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Understanding the motivations of teachers at high-poverty schools what draws them and how do we keep them?

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UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS OF TEACHERS AT HIGH-POVERTY
SCHOOLS: WHAT DRAWS THEM AND HOW DO WE KEEP THEM?

by

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and the School of Education, George Fox University
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George Fox University
School of Education
Newberg, Oregon

“UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATIONS OF TEACHERS AT HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS: WHAT DRAWS THEM AND HOW DO WE KEEP THEM?” a Doctoral research project prepared by JULIE ANN OWENS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department.

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Abstract

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to explore the motivation of teachers who enter the teaching profession and stay in the profession in a high-poverty, diverse, Title I school. This study involved interviews with a small sample of elementary teachers and included the use of personal self-reflections. Through purposive and snowball sampling, the researcher selected six licensed, elementary teachers from a school in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Each of these participants had more than three years of teaching experience in the identified setting. Through interviews with and reflective journal entries from each participant, this researcher explored three areas of interest: (1) participants' original motivations to teach, (2) participants' motivations for choosing to teach in a high-poverty, diverse, Title I school, and (3) the participants' motivations to stay in their current teaching positions within this school setting. The themes that emerged from the participants regarding their motivations to teach included personal quality of life, personal fulfillment, and relationships with mentors. Next, half the participants described choosing to teach in a high-poverty, diverse, Title I school, while the other half stated that the school chose them. Finally, participants described several factors that influenced them to stay within the profession, including personal quality of life, making a difference, relationships with colleagues, and relationships with families and students.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The effects of poverty on a child's educational experience can be devastating. There are approximately 2.2 billion children in the world, with poverty affecting many (Shah, 2008). In the United States, the number of children living in poverty has increased by 9% since 2000, with approximately one in six children being affected (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010).

Relative poverty, when a family's income does not meet social standards, stands at one end of the spectrum; absolute poverty, at the other end, can mean lack of shelter, nutrition, and running water (Jensen, 2009). Poverty can be situational, such as when a parent loses a job, or generational, with families living in poverty for their entire lives (Jensen, 2009). Influencing factors include the family's income, how many people live in the family, and geographical considerations.

Poverty is not a new problem in The United States and it is not difficult to find teachers with a desire to teach in high-poverty areas; however, teacher retention has been a problem for many years. The U.S. Department of Education surveys teachers every year from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. During the 2008-2009 school year, 8% of the 3,380,300 public school teachers surveyed left the teaching profession (leavers); another 7.6% moved to different schools (movers) (Keigher, 2010). Within the first three years of teaching, 19% were leavers with another 13.7% becoming movers. A 1997 study showed that the highest rates of leavers and movers were from schools deemed "disadvantaged" – that is, schools with fewer experienced teachers (fewer than three years in the profession), a high number of students on free or reduced price lunches, and a high population of minority students (Shen, 1997).

As a classroom teacher in a high-poverty, highly diverse school, I find the disproportionate rate of attrition among these teachers of particular interest. The bond between a

student and teacher can be a powerful one. For a child stricken by poverty, that bond may be one of the few constants in his or her life. In my own experience, I have watched these valuable relationships end as teachers move on to other careers, moving away from the disadvantaged students who have grown to love them. Additionally, being an adjunct professor of education, I want to understand better how to help these teaching candidates stay in the career path they have chosen, despite the challenges they will face. The research lends itself to helping teachers already in the profession. However, in my situation of teaching at both an elementary level and university level I see the need to connect the research with pre-service teachers to help lower the attrition rate at an early stage. This has led me to wonder: What brought these teachers into the teaching profession in the first place? Why do those teaching choose to do so in disadvantaged neighborhoods? For those that stay, what is it that allows them to continue the work they do with children in a school that receives financial assistance for having high numbers or percentages of poor students (Title I) schools?

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives provided by teachers serving high-poverty, high diversity schools. Using personal interviews within a narrative inquiry framework, I documented the professional and personal journeys that led a small sample of teachers to the teaching profession, focusing especially in the work they have done in a Title I school. I also sought to understand the mitigating factors that keep them teaching in such a community.

Research Questions

The research questions were broad at the beginning stages and remained that way, with

the use of guiding questions along the way to keep the participants on topic. Specifically, I sought to answer three questions:

1. Research Question #1: Why did the study's participants decide to become teachers?
2. Research Question #2: What factors drew the participants to teach in a diverse, Title I school?
3. Research Question #3: What has kept the participants teaching there?

Through recorded oral interviews, and by giving each participant the freedom to share the rich details of personal experiences, I analyzed and interpreted this shared information to find common themes among the participants' stories.

Definition of Terms

Attrition – This is a component of teacher turnover. Attrition occurs when an educator either leaves the teaching profession altogether or transfers within the field of education to a specific program, such as special education, or to a different school and/or district.

Diversity – There are many definitions of diversity. For the purpose of this study, diversity will refer to a student's ethnic and/or racial background in comparison to a student's America-born, Caucasian classroom peers. For example, while a student is classified Caucasian on a registration form, they may have emigrated with their family from Russia and would still be considered a minority within the district. On the other hand, a student may have been born in America but be of African descent.

Leavers – Refers to those teachers who are leaving their teaching position in the classroom to obtain a position within a school district that is outside the classroom setting. This category may include, but is not limited to, those seeking employment as administrators, teachers on special

assignment (TOSA), or those entering another field within the K-12 department. It also refers to those teachers seeking employment outside the educational setting, or not returning to work at all.

Motivation – Motivation is the reason for acting or doing something a certain way; it can be driven through intrinsic or extrinsic factors. One way to look at this is with students. Are the teachers motivated to teach because they feel an internal sense of satisfaction or because they get an extrinsic reward such as their salary? Performing for a positive feeling would be an intrinsic motivation, whereas performing for the material reward would be extrinsic motivation. This paper will look at intrinsic and extrinsic factors for educators entering and remaining in the teaching profession.

Movers – Refers to those educators who move from their current teaching position to another teaching position. This transfer may occur within the same school district, or may occur within another district, either in the same state or outside the original teaching state. In addition, it may also include those teachers who obtain a teaching position outside of the United States.

Poverty – A person lives in poverty if he or she meets the standards set forth by the U.S. Census Bureau. As of 2012, the poverty threshold for a family of three is \$18,480 and a family of four is \$23,283 (additional figures are set forth in Appendix A).

Stayers – Refers to teachers who stay in their teaching position at the same school. It might also include those teachers who do a grade transfer, but maintain their teaching status within the same school.

Title I – According to the Oregon Department of Education, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a Title I school is one that receives financial assistance for having high numbers or percentages of poor students.

Limitations and Delimitations

One of the limitations in using a narrative inquiry framework was that I worked with the stories of a small sampling of teachers at one Title I school, which may not represent what all Title I educators feel nationwide. While this study did not provide a global picture of all educators' feelings, the tight focus did provide personal stories that were rich in detail and insight from one specific Title I school in which the majority of the teachers felt the work environment to be negative for any of a variety of reasons.

One of the delimitations to this dissertation project was that one researcher completed it over limited time. Additionally, the majority of participants were female; this was because the interviews occurred at only one Title I elementary school, where the population of male teachers was limited. By choosing to focus on one school, I was able to eliminate other outside variables that could have had an impact on the attrition rates of teachers within the district that leave, stay, and move. In addition, I chose to interview classroom teachers who have remained in a Title I school longer than three years, which is within the period for the highest rate of attrition.

Another possible delimitation was in regards to my personal relationship with many of the study's participants. This could have potentially invited personal bias on both my part and the part of my participants. However, having an established trust system with the participants, I was able to engender a level of honesty not necessarily experienced with participants in other studies. I was cognizant of the need to fully explore each participant's story so that I correctly interpreted what he or she said, not distorting the information provided for my benefit as explained by Creswell (2007). I was able to do this through the approach of *writ large* as described by Creswell, "taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (2007, p. 208).

