner's self-concept, (c) the role of the learner's experiences, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) motivation to learn from an internal perspective.

Knowles' andragogical adult learning theory defines the eagerness to attain information when incorporating input, self-concept, orientation, and motivation relative to contextual meaning (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; McGrath, 2009). Based on Knowles' studies and other theorists' research relative to adult learning theory, "learning, emphasizes the person in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur" (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005, p. 281).

Similarly, researchers who study adult learning theory signify the characteristics of an adult's identification process via biological process, legal identification, social communication, and psychological processing (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; McGrath, 2009). Holton, Knowles, and Swanson categorize the four sustainable descriptions of an adult as the biological period, the legal timeline, the social experiences, and the psychological platform. First, the biological period is identified when adults reach the age of reproduction. Second, the legal timeline occurs when adults reach the age when they can register to vote, acquire a driver's license, and choose to marry without parental permission. Third, individuals become adults socially when they can accomplish specific roles in societal context such as working in a full-time capacity, parenting children, and voting citizenship. Fourth, individuals are considered adults psychologically when they acquire a self-concept conducive to their own responsibilities and self-sufficiency.

Comparatively, McGrath (2009) indicates that Knowles' theory of andragogy is representative of individuals who are "autonomous, free, and growth oriented" (p. 107), while

other theorists advocate that there is no indication to conclude that adults are self-driven and impacted by societal tasks and most will follow directives given in specific situations. However, most research encourages the andragogical theory with the notion that adult learners achieve more effectively when they are given junctures for input and shared life's lessons (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; McGrath, 2009). Interestingly, Holton, Knowles, and Swanson postulated that most adults acquire these sustainable adult qualities throughout their journey in life. They emphasize that individuals can be taught these sustainable characteristics in their youth with consistent self-directed opportunities and accountabilities. Yet, most individuals continuously acquire adult qualities as they mature from adolescence to adulthood. Theorists have identified the development of how adults mature and are self-directed, thus, teachers who follow the traditional educational track may struggle with self-direction if not exposed to psychological and social interactions during their youth. Therefore, teachers who have experienced limited novel opportunities for self-concept and resilience may resist or unconsciously avoid specific needs in their classrooms or pose difficulties with social requirements within the educational setting.

Frequently, in traditional educational environments, adult learners are taught and expected to follow a more regimented pedagogical delivery, where they are given the directives, required resources, and the evaluative manner of outcomes. Whereas, with an andragogical approach, adults are encouraged to share input and ideas in a cohesive manner. Knowles and other adult-learning theorists (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; McGrath, 2009) discovered that when adults learn new information on their own instead of being taught, they create a sense of self-direction. As a result of the enforced structure of learning in a traditional educational community, adults often resist or withdraw because of their non-involvement with planning and

input. Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005) believed that adults should be able to diagnose their own needs by articulating goals, determining needed resources, acquiring specific strategies, and evaluating accomplishments, which creates a sense of ownership and commitment to the plan.

Synder (2012) describes reflective journal writing as a tool for novice teachers in their personal and professional growth, “By making the reflective process transparent, students learning to be teachers will become more aware of their own reflective thinking sooner” (pp. 49-50). Likewise, research (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975) indicates that the educational process is an action stimulated or originated by an individual or a community, with the goal to influence continual transformation in academic knowledge, value, talent, and mindset of all stakeholders.

Additionally, the manner in which adults attain content transforms from their ownership, which enables them to learn genuinely and perpetually compared to being taught in a lecture mode. Therefore, teacher education programs in universities are challenged with shifting from the pedagogical mode of delivery where students “sit and get” to offering more student internships in high-need schools, where diverse student populations and teacher candidates experience the phenomena of cultural diversity. As indicated through educational context and instructional dissemination, adults acquire information differently than children, emerging from a pedagogical approach to an andragogical mode of attainment.

McGrath (2009) theorized, “Adult learners need to know why they are learning new knowledge before they are willing to participate” (p. 99). Likewise, educators are to integrate educational practices relative to intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, which establish a growth mindset of content acquisition. Comparatively, teachers are confronted with

incorporating teaching styles and differentiating instructional practices that warrant the fulfillment of all students' learning styles and interchangeable motivational traits. Hence, acquisition that poses collective considerations in identifying the connections between a teaching environment and a learning environment.

During his studies, Knowles (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975) created a learning contract method to help adult learners self-diagnose and determine the learning objectives of both the learner and the assigned supervisor. The learning contract was designed to identify the adult learners' needs, determine the objectives, distinguish the required resources and strategies, identify evidence of accomplishment with determined objectives, show evidence validation, consult with constituents, complete desired tasks, and evaluate outcomes (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975). According to Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005), "Education emphasizes the educator, whereas learning emphasizes the person in whom the change occurs or is expected to occur" (p. 400). Therefore, involving adults in the planning and development processes is vitally important in an educational environment and affords them opportunities to reach "their full degree of humaneness" (McGrath, 2009, p. 102).

Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005) and Knowles (1975) proposed that the andragogical theory transfers from a pedagogical mode of acquiring information to an andragogical approach of learning, encompassing six principles of how adults learn and form assumptions. First, adults need to know why and what they are learning ignites an awareness of current knowledge and the desire for future position empowers their willingness to be challenged with new tasks and interests. Second, as adults mature, they acquire a self-concept which involves ownership and responsibility of their life's decisions. When adults acquire a personal self-concept and/or identity, they are intensely troubled when others try to dictate their thoughts

and perspective. Hence, the conflict for teachers who aren't supported by their colleagues or administrators often results in high teacher turnover and attrition within the educational profession, especially in high-needs schools (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Synder, 2012). Third, an adult's role in lived experiences suggests a maturity over the younger populace, which assumes a greater volume of knowledge and intellect. Therefore, within a group of adults, there should be a greater capacity for knowledge, expounding uniqueness and novel opportunities for input. Fourth, adults' readiness to learn signifies that they are equipped and prepared to handle life's circumstances. Fifth, adults' orientation to learning encompasses a task-centered approach, specifically if they know the situation is applicable to life's journey. Sixth, the motivation factor is a crucial period for adults and their learning, due to the fact that they are extrinsically driven to tasks such as job satisfaction, self-confidence, and higher paying salaries.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow's transformative learning theory supports the potential understanding of the contextual influences and motivational factors for teachers in sustaining their careers beyond the initial years of teaching in high-need schools (Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2012). Mezirow's (2003) transformative learning theory explains how adults process learning as instrumental and communicative and explores how adults attribute their learning capabilities as attaining knowledge of experiences and reasoning. Relative to teachers, transformative learning theory denotes transformation to new, open, more integrative and broader ways of knowing, which can be applicable to an educator's teaching expertise. According to Mezirow (2003) and Synder (2012), adults approach novice learning with intensity and improved emotion, indicating as they

mature, they accrue life's lessons, which cultivates validated frames of reference and ultimately situates novice learning in pre-existing structures.

Mezirow's (2003) theory postulates the importance of adults' reflective discourse and moral development in adulthood, connecting the concepts and theories about how adults respond to adult educational experiences, indicating "free participation in critical reflection and discourse" (p. 63). Transformative theory defines the epistemology of transformative learning while interchanging with adults, indicating the reasoning and the mannerisms of how adults evaluate their beliefs, learning, critical reflection, workplace, and community (Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2012). Mezirow's transformative learning theory transforms problematic frames of reference, making them more inclusive, open, and emotionally able to change and to make meaning of specific context. Therefore, the mode in which adults acquire contextual knowledge is a process that supports the ability to reach their potential, skills, and academic capabilities for maturation and progression. Mezirow's theory kindles hope for teachers in high-need schools in sustaining their teaching profession beyond the initial years of teaching.

Additionally, Mezirow (2003) distinctively describes instrumental learning, communicative learning, and the significance of transformative learning. Instrumental learning has a relationship with transformation in life, highlighting that learning is relative to "controlling and manipulating the environment, with emphasis on improving prediction and performance" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Communicative learning requires the process of assessing the meaning and beliefs of others in conversation or dialogue to determine one's greatest conclusion. The communication factors that Mezirow studied are essential with teachers because they denote interchanges with others as well as self-reflection, which is required by educational professionals. Likewise, teachers are evaluated in accordance with their reflective practices and

how they assess their instructional dialogue and communicative reasoning with students (Anderson & Stillman, 2011; Bridges, 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Wang & Fulton, 2012).

Mezirow emphasized that transformative learning encompasses genuine reflective processes occurring individually or within a group. Thus, it is crucial for teachers to have opportunities to collaborate and participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLC), departmental planning, and content-related professional development to sustain them beyond the initial years of teaching. Incorporating a sense of connectedness and community plays a significant role in sustaining teachers in the beginning years in their careers, specifically in high-need schools. Synder (2013) described the importance of understanding the journey of teachers, particularly regarding the effectiveness of attending specific teacher education programs and the decision to pursue a teaching career. According to Synder (2013), professional instructors are to be purposeful, thoughtful, and involved in preparatory education programs in order to be effective while serving in the educational community.

Teacher education programs should establish an environment conducive to adults transforming their mindset of teaching and learning to a research-based epistemology in serving themselves and their students (Synder, 2013). Additionally, there is an emphasis on teacher education programs incorporating an environment relative to spiraled, experiential, and authentic curriculum with collegial partnerships and reflective expectations (Synder, 2013). According to Mezirow (2003) and Synder (2013), the specific transformative phases relative to adults' transformation are beneficial for teacher education programs incorporating a framework for the distribution of educational practices and collaboration. Also, educational leaders who prepare and equip themselves with a thorough understanding of how adults learn is imperative to the successful education of adults, specifically teacher candidates and their continued interest in

pursuing a teaching career. As theorists (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; McGrath, 2009; Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2013) who study adult learning indicated, adults confront novice learning with more intensity and an augmented emotional state compared to the younger populace. Subsequently, as adults mature, they acquire experience and knowledge that validates their personal frame of reference and cautions attaining new context; “when new learning does not fit, opportunities for perspective transformation emerge” (Synder, 2013, p. 35).

Likewise, transformative learning encapsulates metacognitive thinking and various forms of reference to conclude importance, pertinence, and values, which could alter individuals’ perspectives (Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2013). Mezirow summarized that the epistemology of the transformative learning theory and how adults learn in the educational community entails the concept of reasoning inclusive of critical-dialectical processing and how adults tend to advocate for their beliefs. Comparatively, providing opportunities for teachers to participate in educating others while serving as a student first is advantageous for all stakeholders in the educational community (Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2013). As indicated by Synder (2013), “the candidate can begin the process of measuring their success not based on how well they teach, but rather on how well their students learn” (p. 48). In accordance to Mezirow’s (2003) transformative learning theory, adults require novel occasions for new information and experiences to transform. Thus, teachers should be allotted time to implement and practice new content and strategies in an environment equipped with mentors and knowledgeable practitioners. Research (Mezirow, 1997, 2003; Synder, 2013) denotes that, as adults acquire knowledge and new references, training and validation have to occur for transformation to have a lasting effect in the learning process. According to Mezirow (2003), “Skills, activities, sensitivities, and insights are relevant to participating in critical-dialectical discourse” (p. 60). Thus, teachers who exhibit or attain an

open mind and learn to listen empathetically to students, families, and colleagues will typically seek a common understanding of required resources and communication for the overall success of students and longevity in sustaining their careers. Lastly, Mezirow described individuals' discourse as interchange that involves assessing their principles, judgements, and value systems, which links the greater aptitude to their autonomy in promoting maturation into adulthood. Numerous methods have been suggested to motivate transformational learning, comprising narrative reflection in a journal, metaphorical analysis, one's life history, learning contracts of accomplishments, group collaboration, and literature to ignite critical reflection and rational discourse. As Mezirow (1997) stated with the implications of transformational learning among adults:

The process involves transforming frames of reference through critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it. This understanding of the nature of significant adult learning provides the educator with a rationale for selecting appropriate educational practices and actively resisting social and cultural forces that distort and delimit adult learning. (p. 11)

Related Literature

The literature reviewed for this study is inclusive of context and research studies that indicated both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors to distinguish teacher's retention, attrition, and burnout, and the experiences of those who taught in high-need schools. This related literature highlighted the career status of both novice and experienced teachers, contextual influences relative to leadership, mentor programs, and professional development which supports initial-licensed teachers. Additional research described teachers' clinical

teaching and teacher education preparatory programs to conclude if student-teaching experiences aligned with sustainability encompassing their teaching career beyond the initial three years of teaching in high-need schools located in southeastern North Carolina. Individual identities conducive to teachers and their demographics, personal life history, and aspirations of becoming a teacher were also highlighted in the related literature.

Novice and Experienced Teachers: Retention, Burnout, and Attrition

Educational researchers (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012) continuously study the purpose of teacher retention, attrition, and burnout, specifically regarding novice teachers and their motivation to leave the profession within the first three years. As indicated in the uniqueness of teacher retention, most experienced teachers sustain their careers with a mindset of serving an all-encompassing community. Bernhardt (2012) noted that “. . . . teaching is about instilling an ethic of love, compassion, virtue, courage, joy, and humility” (p. 5). According to research (Bernhardt, 2012; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010), when experienced teachers are asked why they retain their careers, the overall response was the love for students, specific student populations, total-school community support, and established relationships. Likewise, retention among experienced teachers is often indicated by well-established expectations and procedures, coping strategies, and acquiring professional autonomy (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010; Levine, 2013). Advocacy, administrative-faculty relationships, and mentorship for novice teachers remains paramount for retaining experienced teachers in the public school system (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010; Levine, 2013; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Synder, 2012).

One of the continuing factors in teacher attrition in the United States is burnout, and it is estimated that approximately 25% of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching will leave the teaching profession, increasing attrition within the first three years of teaching (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014). Comparatively, burnout is recognized in most all countries and is often linked with all stages of novice teachers' careers, which directly impacts the decision to willingly sustain their careers. The emotional fatigue and instability of teachers can create less personal accomplishment and depersonalization encompassing all stakeholders in the educational community, resulting in the statistical high volume of teacher attrition (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Interestingly, researchers (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010) have discovered three dimensions of burnout and classroom management self-efficacy which are recognized as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lowered personal accomplishment, signifying the correlation between a teacher's classroom management self-efficacy and career burnout dimensions.

According to Aloe, Amo, and Shanahan (2014), when a teacher's classroom management and self-efficacy decreases, both depersonalization and emotional exhaustion increase because a negative relationship occurs when teachers experience non-connectedness and emotional fatigue. Teachers who experience a lowered self-efficacy in their careers may inwardly retreat which shrinks their mindset of achievement and enlarges their interchange of engagement. Consequently, these maladjusted responses could lead to teacher attrition and a reciprocal outcome in sustaining teachers. Equally, researchers (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013) postulated that teachers often feel unprepared with classroom management and documented significantly higher results of unpreparedness and planning with young, unmarried teachers, especially those who taught in high-need urban area

schools. Likewise, Smeaton and Waters (2013) indicated that when cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and constructivism are implemented in the classroom, a higher percentage of teachers are sustained. However, they explained that teachers' intensity increased with weekend planning, personal interruptions, instructional meetings, and curriculum preparedness, the direct negative correlation of conflicts in the teaching profession when compared to other human service fields.

An additional concern for increasing burnout with novice teachers is interchanges with paraprofessionals and supervisory responsibilities in the classroom (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). During the time teachers are students in a teacher education program, few educational courses explain direct expectations of supervising paraprofessionals in the educational community (Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Often teachers learn paraprofessional responsibilities as they continue their careers (direct on-the-job training), which indicated the majority of conflicts occur when the assigned teacher is younger and is directed to supervise someone older than themselves. Likewise, teachers experience conflict with paraprofessionals if they are deemed as a lateral-entry teacher, pursuant of an alternative license, rather than following the traditional educational track in the teacher education course of study (Holt, 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). These conflicts often occur because paraprofessionals have not received the same educational courses and experiences as a teacher who has completed the traditional educational track (Holt, 2011). Interestingly in North Carolina, a large volume of non-traditional teachers are pursuing teaching careers via an alternative licensure track, also identified as second-career teachers and lateral-entry candidates (Henry, Thompson, Fortner, Zulli, & Kershaw, 2010; Holt, 2011). In North Carolina, lateral-entry is identified as an "alternate route to teaching for qualified individuals outside of the public education system"

(www.publicschools.org/licensure/lateral/). As indicated in a study conducted in North Carolina (Henry, Thompson, Fortner, Zulli, & Kershaw, 2010), students who received their education from a non-certified or out-of-field teacher were negatively impacted as compared to those who were being taught by an experienced or certified teacher. Thus, the significance of teachers who are certified to teach in their concentrated area and are considered experienced teachers have the greatest impact with overall student achievement.

Further, teachers experience burnout when instructional methods, resources, and standardized testing mandates are required with limited professional training. Support for behavioral intervention and classroom management strategies pose the greatest teacher burnout, indicating teachers require intense professional development in these areas prior to accepting a teaching position and during their initial teaching careers (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Gimbert and Fultz (2010) and Smeaton and Waters (2013) described additional indicators of burnout among novice teachers in the first three years of teaching as a lack of materials, limited time for planning specifically for elementary-level teachers, teaching for high-stakes testing, administrative support for students with behavioral difficulties, and non-compliant students. Preparing teachers to interpret data and standardized test results is also crucial in minimizing burnout and attrition. Research indicated that teachers are overwhelmed with required meetings, planning, scheduling, colleague support for the assigned grade-level content, and lack of administrative leadership, which often results in burnout and conflict (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Vaughn & Saul, 2013). However, teachers who teach in schools where they are valued and protected in their novice years by administrative staff and colleague support, report a higher volume of teacher retention. Comparatively, environments

that provide educational staff with an understanding of the various obstacles that teachers experience and the overall effect for sustaining them account for lower teacher turnover.

In teacher education preparatory programs and within the school districts, educational leaders must ensure there is no disconnection with field experiences in student-teaching courses and real-world school districts in order to acquire sustainable opportunities for novice teachers. Thus, school districts that incorporate and advocate teacher effectiveness and connectedness genuinely experience a higher rate of teacher retention. Research has been conducted (Shernoff, Mariñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011) with a program that implemented a three-year study entitled, *Teachers Supporting Teachers in Urban Schools*, funded by the Institute of Education Services, with the goal to develop, adapt, and test the feasibility and the overall influence the service model created for novice teachers in sustaining their careers.

Likewise, the purpose of the model was to improve classroom management, motivational learning, and establish cohesive colleague support, which develops trustworthiness in the educational community. Consequently, the researchers shared the results of the service model, noting completion rates for fidelity checks with 92% group seminars, 88% PLCs (Professional Learning Communities), and 59% coaching responses. Likewise, Shernoff et al. (2011) indicated that “More than 90% of group seminar checklists reflected that early career teachers experienced didactic instruction, handouts, discussion, problem-solving, modeling, and performance feedback as more helpful relative to videos (58%), active learning (75%), and practice using strategy (64%)” (p. 477). During the study, teachers emphasized the importance of training materials that highlighted urban school areas and extended opportunities for adaptation to students who attend high-need urban schools.

Sustaining Teachers in High-Need Educational Communities

A continual disturbing turnover among public school teachers occurs each year with approximately “. . . 23% of public school teachers leaving within their first five years of teaching – 14% migrating to other schools and 9% leaving the profession altogether” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 465). Often schools categorized with a high-need, Title I status experience difficulties hiring certified teachers. As indicated in a study (Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010) highlighting the teacher staffing conflicts in high-need schools, inclusive of National Board Certified (NBCT) and non-board certified teachers’ perspectives, the researchers concluded their findings by representing the participants in two phases. Phase one included six open-ended questions regarding the participants’ demographics, and phase two detailed an online survey which primarily highlighted numerous open-ended questions relative to the additional research questions. The additional research questions in Dagenhart, Petty, and O’Connor’s (2010) study were as follows:

- (1) What characteristics help make a teacher and an administrator successful in a high-need school?
- (2) In what ways can teacher education programs begin preparing pre-service teacher candidates to work in high-need schools?
- (3) What strategies can be implemented to attract and retain teachers in high-need schools?
- and (4) In what ways do teachers, currently in high-need schools, [*sic*] say that student achievement can be improved? (p. 9)

As a result of the study, the researchers concluded that the Nationally Board Certified Teachers desired administrative staff who recognized their educational expertise and were not intimidated by their credentials but celebrated their accomplishments. Likewise, the research findings indicated that additional parent collaboration was needed in high-need schools and that

NBCTs who lived in the community would more likely stay in a high-need school rather than relocate. However, the NBCTs indicated that, to be successful teachers in a high-need school and increase student achievement, a teacher needs to attain and incorporate rigorous content knowledge, incorporate research-based instruction, and utilize multiple assessments. The NBCTs acknowledged that administrators need to serve as curriculum partners who are effective and visionary and that teacher preparation programs need to require teacher interns opportunities to teach high-need students during their internships. Orange (2014) indicated that “failing schools tend to have higher rates of teacher turnover and often employ larger numbers of teachers working with emergency certification higher rates of turnover are reported for administrators in failing schools as well” (p. 1). According to the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (2001), “. . . the recruitment of teachers in hard-to-staff schools in one southeastern state and the nation revealed 26% of students in high-poverty, secondary schools were taught by teachers without proper credentials” (Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010, p. 7).