Summary

In the interest of developing a better understanding of teacher attrition in high-poverty schools, I used in-depth personal interviews to gain insight into what draws and keeps teachers working at Title I schools. Searching for commonalities among these teachers who have stayed may help offer insight into what makes others leave, thus helping to reduce the high rate of attrition. In Chapter Two, I survey literature related to this study, reviewing educators' motivations, the effects of poverty on children and teacher expectations of these children, and the rate of attrition among teachers.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The Great Depression severely burdened the condition of education in the United States following the stock market crash of 1929. Many families were unemployed, or under-employed, leaving them unable to pay the taxes needed to keep schools funded. Many schools closed, including schools for handicapped children, summer schools, and kindergartens. Additionally, teachers took salary cuts and many faced lay-offs. Many students could not afford the supplies asked of them, nor could their families afford the mandatory tuition (Webb, 2006).

Unemployment rates continued to increase throughout the 1930s, leaving many families unable to pay their bills. Men often packed up and rode the rails in hopes of finding work in other areas, leaving their wives and families behind. Some families packed up together and went to search for work, becoming migrant workers for farmers. Farmers in California found it cheaper to hire migrant workers from the South, or even to bring in workers from China and other countries (Nelson, 2008).

In response to issues brought about by the Great Depression, the government implemented a New Deal Education Program. The federal government created programs to help deliver services to poor students, including the Civilian Conservation Camp, the National Youth Administration, and the Public Works Administration. Each of these programs allotted federal dollars to the upkeep of dilapidated buildings, created jobs, and provided continued education for the unemployed. Literacy rates improved. The New Deal sought to address national poverty issues, with the reformers seeking solutions (Webb, 2006). The solutions provided were not comprehensive enough to provide opportunities for everyone.

In spite of economic relief that came in the 1940s and 1950s, poverty continued to plague our nation, creating significant issues regarding education for young children. In the 1960s, nearly 25% of the United States lived in poverty (Webb, 2006). Reformers of the time felt that children living in poverty were not receiving proper education, leading to the Vocational Education Act of 1963, which provided federal money for vocational training for educators (Webb, 2006). In 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson addressed Congress regarding the war on poverty, exposing the day-to-day struggle of those affected by financial disadvantage. Impoverished Americans faced living in squalor, poor health, a lack of education, and racial injustice (Johnson, 1964). President Johnson proposed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, a call to action to create new opportunities for the impoverished. The Act would provide educational and work opportunities to the underprivileged, and provide the entire nation with a plan to attack poverty (Johnson, 1964). This included increasing welfare services, access to improved health care, and improving inner-city schools (Webb, 2006).

One of the most important programs to come from the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was the Head Start program. This program aimed at providing an education to disadvantaged children who would not normally be able to attend school (Webb, 2006). As Johnson (1964) put it in his message to Congress, the Head Start program would provide children of poverty access to a foundation of knowledge.

From the 1960s to present day, the breadth of poverty has not decreased. In fact, neither has the need for highly motivated teachers to teach in such impoverished areas. However, retaining motivated teachers in schools in poverty-stricken areas continues to be an issue: “The issue of teacher attrition is even more apparent and critical in rural and disadvantaged areas”

(Ewing & Manuel, 2005, p. 2). The issues of poverty and education together lend themselves to the need to search for strong, reliable teachers who choose to stay in their profession, in order to “make a real difference in the lives of the next generation” and to “provide hope” (Nadel & Sagawa, 2002, p. 45).

It is important to find ways for teachers to provide hope and a positive vision of the future for students that would ultimately make a difference in the lives of children. To do so, this literature review outlines the motivations of educators, teacher attrition, and commonalities among teachers in Title I schools.

Motivations to Teach

According to Palmer (1998), many people go into teaching for reasons that are heartfelt and personal to them; they connect emotionally to the profession, inspired by intellectual interest in subject matter, and/or a spiritual connection to the profession to which they feel called. These reasons appear to keep teachers motivated within their profession in spite of challenges they face. There is no doubt that teaching can and will be a challenge at different points in one’s career; lack of resources due to budget cuts, fewer teachers, more students in the classrooms, and children entering the classroom with needs unmet all create these challenges, leaving a good teacher constantly adjusting his or her role to meet these trials. Despite what some may see as setbacks, some educators choose to enter the profession of teaching because they want a challenge (Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005). Guaranteed paychecks, medical insurance and paid time off to spend with family, especially in the current economic situation, provide a sense of stability that some educators seek. Meeting the needs of students who may or may not attend daily can provide internal rewards to the teacher. Additionally, rewards for teachers may include seeing a

child make gains, making a difference in the personal life of a child, and forming lasting relationships (Irvine, 1999; Jensen, 2009; Simmons, 2005).

Understanding teachers' motives for teaching will increase the understanding of what they find rewarding. Intrinsic motivation is that in which no outside contributing factors occur (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Such motivation involves a person experiencing a sort of self-efficacy for doing something without necessarily receiving anything in return. Self-efficacy is a cognitive model introduced by Bandura, in which one develops internal standards based on reflective thinking, ultimately influencing one's "behavior from the inside out" (Gordon & Browne, 2011, p. 99). Internal motivation may be enough to keep teachers in the profession for an extended time; however, some educators require another type of motivation to keep them teaching. Deci and Ryan (2000) explain extrinsic motivation as motivation "in which people's behavior is controlled by specific external contingencies" (p. 236). Extrinsic motivation might include a person's salary or benefits they receive. Because educators are continually under the scrutiny of parents, community members, and lawmakers, dedication to teaching (intrinsic motivation) or job security (extrinsic motivation) are both factors that encourage individuals to choose this career.

One of the reasons for choosing teaching as a first choice career, as cited in a study completed by Hughes and Manuel (2006), was the educator seeing his/her own teacher as a positive role model when he/she was in school. This type of teacher seeks to understand the child on a personal level, going beyond mere academics. These teachers make a personal connection with children, building a safe community within the classroom (Landsman, 2006). Children, especially those living in poverty, need strong and reliable role models when they are

in school (Jensen, 2009). Hope and inspiration from a childhood teacher allow children to look toward the future and visualize what they can do with their own lives. Relationship building with students is vital to their success in school, which can in turn lead to their choosing teaching as a career (Hughes & Manuel, 2006). The relationship a teacher builds with a student can significantly influence the child's life. Jensen (2009) points out that many children of low socioeconomic status (SES) lack healthy social and emotional development and often have strained relationships with parents. He writes, "Students often seek out and value relationships with teachers, counselors and mentors" (p. 88), and research shows that teachers can make a difference in the life of a child (Burke, 2000). Such relationships may be what it takes in order for that child to decide he or she wants to become a teacher later in life because the teacher was a positive role model during his or her school years.

In addition to having a positive role model as a young child, some teachers feel called to teaching because they want to fulfill a dream (Hellsten & Prytula, 2011; Hughes & Manuel, 2006; Simmons, 2005). Again, as Palmer (1998) stated, people go into teaching for reasons of the heart. These may include coming from a family of teachers and fulfilling a family member's dream for one to go into teaching; for some, it may be a family tradition to go into teaching, and the fear of letting a family member down by not teaching motivates them to continue down the same path (Hellsten & Prytula, 2011). Both motivating factors are intrinsic and fit under the overarching theme of personal fulfillment. Other teachers seek personal fulfillment by working with young students, looking to make a difference in the lives of children (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Hellsten & Prytula, 2011; Hughes & Manuel, 2006; Simmons, 2005). Wanting to be that one role model who helps a child become a better person is a goal of many of the participants in

these studies. Personal fulfillment means different things to different people. A desire to work with young children (Ewing & Manuel, 2005), or children of various ages, is said to be a gift for some people.

For some, teaching is not the first career choice. Some entering the teaching profession as a second choice career also have chosen the educational career path for intrinsic reasons (Williams & Forgasz, 2009). For these teachers, monetary considerations are not high on the list of motivations (Hughes & Manuel, 2006). While some choose teaching because the schedule fits with their personal family life (Ewing & Manuel, 2005), research indicates that the majority of teachers are motivated intrinsically. In Williams and Forgasz's (2009) study, having the ability to work in a field with a flexible schedule that allows for time with family is important. Williams and Forgasz also found that few second-career teachers had financial reasons for entering the teaching profession. Likewise, participants in Simmons' (2005) study understood they could make more money if they stayed in their first career choice or chose another path: however, making a difference to children and their community was more important than the amount of money they could make. All of these motivating factors contribute to a person's quality of life (Simmons, 2005).

While the studies pointed to a few differences, the motivations of first-career choice teachers and those who choose teaching later in their working lives definitely overlap. In a study conducted by Burke (2000), participants who chose education as a second career provided motivating factors such as wanting to make a difference, working with young children, and personal fulfillment. Understanding the motivating factors behind why career-minded people choose the educational field, along with why they choose to stay – whether as a first, second or

third career – can yield results that may allow for better recruitment of these highly motivated teachers.

Teacher Attrition

Scribner and Palmer (2007) state that, “Teaching is a vocation that requires constant renewal of mind, heart, and spirit – if we want to avoid burnout, take joy in our work, and grow in our service to students” (p. 8). Teacher attrition is a national problem and many educators leave the profession within their first few years (Sass, Flores, Claeys, & Pérez, 2012). Teachers leave to go to another school within the district or change districts (movers). They also leave the teaching profession but stay with the education field or leave the teaching profession all together (leavers). Hollabaugh (2012) states in her research that “Teachers leaving the profession to retire is logical; teachers leaving within the first five years of employment is the more problematic phenomenon” (p. 15).

The exact number of teachers reported moving or leaving changes depending upon the research that one reads (Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Part of the discrepancy comes with different definitions of leavers and movers; some consider leavers to be only those leaving the profession all together (Elfers, Plecki, & Knapp, 2006). Of the 3,380,300 U.S. school teachers employed in the 2008-2009 school year, 7.6% of the teachers were movers and 8% were leavers (Keigher, 2010). Additionally, within that total, 617,000 teachers were in their first three years of teaching; of those teachers, 13.7% were movers and 19% were leavers (Keigher, 2010). Not only does teacher attrition affect the professional learning community by the emotional impact of high turnover – losing colleagues, and having to form new bonds with new colleagues – but research also shows that teachers leaving the profession costs districts, nationally, an average of

\$2.2 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). This is a costly concern for districts to face, especially with many districts already facing budget cuts that ultimately affect students. Thus, it is important to understand the reasons teachers stay in the profession (Hollabaugh, 2012).

Many teachers who are leaving are not lacking in professional competence. The reasons given for leaving are numerous and categorized as contextual reasons of support from the district, as well as personal reasons for individual teachers (Schaefer et al., 2012). Better understanding the reasons behind teachers leaving the profession will allow districts to put forth needed energy to retain these teachers. The district can do this through “school-wide mentoring practices” that will help “reduce the attrition rate” (Hollabaugh, 2012, p. 19).

One form of support that helps retain teachers is mentorship programs. Beginning teachers find this type of support to be beneficial to them within the first years of teaching and some districts have put mentorship programs into place to help with teacher retention (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Sass et al., 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012). The reality is, however, school districts are cutting mentorship programs because of lack of funding. It is apparent that teachers just starting out need the support of administrators and colleagues in order to feel more secure in their teaching positions. It is important to realize that, “Relationships with colleagues are an important element of teachers’ contribution to the school and district. Professional educators are generous with their expertise and willingly share materials and insights, particularly with those less experienced than they. The focus of their work is the well-being of students, and they collaborate with colleagues to that end” (Danielson, 1996, p. 113). As cited in Hollabaugh’s research, beginning teachers without a mentor faced a higher attrition rate that was

twice that of teachers who received mentoring within the first years of teaching (2012).

According to Danielson (1996) more experienced teachers can step into a mentorship role through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in order to help support new colleagues. Creating these collaborative teams can be quite time consuming when utilizing proper PLC techniques described by Dufour (2007), factoring in common planning time, creating common formative assessments, analyzing data from the assessments, creating new student groups based on the data shown, and reassessing students (McLester, 2012). Collaborative teams need to find common ground and agree on effective methods for working together before they can do this work. While some may argue that the culture of a school is comprised entirely of what the administration makes of it, the culture of an organization goes beyond the influence of management. Teachers' values, shared visions, and a commitment to working collaboratively affect a team's culture (James & Connolly, 2009).

Teaching is a profession that requires constant decisions, and teachers want to feel supported in the decisions and academic considerations they make regarding students and their families. They want to have the freedom to make decisions on their own and to the best of their abilities without feeling overly scrutinized by school administration. In addition to feeling support from mentor teachers, those schools where teachers felt most supported by administration are shown to have lower numbers of teacher attrition (Allen, 2005; Schaefer et al., 2012).

Another reason for teacher attrition directly relates to teachers' salary and benefits (Elfers et al., 2006). Those schools paying their beginning teachers a higher base salary retained more of their teachers than those with lower paying jobs, according to a study conducted by Guarino,

Santibañez, and Daley (2006). In addition to salary and benefits, Hollabaugh (2012) also noted the importance of job security and promotions within the profession. This is a concept that teacher unions may want to address by completing their own studies of teacher attrition and relating the information back to teacher contracts when working alongside the districts in mediation.

Across the nation, teacher attrition is higher in schools that are disadvantaged (Allen, 2005). When schools are high-poverty, have high proportions of minority students, and have low academic performance they are disadvantaged (Allen, 2005). These previously-mentioned circumstances often come with an increase in behavior problems (Kelly, 2004). Research has shown that higher poverty schools have a higher percentage of teacher attrition than do schools with lower poverty rates (Elfers et al., 2006; Lynch, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012). Part of this is due to student management issues and a perceived lack of support from administration (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). Another contributing factor to teachers leaving these schools is due to student behaviors. One way to support teachers and help with retention is through district-provided professional development opportunities (Elfers et al., 2006) and to ensure that collaboration is taking place within teams done through teacher PLCs (Schaefer et al., 2012).

In addition to the contextual reasons for leaving the teaching profession, many teachers also cite personal reasons. Along with those leaving the profession within high-poverty schools, the highest numbers leaving the profession are among those teachers in the first few years of teaching (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Keigher, 2010), as well as young teachers (Keigher, 2010; Sass et al., 2012). Again, of the 617,000 teachers in their first three years of teaching, 13.7% were movers and 19% were leavers in the 2008-2009 school year. This is in

comparison to those with four to nine years of experience, having an equal 7.9% of teachers being movers or leavers. The rate continues to drop for those with 10-19 years of teaching, with 5.5% being movers and only 4.2% being leavers (Keigher, 2010). Educators with more than 20 years of experience had a higher percentage of leavers, which is most likely contributed to a higher rate of retirement (Keigher, 2010). Of the 575,100 teachers in public schools during the 2008-2009 school years with less than 30 years of age, 14.7 % were movers and 9.2% were leavers. In comparison, of the 865,500 teachers in public schools, aged 30-39, 7.3% were movers and 8.4% were leavers (Keigher, 2010). Part of the discrepancy could be due to young teachers caring for their own children. Of those considered leavers in 2008-2009, 26.3% left teaching in the classroom but maintained a position within a K-12 setting, and 27.8% left the profession to care for a family member (Keigher, 2010).

In addition to caring for family members, some teachers face burnout from their profession (Schaefer et al., 2012). Budget cuts increased class size, ultimately leading to less one-on-one time with each child. In addition, more students in the classroom means more papers to grade, more report cards to complete, and less time to spend with children who need more support within the classroom. In grades where standardized testing takes place, high stakes testing has led to teacher burnout, with more pressure placed on passing standardized tests, even if children are mobile between schools (Sass et al., 2012). If students are not meeting the standards, some teachers may internalize this as a feeling of failure. Having a supportive administrative team or PLC can help these teachers solve problems by looking at the data and finding ways to shift class sizes.

Research clearly shows that teacher attrition is a national problem. It is important to

understand the reasons behind teachers who leave the profession all together and those who seek to leave a specific school for another so that districts have a better understanding of how to retain their teachers. Retaining teachers will help with stability within a PLC, save districts money, diminish the disruption of the student learning process, and maintain a school culture focused on student learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Elfers et al., 2006; Schaefer et al., 2012).