Frequently, teachers experience a sense of helplessness when trying to acclimate within a high-need school. According to Shernoff et al. (2011), “feeling ineffective in the classroom is exacerbated by the alienation and isolation that often characterizes teaching” (p. 467). Studies (Claeys, 2011; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Okojie, 2011; Phuntsog, 1999; Shernoff, Maríñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013) have shown the constellation of community and connectedness are positive indicators of sustaining teachers beyond the first five years in the classroom. Acquiring an understanding of the student populace in urban schools also increases teacher retention. In a study conducted by Meister and Ahrens (2011), four veteran teachers were asked about their continual enthusiasm for teaching; they each shared that dedication to students and their career

along with self-initiated support systems, resiliency characteristics, and their resistance to plateauing distinguished longevity in their careers. Ongoing interactive leadership within the educational community offered continual dedication and willingness to persevere in conflicts among the four teachers. Thus, the positive, reflective opportunities with building leaders, students, and educational colleagues influenced all four participants to retain their educational resilience when negative plateauing emerged.

Comparatively, Orange (2014) conducted a case study involving 13 educators who shared their stories of frustration and reasons for leaving the educational profession. Orange's study also involved the local school system which connected local policy makers and their decisions by reviewing documents, interviews, and observations from a rural elementary school located in Virginia. The elementary school was identified as a school in program improvement because it had not made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for four consecutive years. The researcher concluded her findings by representing the participants and their responses relative to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate and the required testing. As a result of the pressures and expectations placed on the teachers to increase student test scores, some of the educational staff resigned, transferred, or requested to teach in a different grade level.

Likewise, in the state of Virginia, educational staff utilize Standards of Learning (SOL) data, benchmark results, and test scores as predictors of overall student performance. Therefore, the continual stress was overwhelming in the school community, which concluded with three of the participants observed by the researcher resigning prior to the end of the study. Additionally, the researcher detailed reasons why teacher turnover was prevalent at this particular elementary school in Virginia: (a) increased stress to improve test scores; (b) increased meetings after school; (c) an increase in workload and time at school; (d) additional paperwork; (e) an increase

in professional development; (f) parent nights after school; (g) less time to plan, grade, and tutor; and (h) pressure to teach to the test.

In a study conducted by Cooper and He (2011), five participants were asked their greatest conflicts while serving as interns and novice teachers. They indicated that during their internships, each participant interacted with diverse students in various high schools and taught lessons at varied grade levels where three themes emerged: (a) student teacher concerns and challenges, (b) first-year teacher joys and challenges, and (c) strategies used to face challenges. As a result, the participants noted three concerns prior to teaching: (a) classroom management, (b) student motivation, and (c) parent involvement. After their first year of teaching, the participants indicated their experiences with classroom management improved, whereas parent involvement and standardized testing mandates continued to remain primary concerns and stressors. Additionally, minimal leadership support, lack of resources, and imbalance with professional and personal responsibilities developed. Consequently, the participants and the researchers expressed that interacting with diverse students prior to teaching was advantageous for all involved in the study. Likewise, the teacher interns signified the importance for teacher educators to interact and attend the classrooms with student interns. As a result of the study, the teacher participants stated, “. . . after their first year of teaching, they used various strategies to motivate students in content areas, and viewed building relationships with students and making content relevant for their students to be their strengths” (pp. 110-111). However, the statistics are staggering when retaining teachers, according to a report by The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Developments (2005), “On average 25% of primary teachers and 30% of secondary teachers are over the age of 50 years old . . . in some countries, the average jumps to 40% . . . in addition, many countries cannot retain a core of experienced teachers” (p. 770).

The majority of minority students are considered African-American and Hispanic within the public school system (Phuntsog, 1999). Therefore, the continual challenge for educators is to provide an appropriate education for all students, encompassing prior knowledge of ethnic background, cultural interchanges, and societal expectations. According to a study (Anderson & Stillman, 2011) designed to determine the “processes, activities, and events that characterized the participants’ placements” while teaching in urban, high-need schools, the researchers found that individuals who manage novice teachers and teacher induction programs need to consider how they are supported and recognized across disciplines (p. 448). From their grounded theory design, the researchers signified the importance for high-quality bilingual programs for teachers who teach in culturally diverse schools. Likewise, the researchers noted the significance of searching further into individual placements and viewing the options of growing across educational placements. As articulated by Anderson and Stillman (2011), “. . . merely placing them in such contexts does not guarantee opportunity-rich experiences nor intended learning” (p. 459). Equally, the researchers emphasized the importance of all stakeholders investing in student-teaching programs with equity-minded protocols preparing teachers who may possibly teach in high-need school districts. Phuntsog (1999) emphasized the need of a mind shift for teachers entering the educational community, denoting “the need to identify effective ways to alter attitudes of teachers so that they are willing to reflect upon and change as appropriate their long-held views” (p. 109) of their own mode of learning, various cultures, and the teaching profession. Often a teacher’s perception of the classroom and school culture is not the reality of the students or their livelihood unless the teacher was reared in the community and/or had clinical teaching experiences in the educational community where they were assigned in their initial teaching careers (Shernoff et al., 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Teachers and students

are to align their educational goals and relationships to ensue “good teaching is about evoking students’ curiosity to learn” (Okojie, 2011, p. 17). A growth-minded teacher who ignites the flame for learning within the educational community, promotes learners’ interest and motivation to acquire knowledge, which creates an atmosphere for academia to transpire.

Claeys’ (2011) study discovered that teachers who teach in schools with primarily culturally and linguistically diverse students remain teaching because of “social justice, moral obligation, and a desire to serve the community” (p. 145), signifying the reasons they chose and remained in the designated school districts. Equally explored is a program initiated in an urban school district where “the Teachers Supporting Teachers in Urban Schools (TST) model marshals resources through an influential mentor and external coach with the goal of enhancing new teachers’ effectiveness and connectedness to colleagues” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 479). The expectancy of the Teachers Supporting Teachers model being implemented in high-need schools is advantageous with the goal of enhancing professional learning communities, cohesiveness among colleagues, effective classroom management strategies, and addressing the specific needs of teachers, which is essential in sustaining teachers with resources and connections. Likewise, instructional coaching serves well for novice teachers offering reliable resources and avenues for support in the educational community. By utilizing the TST model in a school identified as high-need, “feeling ineffective in the classroom is exacerbated by the alienation and isolation that often characterizes teaching” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 467). Teachers who teach culturally and linguistically diverse students with consistent administrative support and colleague mentors serve as a positive influence for teacher retention. Comparatively, Claeys specified that teachers are driven by intrinsic and altruistic motives, which denotes the motivation to persevere in their career and life choices.

Bridges (2012) conducted research to determine the specific needs of new teachers in the western region of North Carolina. Bridges found that the perception of novice teachers in their first three years of teaching in a particular school district located in North Carolina historically achieved higher rates than the state average with a 75% turnover rate via the 2011 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) report. Likewise, from the survey she incorporated in her study, indications were noted that administrative support and the school environment were the most significant factors with novice teachers' job satisfaction. A collegial environment among staff and a student-focused atmosphere received the greatest response from the survey. Interestingly, the most frustrating experience for the novice teachers interviewed were identified as veteran teachers who did not value their expertise and when they did not feel welcomed in the school.

Lastly, Bridges (2012) reported that the survey she incorporated encompassing teachers (i.e., 56 beginning teachers in their first year, 50 teachers in their second year, 16 teachers in their third year, and 9 lateral entry teachers in their first year, 11 lateral-entry teachers beginning the second year, and no lateral-entry teachers indicated in their third year of teaching) indicated that administrative support and the school environment were the most significant factors related to job satisfaction. Likewise, a collegial environment among staff and a student-focused atmosphere received the greatest response from the survey. Relative to the research questions, Bridges asked the novice teachers about specific methods of support they felt were most important. The teachers identified overall with teacher mentors, colleagues in the school, and administrative support. Equally important, new teachers identified the necessity of having mentor teachers who serve in the same grade level as advantageous. When the teachers were asked about their frustrations, they unanimously shared the overwhelming reactions as student

misbehaviors, workload, resource availability for academia, and effective administrative support (p. 90). However, the most frustrating experience for the novice teachers interviewed was veteran teachers who did not value their expertise or make them feel welcomed in the school. Lastly, the teachers' responses relative to Bridges' last research question indicated that both school-based and district-based induction programs for novice teachers positively impacted their current job satisfaction.

Teachers' Career Status: Traditional and Second-Career Track

Novice teachers are identified as those with five or fewer years of teaching experience and any teacher in their first three years of teaching service (Bridges, 2012; Claeys, 2011). Likewise, novice teachers are defined as traditionally certified teachers when attending a traditional two-to-four year teacher education university program prior to entering the teaching profession. Novice teachers are known as educational professionals who transition from the teacher training stage (pre-service, student internship) to the specific in-service position. While establishing professional development during the transitional years, teachers are expected to exhibit the skills of a professional teacher and learn best practices to teach (Bridges, 2012; Claeys, 2011; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014). The terms beginning teacher, novice teacher, and initially licensed teacher are identified interchangeably according to the North Carolina state education board (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/>) and all receive mentoring support during the first three years of teaching. Teacher induction programs are designed with the ultimate goal to retain teachers and prepare them with ongoing instructional strategies, professional development, and both formative and summative evaluative approaches for career success.

According to an analysis conducted by Henry, Thompson, Fortner, Zulli, and Kershaw (2010) in North Carolina via the UNC GA (University of North Carolina General

Administration) systems, “the effects are negative at the high school and elementary school levels” for first and second year teachers, relative to the NC Standard Course of Study results in reading and language arts (p. 9). Likewise, at the elementary level in the mathematics content area, it is estimated that a student loses approximately 17 days of schooling when taught by a novice teacher compared to the equivalence of 39 days in the middle school level (Henry, Thompson, Fortner, Zulli, & Kershaw, 2010). Therefore, the negative effect of novice teachers in the middle school level is estimated as a “loss of 20% of instructional time during that year” (Henry, Thompson, Fortner, Zulli, & Kershaw, 2010, p. 9).

Additionally, an alarming disadvantage prevalent in the North Carolina public school system in all three grade levels are teachers who teach in non-certified areas which generates negative outcomes for student achievement and teacher retention (Henry, Thompson, Fortner, Zulli, & Kershaw, 2010). It is estimated that approximately 18 days of academic achievements are lost due to non-certified teachers teaching in content areas in which they are not licensed. Research (Henry, Thompson, Bastian, Fortner, Kershaw, Purtell, & Zulli, 2011) in North Carolina also finds that “14% of the public school teachers in 2007-08 first entered the classroom as lateral entry or alternatively licensed teachers, without the coursework or practice teaching required for certification” (p. 1). In most states, it is determined that teachers who are pursuing an alternative licensure in public education are classified differently once their years of experience transforms beyond the first three to four years of teaching. When teachers complete the required courses and pass the required content and instructional strategies evaluations, they are deemed as completely certified teachers (Henry, Thompson, Bastian, Fortner, Kershaw, Purtell, & Zulli, 2011).

The findings from Henry et al. (2011) determined that three of the 11 comparisons in their study involving lateral entry teachers performed less than teachers who were identified as in-state undergraduate teachers in the public school system, which represented primarily high school math and social studies. Subsequently, these results elevated a great disadvantage for students because lateral entry teachers are the majority instructional personnel in North Carolina public high schools. As a result of their findings, Henry et al. (2011) found that approximately 32% of out-of-state teachers who teach standardized-testing content areas are teaching in North Carolina elementary schools, 15% of lateral entry teachers, and approximately 0.3% of Teach for America (TFA) teachers comprise the North Carolina workforce. Relative to the findings, TFA teachers strongly performed higher than the in-state undergraduates in the public school systems. Teach for America teachers are selected across the nation from elite universities in a competitive manner and are required to attend a sophisticated academic institute in the summer offering a two-year commitment to teaching and intense professional development. Because of the increase in teacher shortages in North Carolina, hiring TFA teachers has significantly increased in the public school systems (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Henry, Thompson, Bastian, Fortner, Kershaw, Purtell, & Zulli, 2011).

Heineke et al. (2014) defined the TFA classifications of teachers into the three categories (e.g., leavers, lingerers, lasters). The leavers are identified as those who had plans to leave the classroom after the two-year requirement, the lingerers are described as those teachers who had plans for an additional third year, and the lasters are categorized as those who were committed to teach beyond the two years (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). From their study exploring TFA corps members and their decisions to remain in the assigned classrooms, Heineke et al. (2014) indicated that approximately 65% of the leavers returned to continue their

education, 64% of the lingerers elected to stay in the respected classroom beyond the designated two years, and 73% of the lasters chose to persist in their initial school placement. As noted by Heineke et al (2014), “. . . we must recognize the challenges posed to those who enter the classroom through both traditional and alternative paths and jointly tackle this critical issue that negatively impacts our educational system” (p. 778).

Contextual Influences

Phuntsog (1999) states that “Today’s foremost challenge in education is to create learning environments that maintain the cultural integrity of every child while enhancing their educational success” (p. 99). Teacher preparation programs situated in universities are to transform their criteria for teacher education to a multicultural approach to meet the diverse needs of all learners within the educational community. In recognition of mentor programs in the public school system, a collaborative effort has to be shared among all stakeholders. Therefore, teachers are to share positive interchanges among colleagues, incorporate a reflective mindset, and individual personal perspectives of educational development and practices. As a result of these reflective practices, “Structured dialogue is clearly a promising practice for nurturing growth in the professional practice of urban educators” (Hollins, 2006, p. 52). In order to support and sustain teachers, continual dialogue and professional learning communities are a requirement, specifically in high-need schools, where teachers transform their schools’ vision, principles, and educational expectations (Hollins, 2006).

Bridges (2012) specifies administrative support and the school environment were the most significant factors with teachers’ job satisfaction. Likewise, a collegial environment among staff and a student-focused atmosphere have received the greatest response in his research with teachers. Moreover, Bridges discovered the most important methods of retaining novice teachers

are teacher mentors, teacher colleagues, and administrative support. Equally important in sustaining novice teachers in high-need environments are having mentor teachers who serve in the same grade level, accessible resources, and professional development (Bridges, 2012; Claeys, 2011). Novice teachers who are assigned an instructional coach often benefit from personable and professional relationships with no direct connection to the school system. Instructional coaches offer ongoing co-teaching opportunities, instructional strategies and resources, planning, and teacher credential licensure support when applicable. As noted by Shernoff et al. (2011), “mentors and coaches also helped promote new teachers’ effectiveness around the predictors of attrition through vicarious and enactive learning opportunities” (p. 469). Instructional coaches offer behavioral support strategies, classroom management interventions, and curriculum alignment for the ultimate goal of student achievement.

Individual Identities

Teachers acknowledge their personal and professional identifications and relationships as existing synergistically interchangeable. Thus, recognizing that their lives play an enormous role in their desire to continue teaching in rural communities due to the fact that their advocacy for belonging in the community and being reared in rural areas has a direct impact in sustaining their careers. Teacher education programs need to acknowledge the importance of synergy conducive to novice teachers who teach in rural communities and offer more opportunities for identities and building relationships (Burton & Johnson, 2010).

The teacher’s professional experience is often identified as a three-stage approach to acclimation in the educational community: teacher-centered, instruction-centered, and learner-centered. Thus, various reasons why teachers leave the profession early in their careers relate specifically to social isolation from others, low salary wages, struggles with progression,

standardized testing, classroom management difficulties, stakeholder apathy, difficult parents, lack of collegiality, homesick from individuals' upbringing, and minimal leadership support (Bridges, 2012; Claeys, 2011). Often teacher education programs and real-life daily responsibilities are not aligned with expectations in school systems. The continual attrition of teachers who teach in low income, high-need schools and then leave within the first three years of teaching to seek more affluent school districts remains an ever-growing concern in the educational community. However, teacher induction programs, mentoring programs, and social networks are advantageous for sustaining novice teachers (Bridges, 2012; Claeys, 2011; Levine, 2013; Synder, 2012). "Building leaders who recognized these teachers' abilities and strengths and provided autonomy and support were the ones who enhanced the teachers' enthusiasm and inspired them to grow as professionals" (Meister & Ahrens, 2011, p. 774). Therefore, it is imperative that administrative staff create an atmosphere where clear expectations and boundaries are established and the role of teachers is respected and valued within their educational environment. As indicated by research and the voices of the veteran teachers, establishing resilience and non-conformance empowers educators to not adapt to status quo, but remain focused on the purpose for teaching, which is the student's achievement (Meister & Ahrens, 2011).

Summary

The current literature posits that there are several modes of knowing and learning attributed to the reasons why teachers leave the educational profession within the first three years of teaching (Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013). Minimal content exists to indicate the specific factors of sustaining teachers beyond the first three years of teaching, specifically in high-need, low-

performing public schools located in the southeastern region of North Carolina (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Equally, the existing literature highlights the significance of how adults learn novel content, their maturity of self-directedness, the importance of affording adults the opportunities for planning and input in societal context, and identification of reaching adulthood and their critical reflection (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; McGrath, 2009). The literature describes how individuals transform as adults through life's experiences encompassing the various phases of acquisition.

Subsequently, through transformation, adult maturation, networks of support, teacher induction preparation in high-need schools, and leadership support, sustaining both novice teachers and experienced teachers beyond the initial three years warrants opportunities for less teacher attrition, burnout, and more longevity with teacher retention and sustainability. Thus, the gap in the educational literature indicated further studies were needed to equip the academic community with sustaining teachers beyond the first three years. Sustaining teachers can be attributed to student achievement, teacher longevity, and less budget needs across the nation in the public school system. This chapter has provided an overview of the research and the gap that has been identified in the literature by describing the theoretical framework and synthesizing related literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe factors that sustained public school teachers in high-need, low-performing areas in a school district situated in southeastern North Carolina. For the purpose of this study, teachers who had sustained their careers in the field were identified as those who had been teaching beyond the initial three years of their profession in a high-need public school. The literature indicated a gap in research with an understanding of the factors that sustained teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching in high-need schools.

In this chapter, the methods for the study are described, encompassing the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, and the importance of the researcher's role in the study. Furthermore, the data collection process is described, which includes a questionnaire to determine participants' eligibility in meeting criteria to participate, semi-structured participant interviews, collective photo-narrative documentation from the participants, and a virtual focus group discussion. To increase the reliability of the study, data analysis is described, which includes open coding, axial coding, and memoing (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach was implemented in the study encompassing epoche/bracketing, horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions. Additionally in this chapter, trustworthiness is described including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which focused on the consistency of the research findings, the value of the data, and the assurance that communication was upheld in a qualitative method rather than as researcher bias. In this chapter, ethical considerations are identified pertinent to

the study, including IRB approval, obtaining site and participant access and permission, obtaining informed consent from the participants, and assuring the participants of the voluntary nature of the study along with their right to withdraw at any time during the study. Likewise, an explanation of how data was secured and assured confidentiality among participants is included in this chapter.