Effects of Poverty on Children: What Teachers Can Expect

Teaching can be a stressful job. Teachers are entering classrooms where the children either do not match their own race, culture and/or SES, creating additional challenges as the educator strives to understand how best to meet the students' needs. Disadvantaged schools also face a high mobility rate of students, a high rate of absenteeism, and extreme gaps in student learning. Teachers strive to form bonds with children leading to an increase in stability (Pogrow, 2006). Due to lack of resources, children from low-SES homes are less likely to have access to the same resources as their peers from higher SES homes (Espinosa, 2005). These children often come to school ill-prepared and require additional support to achieve the standard.

A child does not choose to be born into poverty and the effects of poverty can take place while the child is still in the mother's womb (Lipina & Colombo, 2009). Many women in poverty lack access to proper prenatal care while pregnant and this lack can affect the unborn child's brain development, which is linked to both physical and mental health disorders (Jensen, 2009; Lipina & Colombo, 2009). Children of poverty have a higher rate of Failure to Thrive (FTT) than other social classes (Mackner, Black, & Starr, 2003). The abnormalities in growth found in children with FTT that are not from poverty are similar to the cognitive development of

children in low-income households. These children's scores are considerably below those of their peers up to age five (Mackner, et al., 2003). Additionally, children of poverty have an increase in mild mental retardation over their higher SES peers (Bigelow, 2006). This lack of growth in cognitive development can have long-term implications, affecting adults' working memory (Evans & Vincent, 2009).

In addition to the previously mentioned effects on learning, poverty can also lead to delays in language development (Allhusen et al., 2005). These language delays can have negative impacts on a child's reading, writing and speech. Delays in language, partnered with lack of resources, can have a great impact on the reading abilities of a child of poverty. When children fall behind, they often become frustrated with their work because it is a challenge to master the concepts. This affects children of all ages.

Children of poverty sometimes also face behavioral challenges (Allhusen et al., 2005; Jensen, 2009). One such challenge is Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Bigelow, 2006). Typically, a diagnosis of ADHD occurs with children by the age of seven. Together, this diagnosis with students' introduction into a structured classroom causes children to face struggles to complete tasks that are beyond their ability level (Bigelow, 2006).

According to Jensen (2009), children of poverty do not choose to act differently; they often face experiences that students of a higher socio-economic class do not face and therefore may not have the skills to adjust appropriately. Often, these children lack the nurturing, stable relationships that more affluent children experience (Bigelow, 2006; Jensen, 2009). Without this foundation, these children are on their own when it comes to properly handling emotional

disturbances in their lives (Jensen, 2009).

Geographical factors also come into play. Some children, living in crime-ridden areas, are coerced into activities they might not otherwise engage in, succumbing to peer pressure (Young, 2009). These choices can lead to drug addiction, prostitution, violence, and sex trafficking (Young, 2009). Children exposed to negative influences “often feel hopeless and see no viable future for themselves” (Jensen, 2009, p. 112). Educators who act as positive role models in students’ lives can provide the “megadose of hope” that Jensen describes students of poverty needing on a daily basis in order to be successful in school (2009, p. 112).

In rural communities, children often do not have access to community-partnered events after school such as homework clubs or sports (Nadel & Sagawa, 2002). Without proper government funding, these rural areas are not able to create opportunities for participation with students. When young people in these areas become successful, they often leave the community for something better, “creating a 'brain drain' that deprives the area of future leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals” (Nadel & Sagawa, 2002, p. 41). Although children of poverty may have struggles cognitively, socially, and emotionally, there are things that teachers can do to support their chances for success. While the stress of teaching in a high-poverty school may be one of the mitigating factors as to why teachers leave the profession, “the areas where teachers are needed the most are in high-poverty schools” (Diuguid, 2010, p. 78).

Conclusions from the Literature

Teachers go into the education field for many reasons. In order to help lower the attrition rate, it is important to have an understanding of why teachers choose this profession and whether it is their first or second career in order to see if there are correlations among teachers who

choose to teach in impoverished neighborhoods. With a better understanding of why teachers enter the profession, it is possible to begin looking at how to retain teachers. While the research was not extensive, Diuguid (2010) expressed the importance of obtaining and retaining high quality teachers within these school settings to help support students and their learning and to help maintain the missions of the schools. Despite the research showing the need for teachers to stay in high-poverty schools, the attrition rate continues to be high among novice teachers.

While it is evident that teachers' reasons for teaching are different, so are their reasons for leaving. It is apparent that teacher attrition is detrimental to their school districts, the PLCs in which they are members, and to the students with whom the teachers have contact. Districts can benefit from understanding the reasons behind teachers leaving their specific building to move to another school or district, as well as their reasons for leaving the profession all together. Having a clearer understanding may help provide the district with insight that will lead to retaining teachers, particularly those leaving for contextual reasons related to the district and/or the school itself. Several studies cited information regarding the support that districts can provide to retain their educators.

In order to find ways to support teachers in their work and keep them in their profession, it is important to hear the stories of those teachers who prefer to teach in high-poverty schools, especially those choosing to stay despite the conditions and circumstances they face. Additionally, it is imperative to understand the expectations these teachers have for the diverse learners that walk through their classroom doors; they hold these students accountable just as a teacher in an affluent school would hold his or her own students accountable. The research surveyed in this chapter has provided a framework to begin identifying teacher motivation,

possible reasons for leaving the profession of a high-poverty school in relation to how poverty affects students, and teacher attrition. Research with the participants of this study helped solidify this research and add to the body of research that was already in existence.

Chapter Three: Method

Introduction

Research shows an increase in the poverty rate among students in the education system (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010). Providing poverty stricken students with educators who desire to serve them is imperative to their educational success. As I stated in the first chapter, this study explored the narratives of a small sampling of teachers serving students in one high-poverty, high diversity, Title I school. I was able to listen for common themes among these teachers' stories, in order to help schools identify and hire teachers with the stamina to continue teaching in Title I schools. Using a narrative inquiry framework, I explored these three questions:

1. Research Question #1: Why did the study's participants decide to become teachers?
2. Research Question #2: What factors drew the participants to teach in a diverse, Title I school?
3. Research Question #3: What has kept the participants teaching there?

Setting

The participants identified for this study were teachers employed by a school district in Oregon. The superintendent granted permission for this study prior to conducting the research and I received a letter of cooperation through email response (see Appendix B). The chosen elementary school was one of ten schools within the district, which supports elementary, middle, transition, alternative, and high schools. As of October 1, 2012, 63% of the student body within the district received free or reduced-price lunches. This was an increase of 15% in the past three school years. Comparatively, during 2012-2013, 82% of students were on free or reduced at the

chosen elementary school where participants' interviews occurred, with most recent numbers putting the figure close to 90% according to the principal. The statistics held the same for the school, as compared to the district, with an average increase of 15% of the student body population receiving free or reduced lunch throughout the past three school years.

In addition to experiencing an increase in poverty, the district and school have seen an increase in ethnic diversity and the number of English language learners served district-wide. During 2012-2013, 48.77% of the students attending the elementary school were of ethnic minority status. This does not include students who fall under the category of "white," such as students from families immigrating from Russia and Romania. While 48.77% of the student body is of minority status, 39.05% of them receive English as a second language or other language services (ESOL). These statistics are similar to the rest of the district, where 48.86% of the student body are of minority status. However, there is a large discrepancy in that only 18.12% of the students district-wide receive ESOL services, as compared to the 39.05% served by this elementary school.

Participants

The participants in this study were classroom teachers with more than three years of teaching experience in a high-poverty school in Oregon. I chose three years as the research parameter because the highest attrition rate among teachers in the profession occurs within the first three years of teaching. I had a personal connection with each of these teachers because I have worked with all of them for several years. In order to choose the participants, I sent out an email inviting teachers to participate, sent text messages to some, and contacted some of them personally through face-to-face conversation.

I chose to use a purposive sampling strategy for the research in this narrative inquiry to recruit these teachers. The purposive strategy was an appropriate strategy due to the connection I had with the participants. Knowing my participants ahead of time allowed me the opportunity to know where they taught. This allowed me to choose this method because I selected individuals who possessed certain characteristics that I had identified in advance, as discussed by Creswell (2007). Therefore, I had a theoretical basis for purposively recruiting these participants. Through purposive sampling, I chose nine participants from a high-poverty, highly diverse Title I school in Oregon. Of those nine participants I asked, five agreed to participate. The other four had reasons, personal to them, for not wanting to participate. While the sampling size was small, I was better able to capture the richly detailed stories these teachers had to share.

Snowball sampling occurred due to one participant mentioning the name of someone I had not previously considered. Because some of the teachers had been in the building longer than I had, they knew the other teachers and their stories better than I did. When I approached the participant whose name another participant mentioned, she was happy to take part in the study, which brought me up to six participants. I believe these two complementary methods to have been most beneficial and appropriate to my study. I chose to use a semi-structured interview process with guiding questions (see Appendix C). Using the guiding questions, each participant had the same opportunity to provide answers. Additionally, semi-structured interviews made room for participants to add other details they felt would have been helpful. This also allowed me to ask follow-up questions if I required more information.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was personally responsible for implementing all aspects of a

qualitative research method using the narrative inquiry framework. As Creswell points out, I needed to have a “keen eye to identify in the source material gathered the particular stories that capture the individual’s experiences” (2007, p. 57). My primary role as investigator using this qualitative approach was to gather and analyze data. As a student at George Fox University in the EDFL program working on my Ed.D. I had an interest in this research topic. By completing this exploration, I was also working toward completing some of the requirements for my degree.

Research Design & Data Analysis

As a teacher at the elementary school where I had the privilege of interviewing participants, I have formed a bond with many of these colleagues throughout the past eight years. This served to strengthen the research I was participating in completing. Narrative inquirers rely on relationships with participants to guide the work that they do (Huber, Clandinin, & Huber, 2006). In this study, I employed the qualitative research design method of narrative inquiry through the purposive and snowball method. I had originally asked nine classroom teachers to participate, ultimately interviewing and interacting with six of them. I then collected data through private, one-on-one interviews that lasted approximately one half hour. I recorded the interviews so that participants had the ability to share their stories without having researcher interruption. This was important because sharing of experiences is one of the main factors in narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In order to share experiences, I provided my participants with guiding questions ahead of time so they were able to better prepare their answers (see Appendix C). Additional follow-up interviews occurred when I required more information and when participants felt they had more to share. In addition, I collected journals from participants where they described day-to-day struggles and joys in the classroom, as well as

shared motivations to continue teaching. Data analysis occurred after I transcribed interviews, employing initial coding at the time of transcription. I was able to code information from the stories and I looked for common themes to gain insights from the participants.

Data analysis occurred in a three-stage process through the uses of initial, focused and thematic coding. Through initial coding, I first organized data according to themes identified by the study's participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe looking at inward and outward, as well as forward and backward dimensions of seeking information from participants. They describe *inward* as looking at the hopes and feelings of the participants and *outward* as looking at the external conditions of the environment. Simultaneously, we need to look at the past, present and future, which capture Clandinin and Connelly's concept of *forward* and *backward*. This allowed me to look for evidence that can be used to better understand the experience of each participant and compare it to existing literature to produce "defensible research text" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). After initial coding was completed, I then moved to focused coding, where I collapsed themes into similar categories, and refined the identified themes from the interviews and transcripts. Finally, I looked for patterns between themes and prominent information that I received through the interviews and journals. From there, I had the opportunity to look for gaps in my literature review and began identifying areas of future research. In order to ensure I properly transcribed and interpreted the participants' stories correctly, I used what Creswell (2007) refers to as member checking. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcriptions of what I had written and to review the results I came up with to review the themes I identified.

I chose the narrative approach to research because the research questions best fit the

narrative inquiry approach. I was able to capture the detailed stories, backgrounds, and experiences of classroom teachers in one diverse Title I school. Some of these teachers added information from old journals they had kept about some of the stories they had throughout the past years, which enhanced their stories, and expanded the research. Each participant also kept a journal: some for a one-week period, others longer, sharing the joys and challenges throughout the days, as well as what inspired them to go back to teaching the following day. Using this approach, I had the ability to collect information and tie it to the participant's cultural and personal experiences. Through this process, the stories the participants shared were rich in comparison to reading random teachers' statistics solely through quantitative studies. Instead, these statistics have the ability to enhance the stories and experiences of teachers. Using the narrative approach with questioning and developing interpretations, I was able to identify common themes that guided me to areas in need of future research.

Research Ethics

It was of utmost importance to protect the privacy of the participants in my research study. Therefore, I followed the guidelines specified by George Fox University. I also upheld the standards of the Institutional Review Board, following the ethical protocols regarding the use of human participants in my research. I invited participants to be involved in the study; upon receiving their agreement, I provided each with an informed consent form to review and sign (see Appendix D). Additionally, I made sure that they understood there was minimal risk, and clearly outlined the ethical framework behind the consent form. Participants understood that they could decline or drop out of the study at any time if they no longer wished to participate. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, I did not disclose any information that

could allow others to identify a specific participant. I did not have participants identify themselves on audio recording by name; each participant received an androgynous identification name that I transferred to the transcripts.

Additionally, in order to protect confidentiality, I have kept voice recordings on a flash-drive locked in a safe. I have also kept transcripts, participant identification and consent forms in the same locking safe. Five years after of the defense of my dissertation research, I will personally destroy the audio files. I will also personally destroy the written consent forms, and participant's androgynous identification names.

Potential Contributions to Research

This study has been both personally and professionally relevant to me. It has helped to provide greater information about why teachers have chosen to teach and stay teaching in high-poverty schools, which will help the education profession. Professionally, this study was significant to me because of the increase in poverty among our school's families and the increase in attrition rate among teachers. I was seeking to find commonalities among teachers, allowing for future research in the areas of attrition and retention.

Additionally, this study was personal to me because I have had relationships with colleagues who have chosen to leave the teaching profession. As an adjunct professor at a local university in the greater Willamette Valley, I have served as a mentor to student teachers and undergraduate education majors. I have a desire to see my students succeed and not contribute to the attrition rate. The outcomes of this study will help provide guidance to teachers teaching in high-poverty schools and to those coming into the profession seeking positions in schools with such demographics.

This study will add to existing research on teacher motivation and focus on the rate of attrition. The focus of this project looked more specifically at why teachers chose to teach in a high-poverty school and what has kept them there. The purpose of this study was to add to the body of research on teacher attrition rates, and to seek ways to reduce these rates by examining what keeps teachers working in high-poverty schools.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to search for patterns in the personal and professional experiences of teachers working in a Title I school in order to add to the research that might one day help explain or even quantify teacher retention; that is, what keeps good teachers working in high-poverty, high diverse schools?

I conducted the research in this study through a series of interviews with six licensed teachers in a diverse Title I school. The research narrowly aimed to target a single school within one district. I did this to reduce the number of external influencing factors and elements that would likely have altered the participants' answers to the study's primary questions. Student mobility, administrative leadership, and the school's financial considerations are variables that this researcher hoped to reduce by honing the scope of the study. I also narrowed the research to one school within the district because of the fact that educators within this school had extenuating circumstances that caused some to become movers and leavers, while others chose to stay.

Participants took part in interviews occurring during a two-week period in 2013. Each participant served in the same high-poverty, Title I school for at least the last three years. Of the participants, one was male and the other five were female. The ages of the participants ranged from 30 to 54 and their career chronology spanned from five to 24 years of experience.

In addition to interviews, each participant kept a personal journal over the course of a one-to-two week period. Within these journals, participants reflected on the teaching experiences of each day and considered their own motivations for continuing in the profession.

Research Questions

This chapter presents the information from the participants in answering the following research questions:

1. Research Question #1: Why did the study's participants decide to become teachers?
2. Research Question #2: What factors drew the participants to teach in a diverse, Title I school?
3. Research Question #3: What has kept the participants teaching there?