Design

A qualitative study was conducted utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach for inquiry. The transcendental phenomenological research design was implemented to acquire the descriptions and real-life experiences of teachers, beyond the initial three years of teaching who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools. Moustakas (1994) indicated that transcendental phenomenological research describes the participants' experiences. Moreover, Moustakas' (1994), Creswell's (2013), and Patton's (2007) texts support the idea that the transcendental phenomenological approach affords the opportunity to explore intensely the teachers' responses and create a thick, rich, deep connection to the phenomenon. As a result of utilizing the transcendental phenomenological approach, the interpretation of the participants' lived experiences via the historical and societal context of their accounts and the researcher's educational experiences helped to understand the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990; 2014).

As indicated by the gap in the literature, which was an understanding of the factors that sustained teachers in high-need areas, this study's focus, which was on exploring a single phenomenon (teacher sustainability) in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina, the phenomenological research design was determined to be appropriate (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental phenomenological approach was a valid

design because acquiring the descriptions and real-life experiences of the public school teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching via interviews, collective documentation, an online focus group, and bracketing incorporated a collaborative mindset. Bracketing was essential in conducting this phenomenological research because it aided the researcher in setting aside preconceived thoughts and biases which could have interfered with the study. As Moustakas (1994) indicated, bracketing is considered a “purified consciousness” which allows the researcher to experience openness, novice context, people, and events as though occurring for the first time (p. 85).

Incorporating a transcendental phenomenological approach aligned with this study, which substantiates the purpose of understanding the essence of sustaining teachers in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina. Utilizing a phenomenological approach also permitted the current study to extensively explore numerous teachers who shared the same lived experience of sustained teaching careers in high-need, low-performing public schools. Lastly, a qualitative phenomenological design permitted the present exploration to attain the pulse of the teachers’ motivational factors in sustaining their teaching careers.

The theoretical framework guiding this particular study was Knowles’ andragogical adult learning theory (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; McGrath, 2009), Mezirow’s transformative theory (Mezirow, 2003), and Dweck’s mindset and motivation theory (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). According to Dweck (2006), “Great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning” (p. 193). As articulated by Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005), “Evidence is beginning to accumulate, too, that what adults learn on their own initiative, they learn more deeply and permanently than what they learn by being taught” (p. 265). Lastly, Mezirow (2003)

distinguished an individual's transformation with life experiences: "Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (p. 58).

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina?

RQ 2: How do public school teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact in retaining their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

RQ3: What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors do public school teachers describe as encouraging them to sustain their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

Setting

The setting for this study was four large K-12 rural public schools within one public school district located in the southeastern region of North Carolina. The schools were comprised of two elementary (K-5) schools, one middle (6-8) school, and one high (9-12) school. The student populace consisted of 61% minority enrollment, primarily African American; 4% Caucasian; and 2% Hispanic, with 100% free lunch status overall among the schools. Two percent of the students were identified as English Language Learners and 15% were identified with disabilities—receiving special education services, with an overall 65% graduation rate (www.publicschoolreview.com). The poverty rate in the school district's county was 24.9%, compared to 16.8% for the entire state of North Carolina ([www.http://quickfacts.census.gov](http://quickfacts.census.gov)).

Additionally, the school district's teacher attrition rate was 12.91% compared to the 14.84% overall rate in North Carolina (www.publicschools.org).

The semi-structured interviews and collective documentation (i.e., teacher-generated photographs with brief reflective descriptions) occurred in the teachers' designated classrooms within the schools and teacher-selected settings, which created a comfortable environment for the participants. The collective documentation allowed the researcher to observe the classroom community and other settings where the participants indicated "the teacher they had become" (Synder, 2013, p. 38), which connected the participant and the researcher. The participants were identified as public school teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing schools located in the particular southeastern school district in North Carolina and who had sustained their careers beyond the first three years. Consequently, the schools were purposefully selected by the researcher because of teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing schools in southeastern North Carolina beyond the first three years of teaching.

Participants

The participants utilized in this study were designated utilizing purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling occurs in qualitative research with three considerations: (1) selection of the participants and or sites for the research study, (2) the type of sampling strategy, and (3) the sample size being studied. Therefore, a convenience sampling was utilized which "saves time, money, effort, but at the expense of information and credibility" (Creswell, 2013, p. 158). The participants were 13 teachers who had successfully continued their careers beyond the initial three years and remained in the designated high-need educational community located in southeastern North Carolina. The participant interviews were conducted until data saturation was attained (Creswell, 2013; Given, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas

described data saturation as the juncture where the researcher has reached capacity attaining new information and context from the participants. The participants were mindfully chosen by the specific considerations utilizing maximum variation to guarantee the sample was varied and represented a wide range of public school teachers who taught in southeastern North Carolina. The teachers experienced the phenomenon relative to the motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers in high-need, low-performing public schools beyond the initial three years of teaching via a questionnaire (Appendix A). The questionnaire identified teachers who met the criteria of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in southeastern North Carolina, indicating their longevity beyond the initial three years of teaching. Participants were selected by communication with the Beginning Teacher (BT) Coordinator in the school district, who served as the lead mentor for new teachers and experienced teachers. Also, the assigned principals at each school site approved the selected participants.

The research study and participant criteria were identified and explained to the Beginning Teacher Coordinator and the school district superintendent. The district superintendent reviewed the participant criteria and also the teacher list provided by the Beginning Teacher Coordinator. Upon review, the superintendent afforded permission for the research to be conducted in the schools deemed as high-need, low-performing according to North Carolina state report cards and student achievement data. An e-mail and a participatory consent form were sent to school principals who served as administrators in high-need, low-performing schools in the district, requesting permission to interview teachers. Appointments were scheduled with the principals who approved their teachers to participate. During the initial meetings with principals, consent forms were viewed and the list of teachers provided by the Beginning Teacher Coordinator was

discussed with confirmation of designated teachers. Afterward, the researcher met with the possible participants to describe the study and to ask for their participation (Appendix B).

The participants were identified as experienced teachers according to the NC Public School System via NC Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI) and their years of service in a high-need, low-performing public school. The participants represented both males and females, various ethnicities, and ages ranging from 31 to 62 years of age. Additionally, the study included a convenience sample of 13 teachers with the criterion of high-need, low-performing public schools located in one school district in southeastern North Carolina. Likewise, successful teaching completion beyond the first three years of teaching, consistent teacher assignment in a high-need school, and motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers was also a part of the criteria in the study.

Procedures

In recognition of the specific protocol and procedures, the researcher submitted the proposal for research and secured the approval of Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix C) and the approval and consent of the North Carolina school district (Appendix D). After approval was obtained, the researcher conducted a purposeful sampling to elicit participants for the qualitative research study incorporating a participant consent form (Appendix B). After the participants were designated and agreed to participate, the researcher initiated the data collection via individual interviews, collective documentation of photographs with brief reflective narratives, and an online focus group. The semi-structured interview data was obtained and recorded via audio-taped recordings and transcribed by a professional transcriber. The researcher reduced personal and professional biases in the data collection and analysis procedures by adhering to reflexivity and bracketing the researcher's perspectives

beyond the shared data. Reflexivity and bracketing were obtained, which allowed me to be free of bias and preconceived thoughts (Appendix E). Likewise, the researcher remained open and ingenuous during the interviews, listening to participants share the phenomenon being explored. In adherence to bracketing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994) during the study, a reflective journal where specific notes and personal perspectives relative to the phenomena that were being studied were documented (Appendix E). The researcher requested member checks from the participants to view and share for accuracy of the thematic analysis, interview results, and discovered phenomenon (Appendix F).

The Researcher's Role

As the researcher in this study, I was motivated to describe the voices of teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina. After reviewing the literature, I discovered a gap with minimal research relative to teachers who utilize various motivational factors in sustaining their careers in the high-need educational community. I served as an instructional coach within a large university and traveled to various school districts deemed as high-need schools located in the southeastern region of North Carolina, supporting and advocating for teachers to sustain their professional careers beyond the first three years of teaching. I continually advocate and possess a passion for teachers and work diligently to provide resources, dialogue, and professional development to enable teachers to be successful and sustain their educational careers, especially within high-need educational environments. As Bullough and Hall-Kenyon, (2012) posit, “. . . efforts designed to improve the quality of schooling that ignore teacher well-being and the values that bring teachers to teaching and keep them engaged in their work are certain to fail” (p. 8).

I have served as an educator in the public school system for 25 years and, prior to my current educational position, always worked in high achieving school districts. Therefore, the experience I have acquired as a result of the motivating factors of teachers sustaining their teaching career in a high-need public educational community has transformed my fixed mindset to a growth mindset with an intrinsic passion to promote and expound their exceptionalism by implementing research-based best practices. Consequently, my ultimate aspiration for this study was for the teachers' voices to be heard and to signify their preservation to sustain their careers in a high-need, low-performing environment. However, prior to the study, I had no direct communication with the teachers purposefully selected for this study, which helped to reduce bias of the coach-teacher interchange and personal acquaintances during the study.

Data Collection

During the present study, data were collected via various methods. According to researchers (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2007), individuals conducting a qualitative study corroborate evidence from different sources, which allows them to expand a perspective or theme, then code the context via triangulating content and validating findings. In other words, in qualitative research, it is a "means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 298) and observing from various perspectives during the study. Therefore, this study utilized data triangulation by incorporating interviews, collective photo-narrative documentation, and a focus group discussion. First, individual interviews were incorporated with the selected participants. Second, collective documentation was implemented by requesting photos being taken or previously attained photos from the participants via a smart device (e.g., cellular phone, laptop computer, or iPad) for participant-generated photography, encouraging them to take photos of themselves teaching in their designated classrooms and other settings that

relate to their sustainability in their teaching careers. Participants were also asked for brief reflections of what occurred in the photos, to acquire a personal connection with their lived experiences. Third, an online focus group was implemented via WebEx to obtain a more thorough understanding of the participants' experiences after saturation had occurred during data analysis.

Questionnaire

A simple questionnaire (Appendix A) was implemented to determine years of experience, demographic context, teaching licensure completion, and school assignment to affirm the participants met the criteria in the study. Dissertation committee members and teachers who taught in high-need educational communities viewed the questions to ensure content validity (Creswell, 2013).

Interviews

Transcendental phenomenological studies often incorporate “an interactional encounter” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 163) with the researcher and the participant in the interview process. The study included individual semi-structured interviews with 13 public school teachers until data saturation was attained (Moustakas, 1994). According to Schwandt (2007), the interaction during interviewing serves as a “means of gaining direct access to an interviewee’s experience” (p. 162). The specific interview questions were strategically designed to attain an understanding of how the participants related personal life experiences with their sustainability teaching in a high-need public school and the extrinsic motivational factors that enabled them to sustain their teaching careers beyond the initial years.

Interviews were utilized as the primary method of data collection. The interviews occurred in each participants' classroom or selected area within their assigned school settings

and was scheduled either at the end of the school day or during their planning period. The participants were asked 10 questions that were supported from the literature. To simplify the data analysis process, all questions were asked in the same format and exact order. The first question was designed to establish a rapport with the participants. Additionally, the last interview question was used to create an open forum for information that may not have been shared during the interview. Lastly, an online transcription company was utilized to transcribe the interviews. As the interviews were submitted from the transcription company, the researcher synthesized the context by highlighting the textural words and descriptions from the participants and submitted to them via e-mail for member checking and confirmation. During the study, the participants answered 10 open-ended questions relative to demographics, life history, educational aspirations, contextual influences, and motivational factors that contributed to sustaining their careers in a high-need, low-performing public school in southeastern North Carolina.

After IRB approval, the interviews were audio-recorded and annotated, noting concerns of both verbal and physical gestures which assisted in understanding the teachers' experiences (van Manen, 1990). Additionally, the synthesized transcribed context of the interviews was shared with each individual participant to addend or correct context attained during the study. In the event that further interviews and additional information were required, the participants were contacted via e-mail messages. Pseudonyms were utilized to account for participants with the data analysis and to protect and secure their identities.

The specific interview questions were created to acquire an understanding of the phenomenon relative to motivational factors that sustained teachers in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina. Thus, the interview questions relevant to this study were as follows:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina?
3. How do teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact retaining their teaching profession beyond the initial years of teaching in a high-need public school?
4. What intrinsic motivational factors contributed to you pursuing a degree in your concentrated area and grade level of education?
5. What motivational factors enabled you as a teacher beyond the initial years to sustain your educational career in a high-need educational environment?
6. What sustains your decision to serve as a teacher in a high-need, low-performing public school in a rural area of southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial years?
7. What factors, if any, positively impact your role as a teacher in a high-need public school?
8. What, if any variables, would you alter about your experience as a teacher teaching in a high-need public school in a rural area in the southeastern region of North Carolina?
9. Is there anything else related to this experience that you would like to add?
10. If I have other questions, may I contact you again?

Creswell (2013) articulated the importance of the interview process in a qualitative study, “the interview is dialogue that is conducted one-way, provides information for the researcher . . . and leads to the researcher’s interpretations” (p. 173).

The interview and focus group questions were created from the literature review. The interview and focus group questions were developed in light of both andragogical adult learning theory and transformative learning, which focus on how adults learn and transform throughout

adulthood (Holton, Knowles, & Swanson, 2005; Knowles, 1975; Mezirow, 1997, 2003). Also, mindset theory guided the interview and focus group questions, recognizing that mindset can be positively transformed, directly enabling resilience, sustainability, and pliability when confronting adversity (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Ten questions were asked of the participants, which served as an accurate account to foster an understanding of how participants perceived their sustainability in their teaching careers and the motivational factors that influenced their decision to remain in a high-need educational school.

Interview questions one, two, three, and four were directed to acquire background knowledge of the participants, their former life history (e.g., family, community, and aspirations) as having an impact in retaining their career in a high-need public school, their experience working in a high-need public school, and factors that contributed to their specific teaching content area. According to Burton and Johnson (2010), teachers' lives play a significant role in their desire to continue teaching in rural communities because of their advocacy for belonging in the community and being reared in rural areas. Therefore, researchers indicate that teacher education programs need to acknowledge the importance of synergy between clinical supervisors and teachers who will teach in rural communities, and offer more opportunities for identities and building relationships (Anderson & Stillman, 2011; Bridges, 2012; Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Synder, 2013; Wang & Fulton, 2012). Additionally, Mezirow (2003) identifies the concept of reasoning indicating the critical-dialectical process and how adults advocate their beliefs. Mezirow (2003) defined the adult process of learning as instrumental and communicative. Instrumental learning refers to controlling and manipulating the environment, which allows for predictions and outcomes. Communicative learning is recognized as making meaning of context and conversation (Mezirow, 2003).

Questions five and six sought to identify the motivational factors that enabled and sustained participants who taught in a high-need public school beyond the initial three years of teaching. Studies (Claeys, 2011; Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Okojie, 2011; Phuntsog, 1999; Shernoff, Mariñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013) have shown the constellation of community and connectedness are positive indicators of sustaining teachers beyond the first five years in the classroom. Grounding these particular interview questions in Mezirow's (2003) transformation learning theory illustrated the teachers' openness to novice learning, and integrative and extensive methods of knowing, which were applicable to their teaching career.

Question seven was created to understand the participants' roles as teachers in the high-need educational environment and how their position positively influenced the total school community. As indicated in a study conducted by Synder (2012), relative to teachers and their uniqueness in sustaining their careers denoted, "A thorough understanding of how adults learn is imperative to the successful education of adults" (p. 33). Interestingly, Synder aligned her research with Mezirow's (2003) transformative learning theory of how adults learn—indicating authentic learning, experiential learning, collegial relationships and support, and reflective writing and discourse. As a result, Synder (2012) incorporated photo-generated documentation as a part of her study with teachers to illustrate the "teachers they had become" and the significance of their role in the educational community (p. 40).

Questions eight, nine, and ten attempted to expand opportunity for the participants to share experiences and possible alterations while teaching in a high-need public school beyond the initial three years of teaching. According to Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012), the idea that teaching is a sense of calling has no statistical data and that the dedication of teachers to teach

and serve ethically as mothers, fathers, nurturers, and care-takers often goes unnoticed. As stated by Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012), “Efforts designed to improve the quality of schooling that ignore teacher well-being and the values that bring teachers to teaching and keep them engaged in their work are certain to fail” (p. 8).

The interview questions were grounded in Knowles (1975) andragogy learning theory, Mezirow’s (2003) transformation theory, and Dweck’s (2006) mindset theory. In their study, Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005) emphasized the importance of how adults acquire information denoting development with learning tasks encompassing attitudes, expectations, skills, management, relationships, and organizational cultures. Also, Mezirow’s (2003) theory indicates “adults’ skills, sensitivities, and insights are relevant to participating in critical-dialectical discourse—having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, and seeking common ground” (p. 60) play a significant role in the educational community and offer opportunities for change and their voice to be heard.

Dweck’s (2006) mindset theory is essentially grounded in these interview questions, denoting adults who possess a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset have the capabilities of changing over time. Dweck identified a fixed mindset as what individuals believe are their talents and or abilities that they are innately born with and cannot be changed. Growth mindset entails an individual who is considered a “work in progress” and can change over time with ongoing opportunities (p. 103). Additionally, Dweck highlights challenges, defeats, and successes of individuals in her career along with famous people in the social media (e.g., sports athletes, educators, students, parents, and philosophers) relative to their mindset and how it affects life’s choices. According to Dweck (2006), “People may start with different temperaments and different aptitudes, but it is clear that experience, training, and personal effort

take them the rest of the way” (p. 5). As stated by Dweck (2006), “The great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning” (p. 193).

Document Analysis

Collective documentation was incorporated by requesting of each participant participant-generated photographs (Appendix F). Ten of the 13 participants returned their photo-narrative reflections. The collective photo-narrative documentation was piloted with four non-participants who served as educators in various public school systems to ensure accuracy and relative feedback. Participants were asked to take no more than three photos or attach existing photos of themselves teaching in non-specific settings (e.g., home or school) where they felt the photo captured the moment and/or people who contributed to “the teacher they had become” (Synder, 2013, p. 38) and experiences that exhibited their sustainable career. The locations were specifically not designated because the researcher hoped to capture the mindfulness of the teachers in sharing their sustainable teaching careers. At the end of each interview, the researcher shared a sample of the photo-narrative documentation template with the participant for visual accuracy. Participants submitted their photo-narrative document via e-mail messages with existing and current photos or logos that captured the “teacher they had become,” which highlighted their teacher sustainability (Synder, 2013). The photo documentation served as a confirmation from the interview responses and emerging themes in the study. The participants’ photos are not included in this manuscript to maintain confidentiality. However, the participants’ narrative reflections are highlighted in the findings of the study.

The primary goal for the photo documentation was to highlight the teacher’s growth mindset by sharing a few photos of their sustained teaching career and writing a brief description

of the activity being depicted in the photo relative to the teachers they had become. Additionally, the photo-narrative documentation addressed research question two, which asked the participants, how they perceived their former life history as having an impact on retaining their profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school. The photo-narrative documentation was created to understand participants' roles as teachers in the high-need educational environment and how their position positively influences the total school community, which also addressed interview question seven. In the study conducted by Synder (2012), she emphasized teachers and their uniqueness in sustaining their careers, referencing Mezirow's (2003) transformative learning theory and how adults learn which indicated experiential acquisition and societal maturation. Synder (2012) incorporated photo-generated documentation to encourage teachers to reflect as to the teachers they had become in their careers.

As research (Synder, 2013) indicates, the photo-generated documentation lessens interruptions from the teacher's busy schedules and instructional practices. Subsequently, the participants were asked to provide a brief reflection of what was occurring in the photos and to acquire a personal connection with their lived experiences. The photographs and brief reflections were analyzed to attain physical characteristics in the designated settings that depicted the motivational factors that sustained teachers. A constant comparative inquiry of the photographs and the interview analysis was incorporated to search for themes in the educational environment.

Virtual Focus Group

An online focus group was conducted via WebEx with four of the teachers once the interviews were completed, indicating opportunities for the participants to share additional

context or correct miscommunicated information during dialogue. All of the participants were invited to attend the online focus group. However, because of the end-of-year standardized testing schedule, only four were available to participate in the group discussion. The focus group questions were piloted by a non-participant who taught in a high-need elementary school to ensure clarity and accuracy. Thus, the focus group questions relevant to this study were as follows:

1. What intrinsic motivational factors contributed to your sustainability beyond the initial three years serving in a high-need public school in North Carolina?
2. What extrinsic motivational factors contributed to your sustainability in your current public school assignment?
3. How did your contextual influences (i.e., home, community, family, etc.) contribute to your sustainability in a high-need public school?
4. As a teacher, what would you recommend to positively impact teacher sustainability beyond the initial three years in a high-need, low-performing public school?
5. What specific characterizations, strategies, initiatives, or programs would describe teacher sustainability beyond the initial three years in a high-need public school?
6. Specifically explain why you remain in a high-need public school located in southeastern North Carolina.
7. Describe how your teacher sustainability impacts the educational community and student achievement.