The initial coding process began following the collection of all data and focused on common key terms among the recorded information in order to narrow the study's themes. The patterns in the interviews and journals formed the initial coding information. I considered and completed thematic coding for each of the research questions, identifying and defining collective experiential motivation among the participants. In order to give the participants more voice, I have quoted them at length in this chapter.

Research Question #1: Why did the study's participants decide to become teachers?

Table I (below) indicates information about the participants' career choices and motivations.

Table I: Career Choice and Motivating Factors to Become a Teacher

Participant	Teaching as a 1st Choice Career	Teaching as a 2nd Choice Career	Personal Quality of Life	Personal Fulfillment	Relationships with Mentors
Participant 1		X			X
Participant 2	X		X	X	X
Participant 3		X	X	X	X
Participant 4		X		X	X
Participant 5		X		X	X
Participant 6	X			X	

Selected narration from participants through the interview process, written and oral, explains the results presented in the table.

Personal Quality of Life

In the literature review chapter, researchers made mention of influences relating to quality of life, such as financial advantage, flexible schedules, and benefits, all factors that align with extrinsic motivation. Within established research, few teachers cited these items as motivating factors for entering the teaching profession. This study supported those findings; only two participants cited items relating to personal quality of life as a motivation to enter the teaching profession.

One participant mentioned financial advantage as one motivation for entering the teaching profession. Unsure of what courses to take Participant 2 took general education classes. While in his first year of college, the participant sought out the highest paying job within his

institution's work-study program. He stated, "Working in a fifth grade classroom off campus paid the most and so I decided to do that only because it paid the most" (Participant 2). The study participant went on to explain the experience he had within that fifth grade classroom:

I had a really good teacher I was working with, and I loved the kids, and I felt like I was good at it and decided I would just keep going. And [I] decided that that's what I would focus on for school. So I graduated with a degree to teach elementary education.

(Participant 2)

This participant entered education courses that ultimately led him to teaching because of a high paying work-study.

A second participant (Participant 3) stated that having a flexible schedule that allowed her to spend more time with her own family members was a motivating factor for entering the profession. This is another example of extrinsic motivation that falls under the category of personal quality of life. Having a work schedule similar to that of her child's school schedule influenced Participant 3's decision to pursue a teaching career. Additionally, this participant saw the profession as a means to create a stabilizing element in her family structure. Benefits provided by the district were vitally important as a consideration in choosing a profession because she was a single mother supporting her child.

While Participant 3 ultimately chose to teach, this was not her first career choice. She had worked with children in daycare settings and preschools while working on a degree in human development with a minor in social work. This participant began work as an intern with the Child Service Department (CSD); upon finding the fieldwork unsatisfying, she ultimately sought out other career options.

I was very discouraged, having seen the caseload of CSD and seeing one case out of fifty

where a child was going back to the family, and seeing generation after generation of repeat family members on the roll of CSD. I just thought this does not work and I cannot perpetuate that system. So I thought, you end up doing social work at school and I still love teaching. (Participant 3)

Having had previous enjoyable experiences working with children, this participant decided to complete the education courses needed to go into teaching. While she enjoyed working in a daycare setting, she described the need to be able to support the family.

I loved doing the job, but could not afford to do it the way I was doing it, so I needed to go back and do the real thing and get into the school system and get paid good money to get paid to do the real thing. (Participant 3)

Another participant in the study, Participant 4, cited that while the flexible work schedule did not influence her decision to go into teaching, it has been a factor keeping her in the profession.

Personal Fulfillment

While study participants did not commonly cite personal quality of life as a reason to enter the teaching profession, it was a motivating factor for some. A more common theme that developed through this study's analysis was in regards to "heartfelt" matters, which I have characterized as personal fulfillment (Palmer, 1998).

Personal fulfillment concepts that surfaced during the interviews included *wanting to make a difference, love of kids, students becoming excited, being someone who believes in the child, and providing first time experiences*. Such concepts align with Bandura's ideals of self-efficacy and are part of intrinsic motivation – factors that are personal to each individual.

One of the participants described the personal fulfillment that results from a love of working with kids and feeling drawn to the profession:

When I was in high school, I was involved in a lot of the childcare courses and participated with the kids' drama camps, [but] I never really planned on being a teacher. I enjoyed doing that kind of work. That led me to the childcare courses. I also come from a family of teachers. I think what happened is the time I spent with kids I found out was the most joyous time for me. I did do a lot of other little jobs along the way.

(Participant 5)

Teaching was not Participant Five's first choice in career. However, upon pursuing other areas of interest, she inevitably found a way back to working with children.

I kind of played around with the idea that I might do something with the travel industry, because I loved to travel. But every time I was looking to work I was finding myself going to jobs that involved kids, and it just kind of occurred to me that that's where my love was. So it wasn't like I had planned it, like I said, it was just when I was always finding those jobs it was always around kids: and then one day I realized this is where I'm supposed to be. So, I don't know that I necessarily knew that I was going to become a teacher, I just kind of went along my college path and before I knew it, found myself gravitating back towards kids in that pursuit, and on my fifth year, [I received] a teaching degree. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 continually found herself gravitating to professions where children were involved, even though that was not her original plan. She received great joy in her work with children, eventually entering a teaching program.

Another participant entered teaching as a second career choice, having originally gone into the criminal justice field. In addition to having the ability to be creative throughout the day in lessons, Participant 4 said, “I just loved being around the kids.” The satisfaction of working with students during a summer job experience changed her professional aspirations.

After my freshman year in college, I worked. I got a job through my neighbor at a summer school for handicapped kids. I do not even know if the school is around anymore, but I loved it. These kids were severely disabled, most of them. Some of them were more mildly [affected]. They were in wheelchairs, feeding tubes, a lot of them, and different things like that. I loved it. (Participant 4)

The joy of working with children is what sparked an interest in the field of education for Participant 4, leading her down a career path quite different from the one she had originally planned. This participant initially considered working in special education; however, while pursuing her general education degree (a prerequisite for a special education endorsement), she changed her course. She explained, “So I went that route [general education] and then when I student taught I was like, ‘Why do I want to go into special ed.?’ I liked this so much” (Participant 4).

For some participants, the constant draw to working with children no matter the circumstances provided the impetus to enter the teaching profession. For others, the idea of student success provided that needed spark. Participants cited student success as a common motivation for going into teaching and for the in subsequent decision to stay.

Seeing them [the children] get excited over different things... just seeing their eyes light up, and seeing them love being successful or learning something new or doing something that they couldn't do before...it wasn't like I was at work it was like, it was really weird,

it was like, ‘This is work?’ (Participant 4)

Participant 6 explained that while friends were getting “real jobs” in eighth-tenth grades, she was still babysitting because she enjoyed working with kids. As a high school student, Participant 6 worked with children in a Head Start program, which inspired her toward a career in teaching. She had considered teaching at a much earlier age, but her high school experience solidified the plan; seeing children succeed, due in part to her own efforts, was personally gratifying. “When it came time to go off to college I went into teaching and just never wavered from that” (Participant 6). While Participant 6 enjoyed the experience she had in working with children in Head Start, her overall experience was a challenge.

I worked really hard in school, and I have a brother and sister who didn’t work really as hard as I did, but did really well in school. I always found it extremely frustrating that I would work hard, a lot harder than they were working, and got average or mediocre grades. For a long time, I wondered if I was smart enough to be a teacher because my own self-esteem was not good, because it was just really hard all the time. And I always thought teachers knew the answers to everything. (Participant 6)

The participant expanded upon this by stating that she was not confident as a learner, and that she continues to struggle with self-doubt in her profession. However, she went on to say:

I just thought that maybe I could maybe make learning more exciting for kids. I always found school pretty boring and hard, and there was no differentiation back then; it was everybody did the same thing, no matter what reading level you were. No one pulled you aside and put you in a little mini reading group or a little mini math group. It was sink or swim on your own, and I just always thought that maybe I could make a difference

somewhere. (Participant 6)

The idea of personal fulfillment from working with children and making a difference in the lives of students was common to all of the participants. In addition, Participant 2 became a teacher because he thought he could be good at it. He said, “I really, really enjoy working with kids and I like to problem solve, and I have a lot of opportunity to do that. I like being able to teach kids.” Participant 2 also mentioned the lack of males in the profession and expressed, “It was important that kids at that age have a good male role model. And I thought that I could possibly be that.” Teaching because of matters of the heart, or personal fulfillment, has definitely had an impact on these educators’ decisions to enter this profession.