Questions one and three attempted to highlight intrinsic motivational factors that participants identified as having an impact in sustaining their career and resilience beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need public school. According to Castro, Kelly, and Shih (2010),

“Resilience strategies provide avenues for beginning teachers to cope and sustain themselves given the current realities of their teaching context” (p. 628). Research also indicates teaching is not considered just a “job” it is a mindset, a way of life and a lifelong commitment (Bernhardt, 2012; Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Synder, 2012). Mindset theory explores the fixed versus growth mindset and how that mindset transforms during life experiences. Therefore, studies have shown that individuals who possess a growth mindset do not always require self-esteem boosting. Individuals, who possess a growth mindset may require a mindset shift which represents conflicts and challenges they can conquer over time with “effort, new strategies, learning, and patience” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 312).

Question two was created to determine what extrinsic motivational factors (e.g., current school, school district, community, leadership, and collaboration) contributed to the participants’ sustainability. According to a study conducted by Castro, Kelly, and Shih (2010), which involved 15 teachers who were employed in high-need schools, seeking help from others, incorporating critical thinking and problem-solving techniques, helped them learn to manage difficult conflicts and situations, and revitalize themselves in the educational community. Thus, “these resilience strategies allow a person to overcome the adversity and gain new insights which minimize [*sic*] the impact of that adversity for future encounters” (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010, p. 623). As Mezirow (2003) emphasized, concepts and theories of how adults respond to adult educational experiences indicate “free participation in critical reflection and discourse by all adults in a democratic society” (p. 63). Thus, adults process and recognize their learning capabilities via attained knowledge of experiences, direct input, making meaning of circumstances, and their reasoning skills.

Questions four, six, and seven were guided to attain alignment with teacher sustainability and

student achievement while teaching in a high-need public school in southeastern North Carolina. According to Bernhardt (2012), “Effective teachers must move towards a caring pedagogy concerned with the lives, perspectives, and experiences of their students” (p. 6). Therefore, the mindset of a teacher expounds upon personal transformation, the act of teaching, moving beyond the curriculum, thoughtful participation, advocating student voice, and establishing meaningful relationships. As Dweck (2006) indicated in her research, “It starts with the growth mindset—about yourself and about children . . . a deep desire to reach in ignite the mind of every child” (p. 201).

Question five was created for participants to describe specific characterizations, strategies, initiatives, and programs relative to teacher sustainability beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need public school located in southeastern North Carolina. Bernhardt’s (2012) study identified motivational traits that sustain teachers by defining the intrinsically motivated teacher and the extrinsically motivated teacher. An intrinsically motivated teacher emphasizes the benefits of various activities associated in teaching with a focus on the “inherent satisfaction of teaching” (Bernhardt, 2012, pp. 3-4). Whereas, an extrinsically motivated teacher tends to expound on the external benefits of teaching such as “time off, salary, and other external rewards associated with the profession” (Bernhardt, 2012, pp. 3-4). Additionally, an altruistically motivated teacher views “teaching as a job that has societal value and has a genuine desire to positively impact the growth and development of adolescents” (Bernhardt, 2012, pp. 3-4). Relative to andragogy and transformative theory, adults process information as problematic frames of reference, where they make experiences more inclusive, open, and transformative, given the situation (Knowles, 1975; Mezirow, 2003). According to Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005), “Evidence is beginning to accumulate, too, that what adults learn on their own

initiative, they learn more deeply and permanently than what they learn by being taught” (p. 254).

During the focus group discussions, field notes were written and the discussion was audio-recorded via the software program to achieve a more personable understanding of the shared dialogue among the teachers and confirm accuracy and clarity. The focus group audio-recording was then shared with the participants via e-mail messages and the software invitational options. This additional member checking allowed for confirmation and accuracy. Utilizing the field notes and the audio-recording option in WebEx aided in the construction of the thematic analysis from the interviews and any additional textural descriptions from the participants. Inconsistencies and similarities were noted in reflective journal notes. Throughout the online focus group, discussions were incorporated from the photo documentation and the individual interviews to capture the essence of what specifically the participants were sharing that highlighted their sustainable teaching careers while teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school located in North Carolina. The interchange among the teachers allowed for conversations about various interactions and successes relative to their individual experiences and contextual influences in sustaining their careers.

Data Analysis

Several data analysis methods were utilized to advance a clearer understanding of the motivational factors that sustained teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools located in southeastern North Carolina, and their contextual influences and personal-professional aspirations. Thus, Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological method was utilized which included epoche/bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative

variation, and composite textural and composite structural descriptions that provided meanings and essences of the experiences during the study.

Epoche/Bracketing

According to Moustakas (1994), epoche/bracketing is defined as being “transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself” in order to view context through a different lens with openness and ingenuousness (p. 86). The researcher had no direct experiences with the participants prior to the study. However, collaboration with the Beginning Teacher Coordinator and specific schools existed because of the researcher’s position serving as an instructional coach in the school district. It was not challenging to set aside experiences in the school district. However, the researcher consciously had to bracket thoughts with an open mindset primarily focusing on the participants and their lived experiences. Therefore, the researcher kept reflective notes (Appendix E) which served as a guide throughout the study and helped uphold transparency relative to research bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process allowed the researcher to record thoughts and preconceived perspectives and achieve confirmability (Creswell, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). The reflective journal notes consisted of brief (a) descriptions about the setting where the researcher met with the participants, (b) observations from the interviews and focus group discussion, (c) personal reactions, (d) the participants’ reactions to questions, and (e) the rapport between the participants and the researcher (Appendix E).

Phenomenological Reduction

Moustakas (1994) identifies phenomenological reduction by describing the textural language as the researcher observes both internal and external consciousness, which indicates the partnership of the phenomenon and oneself. The researcher continually described and looked for

phenomenon with textural attributes and descriptions within an experiential reference. As noted, this phenomenological study is “transcendental because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning . . . phenomenological because the world is transformed into mere phenomena and reduction because it leads us back to our own experiences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91).

Imaginative Variation

To assist and guide the researcher throughout the study, imaginative variation was incorporated which helps to identify meanings of themes via the utilization of “structural descriptions of an experience,” the aforementioned factors that “account for what is being experienced,” and the “how” these factors identify with the “what” of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). This method helped the researcher to derive structural themes for the textural descriptions that were obtained through phenomenological reduction.

Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

Moustakas (1994) identifies the last stage in phenomenological research as the “intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). In other words, the particular phenomena occurred in a specific time and place with specific people from the lens of the researcher “following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100). The researcher viewed the context through a different perspective, naively and freshly, which synthesized the meaning of the participants’ experiences. Thus, the researcher reflected and documented in journal notes specific textural and structural characteristics of the participants to attain the essence of the meaning of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

Open Coding

Once the transcriptions were recorded, the data were highlighted utilizing Microsoft Word spreadsheets and tables, index cards, and highlighted formation of varying colors as answers to open-ended questions emerged according to repetitive themes and responses. Interview questions were designed with data-specific questions. As indicated by Creswell (2013), open coding allows the researcher opportunities for identifying “one open coding category to focus on . . . and then goes back to the data and creates categories identified around the core phenomenon” (p. 86).

Axial Coding

According to Creswell’s (2013) definition of axial coding, “. . . categories relate to and surround the core phenomenon in a visual model” (p. 86). Axial coding allowed the researcher in the present study to postulate a “theoretical model” (Creswell, 2013, p. 85). Therefore, the current study utilized axial coding to gather concepts and categories attained from the data of the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and the photo-narrative reflections. Axial coding the data assisted in confirming the concepts and categories represented from the interviews, indicated the relation of the thematic analysis, and created a more directed method in accurately identifying all essential components.

Classifying Patterns from the Participants’ Context

The interview transcripts and focus group discussions were coded with specific meaning units established via discovering and synthesizing participants’ substantial responses, which allowed themes to emerge. Thus, Microsoft Word tables, index cards, highlighted content cards, and spreadsheets were utilized to organize the collected data as themes were discovered. Lastly,

axial and open coding were incorporated to recognize patterns and thoughts that were revealed in the data collection (Creswell, 2013).

Emerging Themes from Data Analysis

The photographs taken during the study and reflections written by the teachers were analyzed to determine the emerging themes transcribed from the interviews and notes written during the focus group discussion. Specific identities relative to the motivational factors that sustained teachers in a high-need, low-performing school were denoted and the data collected was interpreted to determine the themes prevalent in the teachers' sustainability. The motivation of the present study hoped to obtain specific context combined with the photograph reflection narratives, interviews, and focus group discussions as a result of this analysis (Patton, 2002).

Memoing

According to Creswell (2013), "Memoing becomes part of developing the theory as the researcher writes down ideas as data are collected and analyzed" (p. 85). Memoing (Appendix E) increased the reliability of the study because it framed the development the researcher observed and recorded the timeline of the qualitative study. As a result, the researcher was able to separate running thoughts and factual context, which allowed for the novel organization of the collected data to transpire as possible themes emerged.

Trustworthiness

In recognition of trustworthiness, the current study adhered to qualitative approaches to consciously address credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Patton (2002) references a constructivist mindset to research as ". . . credibility as an analog to internal validity, transferability as an analog to external validity, dependability as an analog to reliability, and confirmability as an analog to objectivity" (p. 546). Therefore, with the ultimate goal to

increase reliability and dependability of this particular study, various methods were incorporated to increase trustworthiness.

Credibility

Creswell (2013) defined credibility as “. . . prolonged engagement in the field . . . triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators” (p. 246). This qualitative research utilized triangulation of all data (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990; 2007; 2014), encompassing collective data from the semi-structured individual interviews, the teachers’ focus group, and collective documentation via the photographs of teachers and their written thoughts per photo, denoting teachers’ educational experiences, which captured comprehensive data with three different methods of data collection. Thus, the incorporation of triangulation in the study offered the opportunity to establish themes that emerged from the collected data.

Member checking was also incorporated to provide credibility of this research study. According to Schwandt (2007), member checking is a term “for soliciting feedback from respondents on the inquirer’s findings” (p. 187). Thus, member checking served as a significant practice for substantiating and validating the study’s findings and criterion. All participants were asked to review the interview and focus group information and ask specific questions relative to the findings. Ten of the 13 participants returned their photo-narrative documentation. After the researcher viewed and analyzed the photo-narrative reflection documentation from the 10 participants, they were asked to view the narratives to ensure the researcher had captured their reflections. All 10 participants approved their reflections. Likewise, all participants were invited to share thoughts from the findings in the final document and offer corrections or enhancements (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990, 2014). All participants responded with member checking and approved of the findings with the exception of one minor sentence being removed per a

participant's request. Lastly, committee members were asked to check the accuracy of acquired themes and the explanation of the participants' dialogue in the interview data (Schwandt, 2007). This procedure was implemented to ensure that the researcher's "attempts at describing and analyzing qualitative data" were accurate and consistent (Schwandt, 2007, p. 222).

Transferability

Transferability indicates a thick, rich description of the phenomena being studied between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2013). Thus, trustworthiness was utilized to clarify researcher reflexivity and bracketing. As Creswell (2013) stated, ". . . the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative study an interpretation of the phenomenon" (p. 216). Therefore, during the study, the researcher continuously remained mindful of familiarities involving public education, journaling lived experiences relative to the educational community, and bracketing out associations, and refused to entertain personal experiences. All of which "minimizes" bracketing (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Dependability

According to Schwandt (2007), dependability focuses on the consistency of the research findings. In phenomenological research, dependability is accomplished by "the process of the inquiry and the inquirer's responsibility for ensuring that the process was logical, traceable, and documented" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299). In qualitative research, the emphasis is not necessarily replication of the study findings. It is, however, on the understanding that the researcher can utilize a comparable foundation when concluding thoughts. To enforce dependability, the researcher implemented a "lean coding" process, a small list of "five or six categories with shorthand labels or codes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The specific categories were then extended

based on viewing and reviewing the data. Likewise, dependability was reinforced by incorporating triangulation as noted by following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological procedures.

Member checks were included in the study, with the participants viewing the theoretical framework derived from the interview transcriptions, collective documentation, and focus group collaboration, which warrants rich, thick description for future researchers to replicate the study relative to public school teachers who teach in high-need educational communities, indicating similarities and variations. As interpreted by Schwandt (2007), “. . . to thickly describe social action is actually to begin to interpret it by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, that characterize a particular episode” (p. 296).

Confirmability

According to Creswell (2013), confirmability includes launching the value of the data while researching and determining if the results are confirmed by others involved in the study. Therefore, the researcher had to ensure the data results were communicated in a qualitative approach rather than as researcher bias. The aforementioned methods noted in this context account for confirmability (i.e., researcher reflexivity, epoche/bracketing, member checks, and triangulation).

Ethical Considerations

Upon approval from the school district via the district superintendent and school site principals to conduct the study (Appendix D), IRB approval was obtained and informed consent (Appendix B) was shared with the designated participants indicating the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. The ethical considerations were proactively planned with acquiring informed consent during this qualitative study with the researcher informing the

participants of the nature of study and potential selection of participation. Thus, pseudonyms for all participants and settings were incorporated. Informed consent was utilized during this qualitative study with the participants being informed of the nature of the study and potential selection of participation. The researcher established the research results with participants noting anonymous outcomes. Confidentiality was acknowledged and enforced throughout the research study. The researcher adhered to theoretical data interpretations that discharged fraudulent responses. Affording Creswell's (2013) perspective, "A final ethical issue is whether the researcher shares personal experiences with participants in an interview setting" (p. 175). The researcher conducted the study with caution when presenting personal experiences relative to the purpose of the study and enforced safeguards and protection via securing context in a locked file cabinet and utilized password protection for electronic inquiries.

Summary

The phenomenological research design, data collection procedures, and data analysis indicated in this particular context were deemed as appropriate for this qualitative study. The transcendental phenomenological research design incorporated semi-structured interviews, an online focus group, and collective document analysis which attained data about the phenomenon being studied. Likewise, utilizing coding procedures and memoing were deemed appropriate methods for analyzing the data for this study (van Manen, 1990, 2007, 2014). Detailed factors that influenced trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were significant factors in determining the methodology of the study. Also, the ethical considerations were vital components in the design of this research, ensuring that all components of the study were accomplished with honesty. By utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach, the current study proposed to grasp a better understanding of the

central phenomenon of the motivational factors that sustained teachers who teach in high-need, low-performing public schools located in southeastern North Carolina. In this chapter, the research study design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, and the importance of the researcher's role have been described. Also, the data collection procedures, data analysis methods, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations have been identified and described.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe motivational factors that sustained public school teachers in high-need areas in southeastern North Carolina (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990, 2007, 2014). This study sought to provide a thick, rich, and descriptive voice of the experienced teachers who shared the phenomenon of sustaining their teaching careers beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need public school by sharing their experiences, contextual influences, and motivational factors (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1993). Patton (2002) denoted that researchers who utilize a phenomenological approach for research explore “how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness” (p. 104).

Chapter three defined the methods incorporated to conduct this phenomenological study. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and data analysis of the interviews, photo-narrative documentation, and the online focus group discussion that aligned with the three research questions.

Research Questions

In order to explore the lived experiences of the participants who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools situated in southeastern North Carolina, three research questions were proposed as follows:

RQ1. How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina?

RQ2. How do public school teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact retaining their profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

RQ3. What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors do public school teachers describe as encouraging them to sustain their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school?

Participants

The participants of this qualitative study were chosen from one rural public school district in southeastern North Carolina because of the high teacher turnover and attrition among teachers. The participants were chosen for the study according to Title 1, high-need, low-performing status per the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, and years of experience teaching in a high-need public school (i.e., beyond the initial three years). The schools were comprised of four public schools identified as Title 1, high-need, and low-performing according to the North Carolina Public School System via NCDPI, State Report Card and accountability. There were two elementary schools (North Pole Elementary School and South Pole Elementary School), one middle school (Franklin Middle School), and one high school (Norlina High School) involved in the study. All schools were assigned pseudonyms. Once permission to conduct the study was granted via Liberty University's Institutional Review Board on May 3, 2016, along with prior approval from the district, an e-mail was sent to the participants for an introductory meeting.

During the e-mail correspondence, participants desired to interview during the introductory meeting because of a scheduling conflict with standardized tests. Thirteen participants volunteered and participated in the study. The participants' teaching experiences

ranged from 8 to 35 years. All grade levels and core subject areas were represented in the study. General education teachers, exceptional children teachers, and a career and technical education teacher were represented in the study. Additionally, there were four Caucasian females, five African-American females, three Caucasian males, and one African-American male who participated in the study. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Overview

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Concentration/ Subject/ Current Grade Level	Educational Track	Years of Experience Teaching in a High-need Area
Fletcher	35	Male	Caucasian	Middle/PE/6 th - 8 th	Alternative	8
Fiona	43	Female	Caucasian	Middle/Math/ 6 th	Traditional	21
Francesca	42	Female	Caucasian	Middle/Math/ 8 th	Traditional	21
Franco	39	Male	Caucasian	Middle/Art/6 th -8 th	Traditional	15
Faith	58	Female	Caucasian	Middle/ Science/6 th	Traditional	26
Norma	39	Female	African- American	Elementary/All /3 rd	Alternative	14
Noele	31	Female	African- American	Elementary/ Literacy/1 st -2 nd	Traditional	9
Noah	56	Male	Caucasian	High School/ History/ 9 th -12 th	Traditional	28
Nova	50	Female	African- American	Elementary/ Exceptional Children/K-5 th	Alternative	12
Noland	62	Male	African- American	High School/ Business/9 th - 12 th	Alternative	15
Sonia	45	Female	Caucasian	Elementary/All /Kindergarten	Alternative	22
Solona	34	Female	African- American	Elementary/ Digital Learning Sp./K-5 th	Alternative	9.5
Sophia	59	Female	African- American	Elementary/ Exceptional Children/K-2 nd	Traditional	35

Description of Participants

The following is an individual descriptive portrait of the participants. This context describes the participants: their age, ethnicity, their concentration area, grade level, years of experience, educational track (i.e., traditional or alternative), and their experience teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in North Carolina. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Fletcher. Fletcher was a 35-year-old Caucasian male, who had recently become engaged, served as a middle school (6-8) physical education (PE) teacher, and had taught PE for most of his career. He had always resided in the current county. He had been teaching for eight years, seven years at his current assigned middle school, and one year at a local high school, where he taught history. During the first two years at his current school, he taught sixth grade social studies. He had always taught in high-need public schools within the school district. He acquired his licensure and certification via an alternative course of study for lateral-entry teachers. He recently graduated with his Masters in Administration Education (May 2016). When asked about his experience teaching in a high-need school, he said:

Being in a high-need school with a diverse population such as this, I tell people all the time it's some of the most rewarding experiences I have and some of the most frustrating and challenging at the same time. You do have those experiences where you do connect with a student that they don't see a positive role model, especially a positive male role model on a daily basis. And you get through to them, you help them out, you see yourself having a positive impact on them and that's great.

Fiona. Fiona was a 43-year-old Caucasian female and mother of two children, a 14-year old son and an eight-year old daughter. She had always worked around children. Growing up,

she interacted with children in her mother's in-home daycare and with infants in her own volunteer work at her church's nursery. She acquired her certification via the traditional course of study with a concentration in elementary education and later added middle school education. Her family was a traditional family, very stable, and had always lived in the same county. She had served as a sixth grade math teacher for 21 years in the current assigned school. She stated, "Sixth grade was my worst year ever of life and I have been in sixth grade ever since." When asked about her experience teaching in a high-need school, she said,

It is somewhat more frustrating than when I first started, it seemed like there was, I would say, 80 percent of the population actually wanted to learn. They had their differences and their needs, but they wanted to be here. They wanted the stability of school and wanted to learn. Now I'm seeing a lot of parents not support the education system, that there's not a need for college and high school to get a job, that there's jobs that are available to people who do not have that education and they do not push the children to get that education and some of that in this community We're making it so why should they do anything different?

Francesca. Francesca was a 42-year-old Caucasian female and step-mother of three children. She attained her educational credentials through a traditional track and was certified in middle and high school concentrations. She shared her love for animals and indicated she had a small farm with numerous rescue animals. She also had become a vegetarian at the age of six. Francesca had been teaching for 21 years and currently taught eighth grade math. When asked about her experiences while teaching in high-need, low-performing schools, she replied:

I have always worked in high-needs facilities, and every school I've ever been in has been a Title 1 school." She extended the conversation by saying, "I think that is where

my God-given talent is because I've worked for academically gifted kids and worked with kids that probably would not qualify if it weren't for their demographics and their surroundings, and I just have a better talent with the lower performing poverty kids. The fact of it is, poverty and low performing typically does go together. I taught in the prison system, the juvenile prison system, and I enjoyed that. I loved that because I felt that I made a difference in those boys' lives because not only did we have them at school, but I did other things with them, as well. It was more of a family environment than the public school.

Franco. Franco was a 39-year-old Caucasian male in the 15th year of his career serving as a middle school art teacher. He achieved his undergraduate credentials via a traditional track and completed his internship in an elementary school. However, Franco had accepted a position in the middle school during his first year and had remained there for 15 years. He began his career at his current assigned school and had chosen to stay, denoting he "grew up just down the road" but was not familiar with the particular county. However, he had been in eastern NC all of his life. He indicated that he was single and had no children but lived close to his parents and siblings. When asked about his experiences teaching in a high-need public school, he stated:

I never thought I'd teach. I just kind of fell into the education track. I'd say it's challenging. Dealing with what issues that the kids bring in and the needs that they have, especially in art because they're kind of mixed in here. You have the EC [Exceptional Children] kids mixed with some AG [Academically Gifted] kids.

Faith. Faith was a 58-year-old Caucasian female who taught sixth grade science. She had been teaching for 26 years; 6 years in an elementary school and 16 years in her current middle school assignment. Her total years of experience accounted for interim positions she held

while working with the State of North Carolina. Faith completed her education through the traditional track. She began her career in elementary education and later transferred to middle school education, where she had been teaching for 16 years. She left the teaching profession for approximately 6 years to pursue other avenues such as sales and insurance. However, with much encouragement from family and friends, she chose to continue her educational career. Faith was single and very involved with her friends and church family. When asked about her experiences while serving as a teacher in a high-need public school for 16 years, she said:

When I first came here, we had more resources. We had a textbook. We had some of the resources that was ordered for us and had available to us. But as time progressed and things changed, we went into a new program, which was the Common Core. When we came into the Common Core, there was no resources that were given to us. We had to go into and find our own resources. And we were making up really our own curriculum as we went. Because there was nothing that they gave us to go by. They just said, “Here’s the Common Core and teach it” and we could do it, I guess, anyway we wanted to. But I could see a decline after there was no books and no resources and this new program was opened up to us, but nothing else was given to us to help lead us and motivate the children into what they needed to know.

Norma. Norma was a 39-year-old African-American female who had been teaching for 14 years in an elementary setting in North Carolina. Her undergraduate concentration was elementary education through the traditional course of study. At the time of the interview, she taught third grade. However, she had taught first grade in previous years. She had been married for 11 years and has two children; a son who is five years old and a daughter who is one year

old. When asked about her teaching profession while serving in a high-need, low-performing public school, she said:

My experience has been, it's a very challenging job, but I love it! You have to, number one, love the students as you would love your own child whether you have children or not. You have to love them. You have to be patient because a lot of times they come to school as they are. So they have a lot of issues going on maybe at home. So you have to be patient with them. Whatever they do that one day, the next day has to be a clean slate. You have to start over. One thing I do every single year, Ms. Casey, I always work hard to be able to report to my parents. When you get those parents to buy in, then you've got them. You know, sometimes, I always make sure I return phone calls. If parents email or, sometimes on certain occasions, I will give my cell phone out if I feel like that's going to help. So I always try to build a rapport with my parents, and that works.

Noele. Noele was a 31-year-old African-American female who taught in an elementary school. At the time of the interview, she was serving first and second grade students as a Literacy Coach/Reading Specialist. However, she had previously taught Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Noele received her educational credentials via the traditional track with a concentration in elementary education. She had been teaching for nine years at the same school. She noted that she was reared in the county and loved serving the children in the community. When asked about her experiences serving students in a high-need, low-performing public school in North Carolina, she stated:

My experiences working in the community are not, they are not good, I can say. I mean, you know, we don't have support. We're like, and I'm just going to say this, we're treated like red-headed stepchildren. I mean, for lack of a better wording. We're

shunned upon sometimes. We try to do things to the best of our ability, and we're cast down. We don't have parental support. Our parents are not involved. For example, our leadership group, we wanted to raise money to go to Washington, D.C., and we couldn't get supported through our community. Our "Give Five to Read Five" for a summer program, we don't have one book in that basket. Not one. And yes, it's only been a week, but we don't have one book in the basket. We're trying to really develop our students, really try to invest in them, but we don't get that return.

Noah. Noah was a 56-year-old Caucasian male who taught high school (9-12) American History, United States History, and an elective on Holocaust and modern genocides. Noah had been teaching for 28 years at the same assigned school. He received his undergraduate education and certification via the traditional track with an initial concentration in urban planning, which he never pursued but later became certified in high school history. He was married and the father of one daughter who graduated recently from the school where he taught. He indicated that his desire to teach began in his childhood and that his love for teaching was first ignited by his aunt, who was a teacher. His aunt gave him an old traditional bell that he keeps on his desk at home as a reminder of her dedication to teaching. When asked about his experiences while teaching in a high-need school in North Carolina, he stated:

This is coming from talking to other teachers who have been here ten years or more, is just the sound of surprise in our voice when we say, 'how do we become a high-need school?'. I mean, when did this happen? And then how do we know what led us to this point? What have we done wrong as teachers? Because we take on the blame ourselves sometimes. And it's a bit of a sense of frustration that 'What are we doing wrong? What could we do better?' Whenever we meet it's, 'How do we motivate the students? What

can we do to try to improve that?' Is more technology the answer or are we relying too much on technology to get the thing done? I think it's a combination, but also I notice my students seem to, and it might be me getting older, but have less of a sense of curiosity than they had before. And I don't know if that's because everything is answerable to them in a matter of minutes.

Nova. Nova was a 50-year-old African-American female who served as an exceptional children's teacher in an elementary school. She had been teaching for 12 years in various schools within the current assigned school district. She was considered a separate-setting teacher who taught kindergarten through fifth grade students and taught all subject areas. She acquired her licensure and certification through an alternative pathway with a concentration in special education. Previously, she worked in a mental institution for 17.5 years and noted that she had always "loved being into helping someone." She was divorced and also the mother of a 28-year-old son. As a child, her parents always encouraged the importance of education and the strength of helping others. When asked about her experiences while serving students in a high-need, low-performing school in North Carolina, she said:

With my experience, I've seen children from the low end of the spectrum to the medium end of the spectrum, and my belief is that all children can learn. As a self-contained classroom, I want my children to be taught and learn where they will be able to exit the program and into the regular classrooms and that the community is a big support system to help with the children with special needs. Me just helping and just seeing the lightbulb of a child come on and even not just a child because some of the family members are not able and to help family members as well as the children to become a productive citizen.

Noland. Noland was a 62-year-old African-American male who taught business courses in high school. He had been teaching for 15 years in the same school district. He formerly served in the United States Air Force for four years and had also worked in business. He acquired his educational credentials via an alternative track. Noland had been married for 30 years and had five children (two sons and three daughters) and four grandchildren. His oldest daughter passed away last year, and he and his family were still trying to recover. He attributed his lifelong credentials and aspirations to his wife. He believed:

I have a very supportive spouse, my wife. She wants what is best for me so if she gives me advice about something, I know that she's given it some thought and prayer and so if we can come to an agreement on something I am ready for it wholeheartedly. Teaching was one of them. She said I think you should teach. That's my foundation, my backbone, my friend, my partner. She's awesome.

When asked about his experiences working in a high-need school, Noland shared his spiritual foundation:

Oh, I honestly believe that every course that I've taken, even at this point in my life right now, and the decisions I'm making, I really believe that God's hand is in it, and I'm going to end up exactly where he wants me to. I try to give that 100 percent every day to reach as many students as I can and help as many staff members as I can. Actually, I love the high school. Typically, because the students are reaching that point in life where they understand they've got to start making some serious decisions and I can help facilitate that. That's the biggest joy I get just knowing that I might be the one to help someone get the revelation of what they need to do. I think what has given me a good foothold here at [Norlina High School] is the struggles that I dealt with in life, the things that I've done in

the businesses that I've worked with. I can relate to the majority of the students and the parents that I come in contact with.

Sonia. Sonia was a 45-year-old Caucasian female who taught Kindergarten in an elementary school where she had taught for 18 years. She had taught in the same school district for 22 years, including four years in a Head Start program prior to her currently assigned elementary school. She received her educational licensure and certification via an alternative track. Sonia had been married for 20 years and had a 13-year-old son who attended a private school in the district. As a child, Sonia attended the same private school prior to her attendance in a boarding school in Pennsylvania. When asked about her experiences serving students in a high-need educational community, she said:

It's rewarding, it's very demanding emotionally and socially. People don't understand why I'm still here. Emotionally you see the good things like their little light bulbs going off when they're starting to sound out words and I'm reading, I'm reading. You see the love when they might not get it at home. You're their world here. You have some years that are really good involvement, and then you have some years that are really weak involvement. I'm driven to make, to help these, not make, help these children learn, and to be the best they can be.

Solona. Solona was a 34-year-old African-American female who was married and had a two-year-old daughter. She noted that she had always lived in the area. As a child, Solona lived with her grandparents, who she identified as her parents. She attained her educational certificate through an alternative track with a concentration in elementary education. She had been teaching for 9.5 years at the same school. She had taught second, fourth, and fifth grades, and now served as the Digital Learning Specialist for all grade levels. She shared how her hunger for

teaching occurred as a child watching her grandmother's dedication to others as she taught in another elementary school in the district. Likewise, she shared her life-changing experience as a child with the interaction from the principal at her grandmother's school and the impact he had in her life. She believed:

He was very sweet. But, he was really, really, really nice to my mother, and my mom always said great things about him. It was never anything negative or anything like that. He always showed me such great love, and I don't know if it's because my mom worked there or not, but he just had this mentality that when he came around children, he just reached out so much love to them. Doesn't care what nationality you were, he treated everybody the same. And, my mom always displayed this behavior as well that she just loved helping, and she loved doing things with kids as well. If they were in need, she would go out of her way and do things for other children, not just myself. And so, all of that that she did, just seeing her, how she treated not just children in general but people in general, rubbed off on me. It taught me how to actually reach out to others, taught me how to actually communicate without going off the top of the head, or anything. But, just working with children, even now, she works with kids now that she drives the bus, and she'll say, 'Well, this student on the bus, they really need this and I want to go out and see if I can help get something.' So, even now, in her 70s, she's still doing the exact same thing, and driving the bus.

Later in life, Solona began working as a librarian in the public library and then began volunteering in her current elementary assigned school. When asked about her experiences working in a high-need school situated in a high-impooverished area of town, she said:

Well, I can't say it's been anything to my surprise because I grew up here in [this town]. So, you have the idea of the neighborhood that you're working in. My parents, they stayed over in [removed nearby town] back when they were coming up, you know. And then, they moved to where they are now. So, you already have a general idea of what you're walking into. At some points, it has been, how do I explain it? Scary moments. There have been some scary moments that especially when you have the violence that's going around the school and it's during the school hours, and you have to go into shutdown. You don't know what might happen. You don't know what's going on, you don't know if somebody's going to walk into your building with a gun, you don't know. So, you do always have that in the back of your mind, but at the same time, you know that your first priority is, 'I have to keep my babies safe.' They face it more than we do because—there are days that we're not here, especially during the summer when the violence is very high during the summer. I mean, they see it all the time. And so, you have that mindset that, yes, we know what's going on around us, but that's around us. This is their safe haven.

Sophia. Sophia was a 59-year-old African-American female who taught kindergarten through second grade students who were identified with special needs in an elementary school where she had taught for 35 years. Sophia acquired her educational credentials via a traditional track with a concentration in special education. She had been married for 35 years and had three sons and eight grandchildren. She had lived in the area since 1974, where she completed high school while living with her grandmother. When asked about her experiences teaching in a high-need, low-performing school in North Carolina, she said:

I feel, personally, if you can teach in a high school area of need, then you can teach anywhere. You can be an effective teacher anywhere because this setting really prepares you to be a teacher. If you teach in an area for a long time, I feel like you become part of the families within the school units because you'll find out that you're teaching siblings, you're teaching cousins, you're teaching aunts, uncles. You get to learn the parents, the grandparents so you become a part of that family through generations. Then, once that bond is formed with that family, you get more support from the family. I feel like teaching goes beyond the classroom and, if the children come to school with a certain need, whether it's clothing, shelter, whatever, given their life experiences, then I feel like in my heart that I need to try to fulfil those needs too. You can't do all of them, but you try to do the best you can. Then, that sort of shows the children there's another way to live outside of their community. It's part of an adopted family. We're all family.

Themes

A detailed analysis of the data revealed five descriptive themes derived from the participants answering the interview questions, focus group questions, and completing the photo-narrative documentation. The major themes from the study that contributed to teacher sustainability beyond the initial three years teaching in a high-need public school were (a) Colleagues as Family, (b) Sense of Calling, (c) Love for Children, (d) Contribution to Community, and (e) Service to Others. Once the data were collected from the participants' interviews, collective photo-narrative reflective documentation, and the focus group discussion, the transcriptions were utilized to identify textural themes. These textural themes captured the essence of the participants and were approved by the participants.

Colleagues as Family

The interviews, focus group discussion, and photo-narratives revealed that the teachers recognized they shared a family-oriented environment among educational staff within their assigned schools. During the interviews, Faith said the support of others is like a family. She stated:

It's been the support system that I have here at this school. We are like a family. When I moved from reading to science, there was a science teacher, and she helped me, and she had the materials. She gave me what she had. She gave me every resource that I could possibly have to be successful. And I've just had an encouraging support system here as a family, and that's why I have stayed here.

Sophia stated, "You become part of the families within the school units. It is part of an adopted family. We're all family." Franco believed, "The people here, that's one thing that's kept me here. It is challenging, but we've got a lot of great people to work with." Fletcher explained from his experience:

But as far as what kept me here, for all of the problems [Franklin Middle] does have, and it has a lot, there is still a really good group of teachers here that are great to work with. And they have really allowed for me to grow.

Four of the ten participants who submitted their photo-narrative documentation reflected that a sense of family in their schools helped sustain their careers teaching in a high-need public school. Francesca said, "My fabulous colleagues have played a huge part in my professional development. They are often the family members that you spend the most of your waking time with. They have helped me keep calm, have fun, and teach on!" Franco described his educational family in his photo-narrative reflection. He stated:

As I reflect on my career in education, I am convinced that I have grown both personally and professionally. I truly believe that is a credit to three factors: faith, family, and co-workers. Without those, I don't think I could have survived the last 15 years.

Noele described his growth as a teacher. He said, "The better I became as a teacher, the more my mindset shifted and I felt an urgency to want to be a better support system for my colleagues. To potentially reach even more students outside of the classroom." Noland stated:

The support and love from my family has been my most valued earthly treasure. And using my gifts and talents to give back to the community—locally and beyond—have given me overwhelming life worth and fulfillment. These motivating factors allow me to get up each day and face life's uncertainties with great enthusiasm and optimism.

During the focus group discussion, Noland explained that a sense of family is what sustained his career. He stated, "A collaborative team is highly needed, striving to make a difference, giving back to my community, being a great mentor, and working with good people, for the kids." Noele said:

When I first started, intrinsically, I was paired up with a great mentor who was not scared to kind of correct me, kind of get me to where I am today. I worked with a great administrator who helped guide me, nurture me, and really developed me to be the teacher-leader I am today, and put me in position to where I am today. So that's my motivational factor of why I am where I am, not straying away from school, being around good people, and one not to give up on them. That's why I am still here.

During the online focus group discussion, the participants shared specific attributes that motivated their sustainability in a high-need public school. They shared detailed accounts of their experiences as traditional and alternative-track educators. Noland explained his initial

experiences as a later-entry teacher. He explained that he was initially placed on a great team, and the benefits of that experience extrinsically motivated him to continue his career. He stated, “I had never taught in a classroom. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but they made sure I felt very comfortable that first year, and they were there for me continually.”

Throughout this study via individual interviews, collective photo-narrative reflections, and an online focus group, the participants described both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that sustained their teaching profession. The participants believed that administrative support, colleague rapport, and their aspirations to teach were encouraging factors in their sustainability. The participants expressed gratitude for the effort shared by colleagues and the school family when they first began their careers. The support, resources, training, and sense of community established in the schools were also motivating factors in their sustainability.

The participants ultimately appreciated the interviews because the opportunity gave them time to reflect on their sustainability. They were encouraged that someone cared enough to interview them. The online focus group created a cohesive dialogue among the four participants and fostered a relaxed atmosphere to discuss the joys of teaching in a high-need public school. All participants voiced a sense of genuine pride about their choice to sustain their careers in a high-need school and emphasized no desire to transfer to neighboring schools or districts. Interestingly, the participants shared a desire for continual improvement within their educational community and shared ideas to make the students stronger and parents more involved in their children’s education.

Most of the participants recognized the help and dedication others had offered during their careers and how they had supported each other. Sonia stated, “I just feel really wanted and needed.” Noele explained, “Another thing, I had an awesome, awesome principal. [She] was

one main reason why I stayed here. I've worked with some awesome co-workers and colleagues." Fiona shared her experiences working with great colleagues from the beginning of her career. She said:

I was put on a team with two very experienced, awesome teachers, and they took me under their wing, and they taught me what they knew, and what they did, and how to be successful. For years, inside and outside of school, we had a strong relationship, and I found out that, after one year of middle school, I did not think I could go back down [to elementary].

Faith highlighted her colleague support stating:

When I moved from reading to science, there was a science teacher, and she helped me, and she had the materials. She gave me what she had. She gave me every resource that I could possibly have to be successful. At that time it was the Standard Course of Study. And so, there were workbooks, along with the textbooks, there was videos. There was all kinds of resources available to us during that time. And she shared them with me. And we've been a family unit here. If something happens to one of us, it's like it happens to all of us.

As indicated in the study, the participants shared a sense of gratitude for their colleague families and the connectedness that influenced their careers while teaching in a high-need public school. Likewise, the participants emphasized their calling to teach and that their sense of calling helped sustain their teaching careers.

Sense of Calling

During the interviews, photo-narrative reflections, and the online focus group discussion, the participants shared their beliefs for teaching and indicated that they were called to teach specifically where they taught in the community. Noland stated:

I try to give that 100 percent every day to reach as many students as I can and help as many staff members as I can. I think one of the biggest decisions I've made since starting to teach was leaving the middle school and moving to the high school. So, I grew to love the middle school and all of the things that I was doing there. Of course, it's kind of late in my life right now, and I was afraid of the decision, but I felt that that was what God was leading me to do at the time, so I made the move. Actually, I love the high school. Typically, because the students are reaching that point in life where they understand they've got to start making some serious decisions, and I can help facilitate that.

When asked about how her former life history had an impact in retaining her profession, Sophia stated:

One thing is my upbringing, we lived in a rural community. We were farmers. My daddy was a sharecropper and we had plenty of love. When I was growing up as a little girl, I never thought I would be a teacher. That was not even my dream. My dream was just to be a good momma. So, God has blessed me to go beyond that, it's a calling.

Faith described her faith in God as a major factor impacting her role as a teacher in a high-need public school by stating:

Well, I think that my spiritual background is one of the things. I have a strong belief in my Lord Jesus Christ and Savior. I actually seek him and seek his will of what he wants

me to do in decisions. I seek him in how to handle the students and behaviors of the students. I try to uplift and encourage these kids as a role model and seek the Lord.