Relationships with Mentors

In addition to personal quality of life and personal fulfillment, the study’s participants discussed relationships as another motivation to enter the teaching profession. When asked the research question regarding motivation to become a teacher, some of the participants described relationships to, and being inspired by, former teachers when they were younger. These bonds helped the participants feel a strong connection to their teachers, describing the experiences as valuable because an adult saw them as an individual and not just as a student. Some of the words that participants used when describing these former teachers were sweet, caring, kind, encouraging, and inspired.

Participant 4 described a relationship with a teacher who got her through a hard transition in elementary school.

When I was in fifth grade, I had transferred from a small Christian school to a public school and my parents had just gotten back together after being separated for a year. I

was scared to death to go to a new school. I had never changed schools before. I will never forget the teacher, 'Mr. K,' he was just the sweetest guy. He was a Christian, I found out, and just really made it so much easier for me. He just knew what I came from and kind of took me under his wing and he was like, 'It's okay, you know it's going to be okay,' and [he] helped me transition into a whole different environment. (Participant 4)

Like Participant 4, Participant 5 also described a transitional time during which a teacher supported her emotionally.

In my fourth grade year my father passed away, and my teacher surrounded my family with the students, bringing out support. Those things mean the most: the relationships that I built with him that I did not even know were relationships at the time. But I look back and think, wow, he really reached out and took care of me in maybe a way that I didn't even know. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 expressed, "For me the things that stick with me, that I feel are the most important aspects for me as a teacher, is building the relationship with my kids." This participant reflected on former teachers and described how those early relationships had an impact on her own career choices, creating passion for teaching.

Wow! You know, that teacher in my drama department really inspired me and got me involved with teaching kids drama, or in middle school, the teacher got me turned on to certain literature or a certain book. So definitely, teachers along the way impacted my life. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 also described a relationship created with a teacher who fostered a love of learning for students in the classroom.

I had a third grade teacher who was phenomenal. He had very hands-on learning. He

brought in a huge sand table, and we did art projects and we built this whole town. And I remember being so excited to go to school every day. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 felt her teachers made an effort to support her both academically and emotionally. This impact provided her with the desire to emulate the same concepts with her own students.

Two of the study's other participants mentioned being inspired by one or more teachers in their own school experiences, but did not relate the bond to anything they considered significant in choosing a career. Participant 1 described a relationship built with a basketball coach, which in turn inspired her to work towards a health degree to teach at the high school level. Participant 2 described being a teacher's assistant in a high school math class; the math teacher saw his potential and provided encouragement and opportunities for him to support other learners within the class.

While the relationships with the teachers described in each of the participants' stories differed, it is important to note that a relationship formed. Not all of the participants experienced these relationships. Participant 6 described school as being extremely difficult for her and she did not have anyone in school that inspired her; the lack of any such relationship, however, is one of the things Participant 6 now works to counteract in her own career.

In addition to having positive relationships with teachers, one of the participants described having an encouraging colleague who provided much of the same support. This colleague befriended Participant 3 and would often volunteer with her in the daycare setting. Their friendship helped the participant realize her own potential to pursue a career in teaching.

Relationships with family members also played a part in motivating study participants. Two of the participants mentioned having watched parents, siblings, and other family members

teach. Participant 2 mentioned wanting to get into a profession that would make his parents proud and Participant 4 mentioned not wanting to disappoint her parents.

The positive relationships with teachers while growing up, relationships with children they had worked or volunteered with previously, and relationships with colleagues and family members created a significant theme among the participants in this study.

Research Question #2: What factors drew the participants to teach in a diverse, Title I school?

Just as the reasons provided for entering the teaching profession were personal and varied among each of the educators interviewed, so were the reasons provided for teaching in a diverse, Title I school. The second research question evenly divided the group in this regard; three of the participants stated that they chose to work in a high diversity, high-poverty environment; the other three felt that the environment chose them.

Self-Selected to Teach in a Diverse Environment

Three participants in the study described knowing that they wanted to teach in an environment of low socio-economic status, but one also felt the school chose them because it was a job. Growing up in the neighborhood drew Participant 3 to her position:

I grew up in the area, and at that time we weren't as diverse. The neighborhood has changed drastically from when I was here. We used to be the suburbs. It used to be the rolling hills, valleys, farmlands, and people would want to bring their families out here. It was the nice neighborhoods and the good schools were out here. And slowly but surely, it became [a] higher crime, more diverse area with ethnicity, lower SES, yet really just fell down with crime and a lot of things. It did not do well as far as the neighborhood

and community feel, that I have noticed. We used to have community parades, community days, none of that exists anymore. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 related a vision of her original career path, stemming from growing up in the suburbs and seeing the changes occurring within the neighborhood.

When I was young, I always thought I would go off to some third world country and become an orphanage worker and help the kids out there and do some sort of job that way. There's just no way I could ever do that because I just cannot handle even camping nowadays, so, I think this [teaching] is as close as I would ever come to doing any sort of part of that dream. In just being able to help out kids that don't have the benefits that I grew up with, or the experiences perhaps, I love being able to bring things into the classroom, being able to share experiences. (Participant 3)

She went on to explain that providing experiences for children growing up less privileged was a factor that drew her into teaching in this type of environment.

Taking kids to the zoo [who] had never been to the zoo, for the first time, that is amazing to me. Being able to talk to them, well, some of them, about snow or sledding. Some of these things we take for granted, and it is a lot of fun to do that with young children. So, that brings a lot of joy into teaching and why I wanted to teach in this area. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 added that the opportunity to teach at a grade level she loved was also a factor in her decision, although ultimately, she wanted to teach in a high-poverty, diverse school. She came from the private sector of education and saw the advantages that high SES children brought to school. Experienced with teaching both SES levels of students, she described some of the

challenges she sees in working with families in a high-poverty area.

Parents might have more emotional issues but not demanding issues that we are not challenging their child; not the issues I had in the other schools. I think with the families that we have here, they are so busy just trying to exist and work and provide for their families that unfortunately, they are just thrilled their kids are getting the education that they can. They're being provided [for] here at school and that's about all they've got time to take care of. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 also explained in working with children of poverty that, "It's exciting to be able to bring things to them that are fun and new to them, and challenging."

Despite having the experience at both an affluent school and a low poverty school, despite seeing the change in the demographics of the neighborhood throughout the years, and despite feeling as if the teaching position chose them, these participants still choose to teach this population of children. "I still love the area, I love the kids, but it is different. I still have a fondness for the district and the school. I think I still have a passion for kids who are lower SES" (Participant 3).

Participant 1 also chose to teach to a diverse population of students for personal reasons. Having grown up with diversity, she felt it would be beneficial to continue those connections.

I grew up in a very diverse community and I had a lot of friends who were from diverse cultures. I really learned a lot from them because I grew up going to a predominantly white private Catholic school. I got to see how others interact with each other on a different level with their culture, and it just interests me. The different ethnicities and diverse parents and students I was involved with as a child, through school and athletics and everything, made me want to be a part of that. I wanted to have a better

understanding and to help because I feel like I was more privileged as a child, and so I did not really think that was fair, I guess. So, I wanted to help and be a part of the education of children that are maybe less privileged. (Participant 1)

While Participant 1 had no experience teaching in higher SES schools, she considered the different “ups and downs” she might have if she did choose to teach in such an environment.