During the focus group discussion, it was discovered that only one of the four participants' family members served as an educator. However, the participants highlighted the significance of their calling to teach and serve others in their community. Several of the participants indicated that without their faith and being called to teach, they would not have sustained their careers in a high-need school. In the interviews, the participants highlighted both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that had encouraged them to sustain their careers beyond the novice years. Fiona stated, "I just clicked with middle [school], and so I have stayed." When asked about the motivational factors that enabled Fiona to sustain her education in a high-need environment, she said:

I would say that one factor is just this personality trait of mine. That's just a work ethic—that somebody took a chance on me and invested time in me, gave the first grade student teacher a chance to work into a middle school, and gave me wonderful people to work with. Therefore, if I'm investing all that time, and that money and energy, it's more like a family thing. It's a calling. It's not just a job.

When asked about the internal motivational factors that sustained her career teaching in a high-need public school, Norma explained that she always enjoyed working with younger children. She also expressed how her faith strengthened sustainability to teach. Norma stated:

I love first grade because first grade is kind of like at the bottom of the pyramid. So, I feel like you need a strong base. If the base is not strong, then the top is going to be weak. Overall, what has kept me, is the love of children and my calling to teach. Also,

when the lightbulb comes on and the students get it. That lets me know that they have made growth and gains.

During the interview, Noele described the daily functions and experiences teaching in a high-need community. She explained her passion and internal vision to serve others. Equally, she was reared in the community and felt compelled to reach as many individuals as possible through her talents. Noele stated:

I think it's the day-to-day. When you think about the good things that do happen and you are really passionate about what you do and what you are called to do. The people I work with allowing me to be who I am and allow me to grow visions the way I think and serve my kids. That happens to be nine years later, literally.

During the interview with Noah, he explained his 28 years in the profession and the continual transitions with resources, students' mindset, and his sense of pride to serve the families in the community. He also described the extrinsic motivational factors from students each year that inspired him to sustain his career. He explained his gratitude for the student's acknowledgement of his life lessons in class and his intrinsic calling to serve children in the community. Noah stated:

I feel a sense of responsibility. I guess it's my experience teaching the holocaust and my big lessons are: don't be a victim, don't be a bystander, and don't be a perpetrator. In other words, don't do harm to others. And I just think they understand that more. My faith is that we get a little better with each generation. And if I persevered and someone else persevered and we still love it, then you can get through those initial years.

Throughout the study, most of the participants shared their sense of calling and their ultimate aspiration to teach. As conveyed in the interviews, online focus group discussion, and the

reflective documentation, the participants shared an innate calling to teach, emphasizing how a sense of calling sustained their careers beyond the novice years while teaching in a high-need public school.

Love for Children

Through interviews, collective photo-narrative documentation, and an online focus group, participants shared how their loyalty, dedication, and a calling to teach generally sustained their teaching careers in a high-need educational community. Equally, their shared perspective that collaboration among colleagues, sense of calling, community contributions, helping others, and the love for children were the motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers in a high-need public school in North Carolina. During the study, all participants identified their intrinsic love for children that initially guided their desire to teach remained the ultimate motivating factor in sustaining their careers. Although, continual frustrations and conflicts were present while teaching in a high-need educational community, all participants expressed their love and desire to teach children. The participants also shared their innate connection with teaching at the specific grade level and how that connection sustained their teaching profession.

During the interviews, many of the teachers mentioned that their love for children was the primary reason for sustaining their careers beyond the initial years of teaching. Norma stated:

But what has kept me teaching is the love for the students. Education now is hard. You don't make a lot of money. Sometimes you have to work three or four jobs, but every time I think about stepping away, I just think about the students that are going to not be served if I left. You know, I truly do love each and every one of my students in here,

even my former students. But that's what has kept me, I guess, is the love for the students.

Faith believed that her love for children sustained her career. She said:

I think that it's the children, I mean being here with the children. Wanting to help them meet their goals and succeed as a middle schooler. And then my main goal with all children that come in here is to make them aware that my main objective for them is to graduate from high school. So that is my main goal with them. So I always say, 'You're working to become a citizen, and you're going into the workforce one day, and what you need to do is treat this like a job. You're coming to school every day, you're working hard. You are doing what you need to do to meet your goals. So when you get down the line, you can graduate from high school and then choose, if you choose to, further your education.

Additionally, Sophia summarized her thoughts about her love for children. She stated:

I know that they say: it's a cliché for a teacher to say that they teach because they love children. But, I do teach because I love children. And because I love children, I'm invested in those children, not just when they're at school but when they're out of school also. We want to make sure that our children are well, that they're well cared for, physically and mentally. So, you have to have that love. You got to have that love to stay in teaching.

As conveyed by the participants, their love for children ignited a reciprocal response in their careers by investing in the children, their families, and the community. Likewise, the participants highlighted the importance of the students graduating from high school, attending

college, and being productive citizens. When asked about her career and her decision to teach, Sonia stated:

I had those struggles. I had those downfalls. I know it's not poverty, but the stress of it. You can understand where a lot of these parents are stressed. If I know somebody's looking for a job, if I see one open, I try to always help them. I have more sensitivity to what's going on around me from having the cancer. And that has molded me and shaped me in ways I never thought it would. That was another reason to stay here. Then, I just feel really wanted and needed. Now, looking back at it, is that my way of being? Is that one of my ways of being accepted? Because I always want what's best for these children. I want them to graduate from high school, go to college, graduate, and get a good job.

Nova explained her journey as a teacher, stating:

Once I became a teacher, just being able to help someone that was in need so that they can become, even though they have a disability, they can become a good person in society. Me just helping and just seeing the light bulb of a child come on, and not just a child. Because some of the family members are not able, and to help family members as well as the children to become a productive citizen. When you see growth in the children. When you see things that they were not able to do and they begin to do.

While attending college as a psychology student, Solona felt compelled to change her major and pursue an education degree. She initially served as a librarian in the local community library.

During the interview, she conveyed that psychology was not her long-term desire and ultimately wanted to work with children. She described her journey as a student transferring to a teacher, stating:

I had this mindset that I wanted to do something else. I had been working as a librarian in the public library. I was doing story time, and I was doing programming with kids, and I actually loved that. I loved being in an environment with just working with kids. I loved it from the beginning, and I loved the children. They were excited every time I came. It was just a wonderful experience. I knew then, this is what I want to do.

As described by the participants, their love for children sparked an intrinsic response in their careers by investing in the children, their families, and the community. Likewise, the participants emphasized the importance of the students graduating from high school, attending college or the workforce, and being productive citizens.

Contribution to Community

Norma believed that children are the future and all can make a difference in the community. She shared the journey of her former principal and how she made a positive impact in her career. She said:

She had a challenging upbringing and you see what a success that she is today. So with that being said, children in high-needs areas can learn. They can be successful. I tell them, 'I can't help what goes on in your outside world, but when you cross this threshold, we have rules, we have expectations, and we have rules that you have to follow, just as we as adults have to follow.' So they can be successful too. It may be harder to pull it out of them, but they have jewels and nuggets, or whatever you want to say, within them too. So, I guess that's what has kept me. Because so many times you see that because of their upbringing, because of their environment, they're thrown away. They're discredited, but they can make it as well if they're pushed.

During the online focus group, participants shared that their teaching sustainability was derived primarily from a desire to give back to the community and to be difference makers in the lives of the students. Noland said his sustainability came from various factors: “A collaborative team is highly needed, striving to make a difference, giving back to my community, being a great mentor, and working with good people, for the kids.” Noah extended Noland’s responses by stating, “I have a sense of a community, and it takes a village and voice for children.” Despite the desire the participants shared in their teaching roles, a collective perspective describing all the duties and mandates that take them away from actually teaching was also communicated by participants. Noland indicated, “Too many things take away from teaching, which negatively impacts us by losing focus, which is the children.” The collaborative dialogue among the four participants expounded a shared sense of familiarity and likeness with the neighborhoods and community. Francesca shared:

I have to say, I know that I was making a difference and that they need strong teachers. I think that’s what, I guess, kept me in this environment is that I feel that this is where my talent is and this is where I’m needed and where I’m supposed to be. I think that my experiences in school in my own personal life probably make a difference. Because a lot of the people that I went to school with, because I really went to the inner city schools, are some of the same exact children now and grandchildren of those people I went to school with.

Participants emphasized the importance of giving back to the community where they were reared and currently resided. They explained the significance of the students seeing them in the community as positive role models and their personal accomplishments in life. Likewise,

the participants wanted to be a direct connection for the students, to help them become independent citizens in their community and maintain lifelong relationships. Sophia stated:

I see still the same need that I felt 20 years ago when I first stepped into [South Pole].

The need has not changed in the community. Our children still deserve the best of teachers. They deserve the best of education, because our goal in [this county] is to prepare our children for the 21st century. To be productive students. And this

community is part of those students that are going to be guiding us in the 21st century.

Because at my age, soon I'll be sitting at home and I'm going to be dependent upon these students to take care of me. So, as I tell them, 'If you're going to work on my car, I want you be the best mechanic. If you're going to be my nurse's aide assistant, I want you to be the best one you can be. If you're going to be a hairstylist, I want to have some hair on my head.

Likewise, Fiona indicated, "A lot of families that I taught, I taught every one of the children in that family and having the rapport with the parents and the family, brings relief a lot of times to the families." Fiona continued by saying:

Knowing what to expect, seeing a familiar face, knowing that there's a stable, sometimes even a Christian teacher in the school where they're sending their child, and knowing that there is somebody that they could go to in the time of need if they needed some sort of thing. And even this year, this is my first year I think of teaching a child of a student that I taught before.

Noele stated:

It makes me stay. I always have a vision to do things, and when it comes to pass, I have to then see it through and sustain it. So I have to be here so I can see what I'm doing

sustains. So I mean, start now, make the vision plain, so they can start having something on their mind. They can't understand everything, but allow them to start seeing the path, because we're in such a close-minded community that if these kids don't have opportunity to have an experience, they will stay right here.

Additionally, Noah shared:

You grow roots in the community, but also when you have a good year and students and parents say, 'I can't wait for you to teach my youngest son' or 'I've got two more children coming up.' And you sort of feel this, I know it might be silly of me, you feel this obligation that you started with this family, you want to finish. And you just feel like you need to keep going. Well, there's also a sense of pride, and part of it I don't want to leave not being number one. If all of the older teachers bail, you don't have that sense of continuity, and you don't have people to say, 'Look, we've been through this before. We'll be all right. We need to stick together.'

Noland emphasized:

My foundation, stability, and direction has come directly and indirectly from my dedication to serve and love Jesus Christ with all my heart. The support and love from my family has been my most valued earthly treasure, and using my gifts and talents to give back to the community locally and beyond have given me overwhelming life worth and fulfillment. These motivating factors allow me to get up each day and face life's uncertainties with great enthusiasm and optimism.

Participants explained the importance of giving back to the community where they were reared and currently resided. They explained the significance of the students seeing them in the community as positive role models and being successful. Equally, the participants wanted to be

a direct connection for the students in the community, to help them become independent citizens and maintain communication.

Service to Others

A common theme in the participants' responses was that their former life history had an impact on retaining their teaching profession beyond the initial three years and their motivation to teach because of the way they were reared and the expectations of family and community. Some of the participants explained that their family members were educators, and others shared that they always had a desire and hunger to help others. Contextual influences that made a positive impact in sustaining their teaching careers were participants' families, friends, colleagues, and their own aspirations to teach. These themes were present in the data collected from the individual interviews, photo-narrative, and online focus group.

From the interviews, Francesca shared her intrinsic motivation in wanting to help others. She stated firmly, "For me, my most intrinsic motivation is my desire—and innately too—to help kids and want to see them succeed." Fletcher explained:

My dad was in education. He taught for about 15 years. He was an administrator for a school very similar to this as far as population. And I grew up really in diversity. Through athletics and going to school, I didn't just have friends that were just like me from the same background. I think that's important because, when you get in life, you're going to have to work with everybody. You have to work beyond differences and learn to come together, learn to communicate, accept each other's differences, and work through that. I think society, as we see that now, is suffering from that.

Sophia explained her dedication to the whole child and her desire to help others: “Anything outside of the classroom that I can do to help my students, I go looking for it. Teachers are good beggars and I will beg for my students. I will beg for the whole school.”

Throughout the present study, the participants expressed the urgency of teaching and all that it requires of them on a daily basis. Likewise, they spoke of how they benefited from helping others and the moments when the students acknowledged them as making a difference in their lives. Francesca shared her experiences from working in a former high-need public school:

I loved [that school], it was a difficult job with very little reward, except for the fact, that in my own mind, I had to say I know that I was making a difference and that they need strong teachers.

Nova explained her childhood and the expectations from her parents: “Growing up with my parents, education was always very important. They did not attend college, but they encouraged us to go farther than just 12 grades. They instilled in us to do and help others.”

Solona shared that her experiences with family and administrative support drove her sustainability teaching in a high-need environment. Therefore, she referred to the principal she knew as a child:

He always showed me such great love, and I don't know if it's because my mom worked there or not, but he just had this mentality, that when he came around children—he just reached out so much love to them. Doesn't [*sic*] care what nationality you were, he treated everybody the same. And, my mom always displayed this behavior as well, that she just loved helping, and she loved doing things with kids as well. If they were in need, she would go out of her way and do things for other children, not just myself. And so, all of that, that she did, just seeing her, how she treated not just children in general, but

people in general, rubbed off on me. It taught me how to actually reach out to others, taught me how to actually communicate without going off the top of the head, or anything.

Lastly, Noah expressed his willingness to help others in the school building with different responsibilities and courses:

I think one thing that we need to do as older teachers, and I know this is a double-edged sword, and I've tried to do this. And I'll be honest, I haven't always been successful— is give up some of the choice teaching positions.

Throughout the present study, the participants expressed the intrinsic determination of teaching and all that it requires of them on a daily basis. However, they spoke of how they benefited from helping others and the continual opportunities when the students and families recognized them as genuinely making a difference in their lives.

Composite Textural, Structural, and Essence Description

Textural description. The participants' individual textural descriptions were combined to arrange a composite textural description. The combination of the participants' individual descriptions hoped to capture a general description. The general description offered awareness into what the participants collectively experienced (Moustakas, 1994). The composite textural descriptions captured the essence of what the participants experienced while teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in North Carolina beyond the novice years. Utilizing the themes derived from the voices of the participants, the data revealed the participants' descriptions of teacher sustainability in a high-need public school in North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching. The participants' experiences can be identified via the specific intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors they shared while teaching in a high-need public

school. The textural description highlighted the experiences of the public school teachers. The textural descriptions revealed five themes relative to teacher sustainability teaching in a high-need public school.

According to Moustakas (1994), the last stage in phenomenological research is the composite textural and structural descriptions derived from the study. Specifically, the particular phenomena occurred at a specific time and place with specific people from the lens of the researcher, “following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100). The researcher viewed the context through a different lens, with a fresh, naïve perspective, that synthesized the meaning of the participants’ experiences. Thus, the researcher bracketed thoughts and experiences by writing notes relative to the interviews and focus group discussion to attain specific textural and structural characteristics of the participants and to capture the essence of the meaning of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

During the interviews, focus group discussion, and reflective narratives, the participants described their experiences of teacher sustainability teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school. The overall results indicated that the participants attributed their colleagues as family, love for children, giving back to the community, a sense of calling, and service to others were the motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers beyond the novice years.

Structural description. The structural description indicates how the specific experiences impacted the participants. In the present study, the structural descriptions highlighted the participants’ perceptions of teacher sustainability in a high-need public school in southeastern North Carolina. All the motivational factors that the participants shared helped to create the structural description. These descriptions emerged from the acquisition of the structural themes that were related to the experiences. After gathering separate textural and

structural descriptions, data was synthesized to determine the essence of the experiences of teacher sustainability as described by the participants. The acquired synthesis highlighted that experienced teachers identified motivational factors that sustain their careers beyond the initial three years teaching in a high-need public school in North Carolina. The participants shared both the positive and negative experiences teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in North Carolina.

The researcher described the essences of the participants' experience, which is known as what is derived from the participants' sharing their experience (Moustakas, 1994). Relative to the description of the essences is an integration of the textural and structural descriptions into a combined statement (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the essence identified the motivational factors that participants shared relative to sustaining their careers beyond the initial three years teaching in a high-need public school in southeastern North Carolina. As a result, a detailed analysis of the data revealed five descriptive themes derived from the participants answering the interview questions, focus group questions, and completing the photo-narrative documentation indicating the "teachers they had become" in their careers.

Essence description. Finally, the essence of the participants' experiences captured the aspiration of conducting a phenomenological study. The essence combined the specific motivational factors from each participant within the study and captured the individualization of each experienced teacher. Throughout the present study, the goal was to understand and describe the motivational factors that teachers perceived as sustaining their careers beyond the novice years teaching in a high-need, low-performing school in North Carolina. In this manner, this transcendental phenomenological study was utilized to answer the three specific research questions.

Summary

Through the use of individual interviews, collective photo-narrative reflective documentation, and an online focus group discussion, five themes related to the central phenomenon (i.e., teacher sustainability beyond the initial three years) emerged. The emerged themes were (a) Colleagues as family, (b) Sense of calling, (c) Love for children, (d) Contribution to community, and (e) Service to others. The research questions were specifically answered from the data obtained in this transcendental phenomenological study. In the following chapter, the researcher will discuss specifically how the research questions were answered from data collected in the study. The emerged themes addressed the questions that were grounded in the related literature and theoretical framework. Equally, the themes sought to clarify experienced teachers' motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers while teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe motivational factors that sustained public school teachers in high-need areas in southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching. The purpose of this chapter is to expound upon the insights attained from conducting this study. This chapter addresses a detailed summary of findings from the data collected. Equally, this chapter provides discussion, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Three research questions that transpired from the literature guided this study. As a result of the data collected, each of the three research questions is discussed.

Research Question One

How do public school teachers describe their experience working in a high-need educational community in North Carolina? From the data acquired through interviews, collective photo-narrative documentation, and an online focus group, it was concluded that participants liked working in a high-need public school. Teachers stated that often times the journey had been frustrating and presented difficulties. However, they continued to feel a sense of connectedness with colleagues and a continued love for children. For the teachers who were reared in the community, they believed that they were giving back to their community while serving as teachers in a high-need, low-performing school. Also, they wanted to be a part of the positive influences in the children's lives. The teachers felt that they were born to teach or were called to teach with the God-given talents and skills to help others.

Often educators retain their profession while teaching in high-need schools by drawing from each other and establishing relationships, which creates a sense of belonging. In a study conducted by Meister and Ahrens (2011), four participants shared their dedication to teaching for more than 20 years. They discussed the skills necessary to resist plateauing in the educational profession. The participants indicated, “The presence of at least one caring person in an individual’s environment can provide the support a person needs for healthy development” (Meister & Ahrens, 2011, p. 775). Likewise, Meister and Ahrens denoted the positive, reflective opportunities of building leaders, students, and educational colleagues influenced all four of the participants in their study to retain their educational resilience when negative plateauing emerged. Therefore, the participants in this study agreed that their teacher sustainability is because of their love for children, service to others, sense of calling, contribution to the community, and colleagues as family.

Research Question Two

How do public school teachers perceive their former life history as having an impact retaining their profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school? The participants in this study shared no hesitation in describing the contextual influences of their upbringing and their former life history as having an impact on retaining their profession. All of the participants shared how their childhood, their parents, and living in the community were factors that directly impacted their teacher sustainability. Also, several of the teachers explained their work ethic, which transpired from their families and their upbringing, as attributes that sustained their teaching careers in a high-need public school. A few of the teachers were inspired to teach as children because of family members serving as teachers in public schools and in church. Lastly, some of the teachers shared that making a

difference in children's lives and watching them and their families grow in the community were motivational factors. As Bernhardt (2012) indicated, teachers who have a sense of giving back to the community originates from their experiences within the community and their upbringing: "This unwavering commitment to a moral agenda pushes us to uncover ways to break down those barriers negatively influencing the lives of our students" (p. 6).

Research Question Three

What intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors do public school teachers describe as encouraging them to sustain their teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school? Noah accurately described both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors when he said:

I just still love doing it. I mean, I get frustrated like everyone, and there's some days I'm really frustrated, but I just still love doing it. And what's nice now is I'm the old guy in the room, which I never thought I would reach that point. But it's neat. The longer you've been here, you feel like, at least, that you're helping new teachers. Because I see a very high frustration level with new teachers, especially coming here. And I think, if they see that I persevered, and someone else persevered, and we still love it, that you can get through those initial years.

Generally, the participants shared intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Solona encapsulated the overall essence of her motivational factors when she stated:

In my thought process, it starts here. It starts at the beginning. If you can grab them where they are just first really developing, and you can grab them where they're young, and just do all you can to help them to be successful? To help them not just in academics, but just in life in general, then when they hit the middle school, when they hit

high school, then everything that you have taught them, even though they may not show it, it's still instilled inside of them. And, something is going to trigger what you say to them, what you've done, however you've treated them, it's going to trigger something in their heart, it's going to trigger something in their brain. Then you'll say, 'Oh, yeah, I remember Ms. [Solona] said this.' So, that was my whole start. If I could just start where they're small, and just instill a little piece at a time.

According to research (Claeys, 2011; Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Okojie, 2011; Phuntsog, 1999; Shernoff, Maríñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013), the assemblage of community and connectedness are positive indicators of sustaining teachers beyond the first five years in the classroom. Likewise, colleague support and a sense of connectedness are vital in sustaining experienced teachers in high-needs schools. Upon researching relative literature for the study, a program was explored that was initiated in an urban school district where "the Teachers Supporting Teachers in Urban Schools (TST) model organized resources through an influential mentor and external coach, with the goal of enhancing new teachers' effectiveness and connectedness to colleagues" (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 479). From their study, the expectancy of the Teachers Supporting Teachers model was beneficial for enhancing professional learning communities, cohesion among colleagues, effective classroom management strategies, and addressing the specific needs of teachers, which is essential in sustaining teachers with connections and colleague support.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe motivational factors that sustained public school teachers in high-need areas in southeastern North Carolina

beyond the initial three years of teaching. Therefore, to link connections between current literature and this study, this specific discussion represents the literature recognized in Chapter Two and explicates comparisons to the data discovered in this study.

Comparison to Literature

High-need public schools. Sustaining teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need public educational community is essential to student achievement, budgetary needs, and teacher education programs. According to Burton and Johnson (2010), “The issues related to teacher retention only intensify in high-needs schools, where up to 50% of teachers leave teaching within the first five years” (pp. 376-377). Comparatively, it was estimated that the nation’s cost of teacher turnover in the public school system totals “approximately seven billion dollars annually” (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010, p. 2). Heineke, Mazza, and Tichnor-Wagner (2014) found that “one third of the teaching force in the United States turns over each year, with the highest attrition rates occurring in high-need schools—urban and rural schools with low-income and minority populations” (p. 751). Interestingly, teachers who eventually begin their careers in a high-need public school are often under-prepared for the journey because of the lack of local school district support and programs offered during their teacher education programs (Anderson & Stillman, 2011; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010). In order to sustain teachers who teach in a high-need, low-performing public school beyond the initial three years of teaching, motivational factors are to be considered and acknowledged.

Participants’ experiences in high-need communities. In this study, participants’ responses transpired from their beliefs that teacher sustainability is obtained through colleagues as family, sense of calling, love for children, contribution to community, and service to others. The participants described their years of experience, beginning with the novice years to their

current experiences, including all the changes that have occurred. In recognition of the changes, some participants shared that the community used to be recognized as somewhat safe, where the dangers primarily occurred at night and on the weekends. Now, in schools situated on the east side of town, crime and substance abuse has escalated into the daytime. Some of teachers shared their experiences of being in school lockdowns during the school day because of local shootings and drug-investigations. An additional change in all schools represented in this study is the non-involvement of parents and the non-investment in their children's education. Several of the participants shared detailed accounts of how parents did not share a vested interest in their children's education and did not communicate with teachers when their children continued to struggle.

Inconsistencies in high-need public schools. An additional area shared by participants during the study was their concerns about students' diminished desire to learn, a lack of motivation, and an emphasis on social media and how it impeded students' lives. Some of the participants described examples of students' inappropriate behaviors with themselves and others, the hyper-focus of being involved with friends as opposed to learning, and the distractions involved to socialize during the school day rather than learning. Further, the participants shared some of the negative impacts that technology had generated within the school system. This particular school district had invested in the one-to-one technology initiative (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/dtl/accountability/tech-plan/201104-lfi4.pdf>) in which all students were given iPads or Chrome Books for instructional purposes. However, the teachers had observed an overall distraction with incorporating technology devices and inappropriate responses from students. Also, the lack of textbooks had a negative impact on student achievement. Teachers believed that current textbooks were needed in the classrooms and that

additional resources for students who were identified as low achievers, were also needed to attain academic success.

Likewise, some of the teachers believed accountability for public schools that were identified as a high-need, low-performing school should meet a different criteria compared to the non-low-performing schools in the state. They explained that the students who live in high-poverty communities are not afforded the same access to education by their parents in the home, and generational poverty is a never-ending cycle for some families. As a result, the statewide initiative *Give Five-Read Five* (<http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/give5read5/>) should ultimately benefit the children in the community, where each child is equipped with books to read in the summer months away from school. Although, as one participant noted, no books had been given or donated to her school for the summer reading program. Noele stated:

We are looked upon differently. Now [North Pole], we get a lot of things, and we get these things because, I feel like, they think, ‘Woe is us,’ you know, a poor school, more like charity. The more recognized schools get things because they have the funds to do that. Their parents are involved, and they can raise money. And when they have *Give Five-Read Five*, their parents can write \$100.00 checks, so they know about the resources. They are aware of things that are going on. We hear it secondhandedly, maybe third, or maybe we don’t hear it at all. And we’re like, ‘You all didn’t tell us.’ Or they have resources or material or knowledge of whatever’s going on, and we don’t.

Transitions in high-need public schools. Another area where the experienced teachers benefit the total school environment is the overall student success by way of collaborating with novice teachers. Several of the participants acknowledged the high teacher turnover in their schools during their tenure and the continual increase in lateral-entry teachers pursuing the

teaching profession. As of July 2015, the overall teacher retention rate for the school district was 12.91%. The retention rates in the schools designated in this study were as follows:

- North Pole Elementary School: 12.12%.
- South Pole Elementary School: 18.75%.
- Franklin Middle School: 27.78%.
- Norlina High School: 12.07% (www.dpi.state.nc.us).

Six of the participants acquired their teacher state licensure and credentials via an alternative track, while the remaining seven participants attained their credentials through the traditional track of a teacher education program. At varying stages in their careers, the participants served as mentors for the novice teachers entering their building. Likewise, several of the participants served on various leadership committees at their assigned schools and within the school district. A few of the participants had continued their education by acquiring their administration education and license and served within their assigned schools in partnership with the administrative staff.

Contextual influences in high-need public schools. Some of the teachers involved in this study believed their dedication to teach, love for children, sense of calling, and service to others were some of the reasons they had sustained their careers. According to research (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Levine, 2013), a sense of calling and hope is unclear and often unnoticed in the educational community. However, throughout the history of educational research, theory, and practice, teaching is recognized as “an ethic of love, compassion, virtue, courage, and humility” (Bernhardt, 2012, p. 5). Often when experienced teachers are asked why they teach, they reply with a decisive response of their God-given talents and skills and calling to teach. Likewise, Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012) conducted a study to determine the

effectiveness of hope, a sense of calling, and commitment to teach and how it impacts teachers' retention. They discovered that when teachers are signifying their most important goals, "Virtually every teacher focused sharply on students Teachers' remarks indicate how caring for students was not just a matter of emotionally connecting with them, but represented an intellectual activity" (p. 19). During the interview and the online focus group, Noland explained his belief:

I am a Christian. I've been saved 30 years. I love the Lord with all my heart. I know that that's where my strength comes from, in whatever I face. My background, I feel has as far as teaching is concerned. I've always had a love to teach, even in the church, and at home, and it seemed everywhere I go, I have that, I guess, a knack to be able to get my point across. Oh, I honestly believe that every course that I've taken, even at this point in my life right now, and the decisions I'm making, I really believe that God's hand is in it, and I'm going to end up exactly where he wants me to.

Likewise, Nova shared her mindset of helping others, initiated from her childhood, and that her parents instilled in her the importance of education and helping others. Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2012) indicated that the positive influences of teaching as a calling are uncertain. However, "it appears to be more common than generally recognized in the research literature" (p. 8). Equally important and noteworthy is the sense of hope. According to Bullough and Hall-Kenyon, ". . . teachers' hopefulness and their deep commitment to teaching are precious resources, sadly too often taken for granted by parents and policy makers alike" (p. 22). As postulated by Levine (2013), "Hopebuilding strategies used by mid-career teachers might be of great value as a means to support coping and hoping skills, which might positively influence teacher retention" (pp. 70-71).

Implications

The results of this study are important because they provide a voice to the experienced teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina and the motivational factors that sustained their careers beyond the initial three years of teaching. The goal of the researcher was to discover and present a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the shared experiences of experienced teachers. This particular study was important because it explored the lived experiences of rural experienced public school teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing schools and the motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers beyond the initial three years of teaching.

The implications of this study were important in the following ways:

1. This study highlighted the essence of experienced teachers who taught in high-need educational communities and the motivational factors that sustained their careers beyond the initial three years of teaching.
2. This study explored existing gaps in the literature related to teacher sustainability in high-need public schools.
3. This study shared additional attributes of teacher sustainability of teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools in North Carolina by identifying the motivational factors that have sustained them beyond the novice years.
4. This study created a voice for experienced teachers who taught in high-need educational communities, which permits changes in pedagogy, future development of the educational profession, and teacher education programs.
5. This study provided data sources and evidences needed to support current and future studies for teacher sustainability in high-need schools.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework for this study was grounded in the research of Dweck's mindset theory, Knowles' andragogical adult learning theory, and Mezirow's transformative adult learning theory. Carol Dweck's mindset theory highlighted the differences between individuals who possess a fixed versus growth mindset relative to motivation, personality, and individual growth development. Dweck (2006) advocated, "Individuals who possess a growth mindset can develop over time, however, an individual who retains a fixed mindset believes that their qualities are carved in stone" (p. 6). Flexibility, adjustment, and growth indicate that mindset can be positively transformed, which directly enables resilience. Likewise, when individuals possess a growth mindset and are taught specific psychologically based interventions, they become their own change agent (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Mindset theorists affirmed that individuals who possess a growth mindset require minimal self-booster, arise to challenges, pursue aspirations, acknowledge novice opportunities, encourage team cohesion, and preserve humility, which empowers them to be resilient to life's struggles (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Important to this study was Malcom Knowles' andragogical adult learning theory, which signifies the mannerisms of how adults learn, their interactions within their environment, and maturation of life. Holton, Knowles, and Swanson (2005) categorized the four sustainable descriptions of an adult were as follows:

- Biological Period,
- Legal Timeline,
- Social Experiences,
- Psychological Platform.

First, the biological period is the adult age of reproduction. Second, the legal timeline is the age adults can register to vote, have a driver's license, and choose to marry without their parental permission. Third, individuals become adults socially when they can achieve specific roles in societal context, such as working, parenting children, and voting citizenship. Fourth, individuals are considered adults psychologically when they obtain a self-concept conducive to their own responsibilities and self-sufficiency.

Lastly, Mezirow's transformative learning theory supports the understanding of the contextual influences and motivational factors for the participants in sustaining their careers beyond the initial years of teaching in high-need public schools (Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2012). Mezirow's transformative learning theory explains how adults process learning as instrumental and communicative. It also explains how adults attribute their learning qualities as attaining knowledge from experiences and reasoning. Mezirow's transformative theory outlines the epistemology of transformative learning while interchanging with adults, which indicates the reasoning and mannerisms of how adults evaluate their beliefs, learning, critical reflection, workplace, and community (Mezirow, 2003; Synder, 2012).

As discovered in this study, teachers believed their sustainability occurred beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need educational community because of colleagues as family, sense of calling, love for children, contribution to community, and service to others. Colleagues as family were human resources in the school building that helped them sustain their teaching careers beyond the novice years. Likewise, they discussed that sharing ideas, resources, and expertise with other educators had a profound positive impact on their teaching sustainability. By acknowledging their colleagues as family, the participants indicated that their confidence, longevity, and academic growth enabled them to sustain their careers.

Sustainability and growth mindset occurred because of colleague support from the beginning of participants' careers. Faith noted that her growth mindset began to develop as a result of receiving help and support from colleagues when she first began her career. She struggled with locating resources. Therefore, various teacher colleagues shared resources and showed her how to incorporate strategies to meet the needs of the students. As a result, Faith began modeling that same support with novice teachers each year by providing resources, materials, and best practices for students' success and teacher sustainability. Lastly, adult learning theory, derived from Knowles' andragogical adult learning theory and Mezirow's transformative learning theory, was used in the theoretical framework of this study. According to Knowles (1975), adults require the following elements in order to learn effectively: (a) knowledge of why and what they are learning, (b) a self-concept that involves ownership and responsibilities to life's decisions, (c) an understanding of their role in lived experiences, (d) readiness to learn context, (e) an orientation to learning with a task-centered approach, and (f) motivation to learn. In the present study, participants shared the importance of collectively meeting with school building stakeholders and the foundational support of colleagues, students, and families. As stated from the participants, there was a union and trust between the teachers that enabled them to support one another and all their hard work.

Empirical Implications

As noted in the related literature and grounded in this study, a continual upheaval occurs each year in the public educational school system with high teacher turnover. Teachers are leaving the profession after the first five years and transferring to an alternate profession (Shernoff et. al., 2011). Compounded with high teacher turnover is the high-need, low-performing status of numerous schools in southeastern North Carolina, according to student

achievement and the number of students receiving free breakfast and lunch. Orange (2014) stated that “failing schools tend to have higher rates of teacher turnover and often employ larger numbers of teachers working with emergency certification” (p. 1). Likewise, the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality (as cited in Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor (2010) discovered that approximately 30% of students who attended high-need schools were taught by teachers who were not properly licensed. Often, teachers experience a sense of helplessness when trying to acclimate within a high-need school.

According to numerous researchers (Claeys, 2011; Dagenhart, Petty, & O’Connor, 2010; Meister & Ahrens, 2011; Okojie, 2011; Phuntsog, 1999; Shernoff, Mariñez-Lora, Frazier, Jakobsons, Atkins, & Bonner, 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013), studies have shown that the constellation of community and connectedness are positive motivational factors in sustaining teachers beyond the first five years in the classroom. Likewise, obtaining an understanding of the student populace in urban and rural schools also postures teacher retention and sustainability. In a study conducted by Meister and Ahrens (2011), four veteran teachers were asked about their continual enthusiasm for teaching; they each shared that dedication to students and their career—along with self-initiated support systems, resiliency characteristics, and their resistance to plateauing—distinguished longevity in their careers.

The results of this study support the view that having an experienced colleague, an educational family, and a sense of connectedness positively impacts teacher sustainability in a high-need public school. Significantly important to this study was prior research, which indicated the negative impact of teacher sustainability when teachers felt that colleagues did not support them or recognize their expertise in specific specialty areas (Anderson & Stilman, 2011; Cooper & He, 2011; Orange, 2014). However, the majority of participants in the present study,

recognized the cohesive environment and support systems acquired in their educational communities.

Practical Implications

According to former research, administrative support is one of the primary purposes of teacher retention in high-need public schools (Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Castro & He, 2011; Levine, 2013). However, in the present study, only a few experienced teachers acknowledged their administrators as having an impact in sustaining their careers. Noele shared the positive outcome in her career as a result of her administrators' support, indicating that she only had worked under two principals. She extended her experiences and gratitude of her administrators by sharing administrative support that allowed her to live her vision and pursue goals for students with various grants and programs. Also, Norma explained the positive impact her former administrator had in her career with professional growth that directly impacted her sustainability. She shared how her former administrator was reared in the high-need community and chose to break away from poverty to pursue her educational dreams. Norma believed that, if her administrator could be professionally successful, she and her students could as well. As noted in this study, the voices of the experienced teachers conveyed that colleagues as family, sense of calling, love for children, contribution to community, and service to others were the ultimate factors in sustaining their careers beyond the initial three years of teaching in high-need public schools.

Limitations

Though conducted with a careful research design, the study is limited by the following factors. First, participants' ethnicities consisted of only Caucasian and African-American. Second, the teachers were limited to those who taught in public schools. Third, a limited

diversity among the participants because of being centrally located in the southeastern region of North Carolina, rather than additional school districts in other states, is acknowledged. Fourth, this particular study was conducted in one public school district rather than additional school districts in North Carolina. Fifth, all participants taught in the same school district. Sixth, only four of the 13 participants participated in the online focus group. Therefore, this study concedes that the motivational factors and experiences of the experienced teachers may not reflect the diverse perspectives and teacher sustainability of other ethnicities, ages, novice years of experience, and geographical locations.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to describe the motivational factors that sustained experienced teachers who taught in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina. Future research that may be beneficial to the educational community would be to study experienced teachers who teach in non-high-need public schools within North Carolina and surrounding states. Specifically, what are the motivational factors that sustain experienced teachers beyond the initial three years in public schools in North Carolina and other states?

Likewise, replicating this study in an urban school district would pose interest. In a more urban area of the county, the population may be more diverse and the socioeconomic status could ultimately impact the results of this study. Thus, if the school is very large, the colleague support, contribution to community, and service to others may be different.

An additional recommendation is to conduct a similar study with charter schools and parochial schools that serve students in a high-need, low-performing educational community. The teachers in charter schools and parochial schools often have different guidelines and protocol for diversity and accountability according to state regulations. Likewise, the teachers in

these schools may sustain their teaching careers beyond the initial three years. Questions to be considered in conducting a similar study in charter schools and parochial schools, compared to a public school, are as follows:

What are the student expectations?

What are the standardized testing requirements and expectations?

Are there systematic supports distributed equally among all teachers?

Lastly, a quantitative study could be explored on the effectiveness of teacher sustainability and student achievement in a high-need, low-performing public school. Such a study would afford teachers the opportunity to observe the professional longevity that was attained and the students' accomplishments through data collection. The researcher could then measure the effectiveness of teacher sustainability and the direct correlation with student achievement.

Recommendations for Teachers

As often heard in the educational community, educators are lifelong learners. The primary goal of teachers stems from the knowledge attained as they mature through life as adults and transform from life's lessons with a growth mindset of acquisition. Therefore, as the participants shared throughout this study, their growth mindset developed because of support from others, contribution to the community, their dedication to teach and service to others, their love for the children, and a sense of calling. From the voice of a participant during the online focus group, Noah stated:

I look at being at a high-need public school, as I'm highly needed, too, to help turn things around with having longevity. And intrinsically I love what I teach and helping others.

Seems like I'm needed and appreciated. Also, I feel like I'm a conduit in helping people help their students.

Recommendations for Administrators

During this study, participants shared the significance of administrative support both positively and negatively. A few of the participants shared the importance of administrative support and how that support has helped sustain their careers. Noele noted that her administrators continually advocated for teachers. She also indicated that her administrators understood the poverty-stricken dynamics of the students and their families. Likewise, Noele explained that her administrators provided resources for all teachers in the building.

High-need schools need to be staffed with administrators who possess a forward-thinking mindset, understand the community, and have knowledge of the curriculum. Contrary to supportive administrators, a few participants shared their frustrations involving non-supportive administrative staff. One participant noted that staff morale remained low in her building due to non-recognition of accomplishments of the teachers and paraprofessionals. Also, a lack of communication and being invisible in the school building on a consistent basis were all frustrations involving non-supportive administrators. Another participant shared frustrations at his school where the administrator turnover was ongoing. He noted that he had worked under three principals and at least seven assistant principals in eight years. The conflict was the inexperience and the expectations differing from each administrator. Lastly, several participants shared their concerns involving the inconsistencies with behavioral interventions, and programs being upheld and consistent expectations in the school building. Some of the participants shared alarming concerns with administrators not supporting them when needed for behavioral

interventions. One participant conveyed that his administrator would often blame him for the students' inappropriate behaviors when referring students for disciplinary needs.

Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs

Finally, experienced teachers play a vital role in the success of students. Often students' academic achievements are governed by the quality and experiences of their teachers. A mounting conflict arises each year among public education indicating teachers are leaving the profession and pursuing an alternate career, specifically teachers who teach in high-need schools. In the present study, seven participants pursued and completed a traditional track during their teacher education experiences. However, six of the 13 participants completed their credentials via an alternative track as second-career teachers. Therefore, a challenge and need exists among universities and colleges to prepare student-teachers for the opportunities to teach in high-need, low-performing schools and to observe and support the student teachers in high-need, low-performing schools when assigned. In addition, courses need to be offered at the universities for student-teachers that expound upon the diversity of communities where they may teach in their clinical experiences and in their future employment. Lastly, university supervisors, content experts, and clinical teachers should be required to educate themselves with a better understanding of children who live in poverty and the general outcomes.

Recommendations for Local Central Services Administration

Some of the participants in the present study indicated that as a state and local public school system—specific representations, district-wide expectations, and the dedication of all schools—should be recognized beginning with the state board of education. In support of teachers and all stakeholders in the building, the facilities should be presentable and clean. Likewise, the participants shared their concern for balance across the district. They indicated

that the high-need schools are not recognized and supported in the district. Often, the high-achieving schools received additional programs and funding. Whereas, the high-need schools did not receive additional programs and funding advancements. A few participants shared their concerns relative to the unclean facilities of their schools. Teacher sustainability is highly prevalent in high-need public schools where teachers feel that their local school board and leadership constituents are invested in their careers and their communities.

Summary

This study was comprised of 13 participants who shared their experiences while teaching in high-need educational communities in southeastern North Carolina. They shared their experiences via individual interviews, reflective photo-narrative documentation, and an online focus group. Teachers shared a timeline of their educational journeys gathered from the interview and focus group questions, photo-narrative reflections, and the three research questions. Interestingly, when the teachers were asked to share photo-narratives of the “teachers they had become,” they paused for a moment to genuinely reflect upon their journeys exhibiting pride for all their accomplishments through the lens of the constellation of children and their families, whose lives they had shared, spanning from 8 to 35 years in the profession. From the voices of the participants, it is discovered that their colleagues as family, sense of calling, love for children, contribution to community, and service to others are the motivational factors that sustained their teaching careers teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Teacher,

As a doctoral student at Liberty University, I am conducting research regarding experienced teachers who have sustained their teaching careers beyond the initial three years of teaching in public schools that are identified as high-need, low-performing according to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina State Report Card data, situated in southeastern North Carolina. Thus, the purpose of this questionnaire is to identify potential participants. If you are willing to do so, please take a moment to complete the questionnaire below and email back to me mcasey15@liberty.edu.

1. How many years have you been a teacher in North Carolina?
2. How did you receive your NC teaching license (i.e., traditional tract or alternate license)?
3. Have you taught more than three consecutive years in your current school assignment?
4. Is the school where you teach, considered a Title 1, high-need, or low-performing school in North Carolina?
5. If I have other questions, may I contact you again?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT SUSTAIN EXPERIENCED TEACHERS IN HIGH-NEED, LOW-PERFORMING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Michelle S. Casey
Liberty University
School of Education

Dear Participant: You are invited to participate in a research study of experienced teachers who teach in high-need, low-performing schools in the local school system located in the southeastern region of North Carolina. You were selected as a potential participant because (1) you are identified as an experienced public school teacher, (2) you teach in a high-need, low-performing public school, and (3) you have been teaching for more than three years. I ask that you read this form and ask specific questions prior to your agreement to participate in the research study.

This study is being conducted by: Michelle S. Casey, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe factors that sustain public school teachers in high-need areas in North Carolina. For the purpose of this study, the sustainability of teachers is generally defined as teachers who remain in a high-need, low-performing public school located in southeastern North Carolina beyond the initial three years of teaching. For the purpose of this study, public school teachers are identified as those who have been teaching beyond the initial three years of their profession, recognizing the literature indicates a gap in research with teachers who remain beyond the first three years of teaching (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Gimbert & Fultz, 2010; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). The problem is that research has explored teachers' attrition, retention, and burnout (Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013); however, minimal qualitative research exists in acquiring an understanding of the factors that sustain teachers beyond the initial years of teaching in high-need schools (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014; Levine, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012).

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to answer the following questions honestly, based on your own personal and professional experiences serving as an experienced teacher in a high need public school and your reasoning for sustaining your career beyond the initial first three years of teaching.

- 1.) Meet with the researcher for an initial brief introduction and description of the study in your designated school (20 minutes).
- 2.) Participate in a semi-structured interview that will be audio-recorded for approximately one hour, where I will ask 10 questions related to: (a) your experiences while teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school, (b) your perception of your former life history as having an impact in retaining your teaching profession beyond the initial three years of teaching, (c) intrinsic motivational factors that contributed to you pursuing a degree in the specific concentration and grade level, (d) motivational factors that have enabled your sustainability beyond the first three years in a high-need educational environment, (e) specific factors that positively impact your role as a teacher, and (f) opportunities that you would alter from your experience as a teacher teaching in a high-need public school in North Carolina (1 hour).
- 3.) Participate in an online Focus Group via Google Hangout where the same topics will be discussed (1 hour).
- 4.) Participate in collective photo-narrative documentation (Synder, 2012) which will highlight the “teacher you have become” in non-designated areas (e.g., classroom, school, home, etc.) and write a brief description of the photo submitted per a narrative format (15-30 minutes).
- 5.) Participate in member checking, which encompasses the review of data to check for the researcher’s accuracy in the interpretation of the collected data (less than 1 hour).

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

Risks: This research requires minimal risk and is no greater than everyday activities.

Benefits: The results of this study will provide a deeper understanding of the motivational factors that sustain experienced teachers beyond the initial three years of teaching in a high-need, low-performing public school in southeastern North Carolina. Thus, there are possible benefits for teachers and educational stakeholders for future teacher sustainability with retaining teachers beyond the first three years of teaching in a high-need public school in the southeastern region of North Carolina. Ultimately, it is been proven in the educational community that sustaining teachers in their career benefits the overall achievement of students. During the progression of educational psychology, research, and theories, it is proposed, a student’s academic achievement is governed by the quality of his or her teacher.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for participants in this study.

Confidentiality

The records of this qualitative study will be kept private. In the event, the study is published or reports are derived from the study, I will not include any information that will disclose the participant’s identity. Thus, research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. The information shared in the participant enlistment questionnaire referencing your years of experience, concentration area, grade level

assignment, acquisition of teaching licensure, and high-need, low-performing school status will be reported in the study, however, all this information will be tagged to the pseudonym. Audio recordings will only be accessed by the researcher as well as an outside person who will transcribe all recordings. All electronic data will be password protected, and all hard copy paper documents will be stored and secured in a safe, fire retardant locked file cabinet. At the end of three years, all these documents and recordings will be destroyed. Due to the nature of the focus group, the researcher cannot assure that members of the group maintain confidentiality and participant privacy during this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your present or future associations with Liberty University. Likewise, if you decide to participate, you are free to discard any question during the interview or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from this Study

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in this context. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, however, your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this qualitative study is Michelle S. Casey. You may ask any specific questions. If you have questions at any time during and or after the study, **you are encouraged** to contact the researcher at mcasey15@liberty.edu or (919) 631-7248. You may also contact the researcher's facility advisor, Dr. Sam Smith at sjsmith3@liberty.edu.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this particular study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Carter 134, 1971 University Blvd, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the above information, I have asked questions and received answers. I consent to participate in this qualitative study.

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

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 3, 2016

Michelle Casey

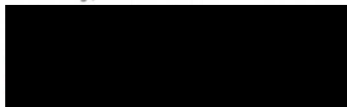
IRB Approval 2519.050316: Motivational Factors That Sustain Experienced Teachers in High-Need, Low-Performing Public Schools in North Carolina: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Michelle,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



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APPENDIX D: LETTER TO SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dear Mr. Superintendent,

My name is Michelle Casey, and I am a graduate student at Liberty University pursuing a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership. Mrs. BT Coordinator referred me to you as the person to contact requesting approval to conduct research in your school district. I am working on a qualitative study regarding motivational factors that sustain teachers in high-need, low-performing public schools in southeastern North Carolina. I am asking permission to conduct my research with teachers who teach all grade levels in schools identified as high-need, low-performing in your district. I am interested in conducting my research in your school district because of my professional interest and the ultimate goal to describe what intrinsically and extrinsically motivates teachers in the schools that are considered high-need, low-performing to sustain their career beyond the initial years of teaching. From my research, literature highlights studies relative to teacher attrition and burnout, however, no studies describe the motivational factors that sustain teachers who teach in high-need public schools specifically in southeastern North Carolina. Likewise, research shares the environmental and academic needs of students but no studies have been discovered to describe what motivates teachers in low-performing schools to sustain their career in high-need areas. I currently serve as an instructional coach with the North Carolina New Teacher Support Program (NC NTSP) via East Carolina University in your school district and have served the district for three years. Therefore, I am genuinely invested in your school district and the sustainability of teachers in high-need educational environments.

The purpose of the study is to explore the motivational factors that sustain public school teachers in their career who continue to teach beyond the initial years when teaching in a high-need, low-

performing public school in southeastern North Carolina. Data will be collected in three methods: Individual interviews, online focus group, and photo-generated documentation. I will conduct individual interviews with the teachers who are willing to participate. I will conduct the interviews outside of school hours. In addition, I will request participants to take no more than three photos of moments that indicate “the teachers they have become,” according to research this lessens teachers’ instructional time compared to additional interviews. These photos can be taken in their classrooms, schools, homes, or other memorable environments to capture their teacher sustainability. No children will be included in the photographs or in the research in any capacity. My data collection will not disrupt the school day or learning environment. All identifiable information will be omitted and pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality for the teachers, schools, and the district. There are no known risks associated with this research. This study is beneficial to the educational academia due to the fact that information will be attained about teachers’ motivation and lived experiences of teacher sustainability and how to support them in the educational community.

Thank you for taking time to consider my request. If there is another individual or method of communication needed in the district, please share or forward this information. Feel free to email (caseym14@ecu.edu) or call me (919-631-7248), if you have questions, concerns, or need additional clarification of the study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,
Michelle Casey

APPENDIX E: EXCERPT FROM REFLECTIVE JOURNAL NOTESExcerpt Reflection from One Interview

May 11, 2016 @ 3:00-4:00 pm (Franklin Middle School)

Franco Interview #5 (37:20)

As a lifelong learner, partnered with serving as an educational coach, I find it difficult to refrain from sharing my thoughts and experiences when interviewing teachers. I am ultimately a people-person, therefore, for most, I enjoy dialogue with individuals especially educators. This is my fifth interview and the participant struggled somewhat to answer the interview questions. Therefore, I had to consciously not answer the questions and found myself talking more trying to retrieve information from the participant. I continuously had to reword the questions and elaborate to attain responses from the participant. The participant noted that he was naturally shy, exhibited an introverted personality, and is comfortable in his own place. As a result, this was a teachable moment for me, noting that with the remaining interviews, I will patiently wait for the participant to respond and if he (she) asks, I will elaborate the interview question.

As I reflect, I am reminded of my position in the study and the boundaries that are present for gathering information and refraining from my own perspective. I consciously have to remain objective as I listen to the participants, write notes as they answer questions, and maintain a human interchange so that I do not appear non-interested. This consciousness allows me to gather the essence of the participants and their individual experiences. Although my extroverted personality is physically known, I have to respect the roles involved in the study (the researcher and the participants). Overall, the interview was successful, however, the duration was lengthy with a lot of empty space due to the delay in answering questions. A great lesson learned today.

Excerpt Reflection from Focus Group Discussion

June 2, 2016 @ 5:00-6:00 pm (WebEx Meeting)

Focus Group Discussion (55:00)

Four Participants: Francesca, Noah, Noland, and Noele

Initially when the Focus Group Discussion was scheduled, two of the participants experienced technical difficulties with Google Hangout. I emailed Dr. Smith (chair) to confirm I could utilize a different online program and wouldn't have to go back to IRB for approval.

Therefore, we had to reschedule the discussion. The rescheduling posed problems with the initial four participants who volunteered to participate due to standardized testing schedules.

As a result, I corresponded via email messages requesting other participants to participate while at the same time trying to have varied representation in the Focus Group (i.e., different schools, different grade levels, years of experience, gender, and ethnicity). Whew! What a challenge. Serving as an educator in the public education system for 20 years, I know the complications with scheduling during End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC).

Hence, the purpose in planning the initial interviews and focus group discussion prior to the end of May.


During the Focus Group Discussion, the four participants shared dialogue and emphasized in depth context they shared during their individual interviews. The focus group questions guided the conversation and each participant was very appreciative of each other and discussed the opportunity to network in the school district. Likewise, the participants were complimentary of each other's dedication to teach and their love for children. There were a lot of laughs and humor during the discussion and somewhat of an enlightened sense of connectedness and recognition of how each participant serving in a high-need, low-performing school in the same public school district has their own set of issues and praises. Each participant exhibited no hesitation in sharing their educational journey teaching in a high-need, low-performing school and shared specific motivational factors that sustains their decision to teach in a high-need educational community with no thoughts of leaving. As Noah stated, "If not me, then who."

At the end of the discussion, the four participants received an audio-recording of the meeting via WebEx software for them to listen and share input, which was a part of member checking for accuracy. Each participant accepted the discussion with no changes, and was very grateful for the opportunity.

APPENDIX F: COLLECTIVE PHOTO-NARRATIVE DOCUMENTATION

Goal: To visually capture insight about your growth as an experienced teacher indicating “the teacher you have become” (Synder, 2012). As indicated in research, “Human beings are best understood in relation to their environment . . . reflexive photography can aid in understanding how meaning is formed when individuals interact with their environments” (Schulze, 2007, p. 552)

Directions: Utilizing your Smart device, please take 2-3 photos of experiences that illustrate your professional growth (e.g., school, home, community, church, children, students, professors, colleagues, family, etc.) or attach existing photos that allow you to define yourself as a professional teacher in whatever capacity you choose. Afterward, upload your photos into the rectangle-shaped box below as a collage. In the lined bottom section (underneath the photos), please write a brief description in a narrative formation of the “teacher you have become.” Thank you for your participation in this study.



References

Schulze, S. (2007). The usefulness of reflexive photography for qualitative research: A case study in higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21(5), 536-553.

Snyder, C. (2012). Finding the "royal road" to learning to teach: Listening to novice teacher voices in order to improve the effectiveness of teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 39(4), 33-53. Retrieved from http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA322480293&v=2.1&u=vic_liberty&it=r&p=ONE&sw=w&asid=cf8dde209285837c0e0acd25802fbaa

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT PRELIMINARY-FINAL REVIEW

Participant	Interview Date	Preliminary Review/Final Review	Photo-Narrative	Sent/Acceptance	Changes
Faith	5/9/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We had more resources • Common Core, there was no resources that were given to us. We had to go into and find our own resources • I could see a decline after there was no books and no resources and this new program was opened up to us, but nothing else was given to us to help lead us and motivate the children into what they needed to know • My father was a teacher. And I saw my father having a lot of fun with the kids. He was a coach. • It's been the support system that I have here at this school. We are like a family. • Encouraging support system here as a family and that's why I have stayed here. • But it's just been a progression of what somebody needed me to do. So I would fall into that position of whatever and wherever I was needed to help the school as a whole to be a success and be successful. • I think that it's the children, I mean being here with the children. Wanting to help them meet their goals and succeed as a middle schooler. And then my main goal with all children that come in here, is to make them aware that my main objective for them is to graduate from high school. • My goal is to make everyone feel successful. • And I wanted to be able stay in my local area where I was born and raised and try to make a difference in the area that I was born and raised in. • I think that my spiritual background is one of the things. I don't actively come in and tell the students what I believe. But I have a strong belief in my Lord Jesus Christ and my Savior. 	5/12/2016	5/30/2016 5/31/2016	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would alter that they would provide more resources for the teachers to be successful in their particular grade or grade levels. • I would like to see that the teacher pay be increased in a fair, evenly distributed way. • People are not going into the educational field because they are not compensated for the hours that they put in. It's a 24/7 job. I never quit working. When I get off work, I'm still continuing to work. I work every weekend • More needs. It's become an increase in needs for the children. I can see that the motivation of the children is not as high as it used to be. • I've seen a reduction, too, in the parent concerns. 		
Francesca	5/9/2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have always worked in high needs facilities and every school I've ever been in has been Title I school. • I have to say I know that I was making a difference and that they need strong teachers • My home. I have two parents, they were married in their 20s. I have two college-educated parents. • I think that my experiences in school in my own personal life probably makes a difference because a lot of the people that I went to school with, because I really went to the inner city schools. I teach some of the same exact children now and grandchildren of those people I went to school with. • I love math. I love animals. I love science. I love all kinds of nonfiction. I am a real cut and dry person. • And I will say I had great teachers, and those teachers probably were what inspired me. • I saw a difference that I was making in kids' lives, they would tell me. • They come back and tell you, 'You just don't know how much you helped me.' It was amazing because I would say, where did that come from? Like I'd never thought I'd hear that. And because I've stayed in the same area. • I am where I'm supposed to be and I 	5/19/2016	6/2/2016 6/5/2016

really don't have any better explanation for that.

- Loyal commitment
 - Administrative support. The number one is the administrator. The administration makes a significant difference.
 - More parental and community involvement and how that's done.
 - What could we do to make it a cooler thing or a popular thing to go to work, to go to school, get an education, live right? It's not really that they don't have the ability to do that, a lot of them have very high intelligence
 - You work twenty times harder at a place like that. Like, I would be exhausted in the afternoon. I almost felt like I was going to war on some days.
 - A lot of teachers who were good teachers are now getting disgruntled.
 - Which I haven't been under Mr. [Principal] very long. You could come on the intercom and say, such and such is doing so and so. That wouldn't cost anything. If they do recognize teachers.
 - Sometimes I feel like that they don't leave administrators in one place long enough for them to make a difference. It's like as soon as we get used to someone, golly, we're getting another person.
-

APPENDIX H: VERBAL SCRIPT TO PARTICIPANTS

Good Afternoon,

My name is Michelle Casey, and I am conducting research in the school district. I have formally received permission via Mr. Superintendent, the Beginning Teacher (BT) Coordinator, and your principal to discuss the possibility of you participating in the study. Mrs. BT Coordinator shared your name as a possible candidate in the study; therefore, you are invited to participate in a research study encompassing experienced teachers who teach in high-need schools in the local school system of North Carolina. Likewise, you were selected as a potential participant because (1) you are identified as an experienced public school teacher, (2) you teach in a high-need, low-performing public school, and (3) you have been teaching for more than three years.

The study hopes to hear the voices of experienced teachers who teach in high-need schools in the district and have sustained their careers beyond the initial three years of teaching. In other words, there is a lot of research and conversations about students in high-need schools and their achievement; however, I have discovered no research about motivational factors that sustain experienced teachers in high-need public schools in southeastern North Carolina. Therefore, I am interested in hearing what you have to share about your educational experiences in a high-need school and your sustainability.

I have an enlistment questionnaire and an informed consent form for you to read and sign if you are interested in participating in the study. Pertinent information is explained in the consent form (i.e., background information, purpose, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, voluntary nature of the study, and withdraw procedures). If you agree to participate in the study, I would like to schedule an interview today at the end of our introductory meeting or via an email message. Likewise, if you agree to participate in the study, you will complete the following:

1. Meet with me (the researcher) for an initial brief introduction and description of the study (20 minutes)
2. Complete the Enlistment Questionnaire (15 minutes)
3. Participate in a semi-structured interview where you will be audio-recorded (1 hour)
4. Participate in an online Focus Group via Google Hangout (1 hour)
5. Participate in collective photo-narrative documentation (given to you today), which will highlight the “teacher you have become” (Synder, 2012) and write a brief description of the photo(s) submitted in a narrative format (15-30 minutes).
6. Participate in member checking, which encompasses you reviewing the transcription from your recorded interview for accuracy in the interpretation of the collected data (30 minutes).

Thank you for your time and willingness to share your voice in the study.