I think that it would be less frustrating because the students or the children would maybe know more, because they go home and their parents help them and the parents are more literate than the parents here. But then you also have the other side, which we don’t have here with parents in all the time, wanting to help, maybe breathing down your neck, ‘Why aren’t you helping my kid? You know they’re behind in reading.’ when really they are not, so I do not know. I have never done it so I cannot say I would not like it, but I think it would be different. (Participant 1)

Since she has experience in teaching at a Title I school, Participant 1 explained the personally rewarding aspects of her job:

I find it rewarding every day, if not one or more than one student, you just have that connection with them. Every day when they leave, they just go away with a smile. They may have come in the classroom bringing things in and they are just not normally who they are when they are with me. You can see that change and that transition throughout the day where they just act as if they have left all their things behind at home or whatever is happening. They just kind of leave with a smile: it’s a great feeling. (Participant 1)

The final participant who described choosing to teach in a highly diverse, high-poverty area was Participant 2. He described what drew him into wanting to teach in a diverse

environment:

When I first graduated, I really wanted that high diverse population to teach in. I had experiences working in both ends of the spectrum and I like the kids better in the higher poverty schools because, well, I think they need good quality teachers. But also they need people who care about them. And at the time, when I was graduating, I was really involved in working with homeless people. That was a passion of mine. So working in a high-poverty school allowed me to sort of follow that passion. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 described that since he also grew up in poverty, he felt he could relate to students in this type of educational environment.

I grew up somewhat in poverty, but not in a lot of the situations that these kids have that they have to deal with: drugs, abuse, parents being in jail and I couldn't really relate to that, at first. I wanted to be their friends at first before I realized that these kids just need an extremely structured setting where someone cares about them and is there for them, but is also going to hold them accountable. They really thrive on that. And once I learned that, it sort of changed the dynamics of my teaching and the classroom I was working in. (Participant 2)

In addition, Participant 2 had a prior teaching experience overseas and described that the country he was in was well off, but not in comparison to Western standards. The children he worked with overseas came from families who worked for embassies; there were also a number of international students. Families provided support to the students in this school.

It was a lot easier to work with those students because they didn't have as many problems at home, and they had really supportive families who worked with them all the

time and the kids in my classroom don't. I did enjoy that experience, and I did enjoy working with those students, but there wasn't the same problem solving and challenge and things that I enjoy working with poverty students. (Participant 2)

While Participant 2's overseas experience may have been easier because of parental support for the students, he described his calling to be an agent of change.

Outside of teaching, in my private life, I still work with people who are homeless and you know, I still have things, with my church or a different area where we'll serve people who are living in poverty and that really is a passion of mine. On a faith note, I feel that those things are things that in my Christian faith God has overcome. And knowing that, I feel like He can use me as a change agent in those situations because I know that those are things He has already overcome and sometimes just letting people know that, or me knowing that, can make a difference in these kids' lives. So my faith plays a big role in me wanting to be a teacher with this population of kids at this school. (Participant 2)

While this participant felt called to be a change agent among this population of students, he also described not feeling adequately prepared when leaving college. He described not having experiences in college with working with diverse populations of students or seeing students who truly struggled.

Textbooks were perfect case scenarios, not real world situations where students have behavior issues. You deal with family issues and having to make reports, and trying to get your struggling students just up to where they should have entered your classroom, not to mention another year's growth to be at grade level. (Participant 2)

A Diverse Environment Chose Me

Half of the participants stated that they did not really choose the environment of a high diverse Title I school and that they believe the environment actually chose them. Participant 5 explained that she took the position because she needed the job and did not realize that there was anything different about different types of schools. The other two participants in this category explained that over the course of time the school changed and became more diverse.

Participant 5 described her experience student teaching in a very wealthy, highly educated neighborhood school. Although there were 32 students in the second grade classroom, the participant stated that the classroom did not feel overcrowded, and that resources were ample. Parents worked diligently with their children at home and there was no shortage of parent volunteers. Participant 5 described the transition between her student teaching experience and working in a Title I school:

I graduated and got hired in December. I was the third teacher to this classroom of second graders: same age group as my student teaching. That means they had already hired a teacher, [a] first year teacher, and this class was so difficult and so demanding that he quit. They brought in a sub that was going to take it over; she could not do it. She said 'I'm just not; it's just too demanding, they're too needy.' So, as a brand new, first year right out of college teacher, I was hired in December. [I] did not know any better and did not know there was another way, other than what I had seen at my student teaching. Now I am like, 'I have 18 kids this is going to be a piece of cake.' I did not come in with any expectations. I did not even understand the difference between a high-poverty-school with multiple languages, versus where I was. I was just thankful to have a job. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 described not feeling prepared for the new environment, but explained that it was her naïveté that allowed her to remain.

That class has always marked the true test of my classroom management. It was years later that I ever realized how difficult they were, because nobody else was ever that difficult again. I know part of it was because they did not have stability. I was their third teacher. People had run out on them. I had judges and caseworkers and attorneys I was meeting with on students, because they [the students] had broken the law at age 8. It was extremely different and I was being pulled in a lot of directions. (Participant 5)

She went on to discuss the disparity between what she learned in college and the reality of teaching in a Title I school.

No one ever told me there were high-poverty schools and high-income kids. I just thought schools were schools. Everybody was going to get the same types of students and you were going to have a mix of kids. But I've learned over the years that in public education, and the way property lines fall, there's a huge difference between one school and another school. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 did not feel prepared for her first teaching position by the textbook scenarios she participated in while still in school. However, this participant took to heart advice received from one college advisor.

The only things I ever remember someone telling me was 'don't take a grade level, don't take your first job in an area you don't think you can do, because you'll quit teaching right away.' So, for example, all my training had been primary grades and if a sixth grade position came up, my advisor said, 'I wouldn't jump on it, I would make sure you

pick what's really going to fit for you, so you can make this a successful career.' And that's the only thing I remember. (Participant 5)

According to this participant, this advice saved her and she continues to teach because she was so naïve going into teaching in a diverse, difficult situation.

Similar to Participant 5, Participant 4 described student teaching in a highly affluent area at a small, private, Catholic school. Like the parents in Participant 5's school, the parents at Participant 4's placement were highly involved in their children's education. Participant 4 described having to set up calendars each month for parents in order to keep volunteers and snacks at a workable level.

Unlike Participant 5, who took a position for the sake of having a job, this participant took a teaching position at a school that later became more diverse. She described how the environment has changed throughout the past 20 years with the economic status going from more middle class to a lower socioeconomic status (SES).

When I started here 20 years ago, I did not need interpreters at conferences, or to call families at home to discuss students' progress. I had parents who volunteered on a regular basis (weekly) and wanted, or were willing, to be involved with class parties and field trips. Over the years I have had an increase in diversity to where I have a third of the students speaking Spanish, a third Russian, and a third English speaking this year. It has affected the learning in my classroom in a number of ways. (Participant 4)

Participant 4 expressed frustrations similar to those of Participant 5 with the disparity between what she was taught in college and what the reality of her teaching environment is.

It is challenging because I do not remember getting any training in college on diversity.

The extent of any diversity was limited to learning disabilities and a little training on difficult behaviors. Even my classroom experiences in practicum settings and student teaching did not have second language students. (Participant 4)

Like Participant 4, Participant 6 described changes to the SES median of the families at her school.

It used to be upper middle class when we moved out here. That was when I was in the third grade, 40 years ago. It was upper middle class, and now kind of the whole dynamic of the school district has changed. This school was always on the lower end of diversity and poverty in the district. It has changed over the years and has gotten more and more diverse. The economic levels of families have gone down considerably. (Participant 6)

Participant 6 described working at another school in the district that was not labeled as a high-poverty school. Reflecting back on the experience, and pondering the question, “What factors drew the participants to teach in a diverse, Title I school?” she responded:

I did not choose this school. I was at another school in the district and broke into my teaching career in that school and got placed in a fifth grade classroom. I was in fifth grade for two years and involuntarily transferred. I was so new at teaching a classroom of kids I had no idea about population and what this school, or actually any other school, was like. I had no experience to base it on at all. I had substituted around, but I do not think you get a very good idea, or a very good picture, of what things are like [substituting]. (Participant 6)

She went on to describe some of the challenges.

When I came to this school, it was like really hard because it was a pilot school for the

district for blended classrooms, so every single classroom was blended at the time when I came here. I was such a new teacher, that to have fifth and sixth graders in a classroom, at a new school, and being brought here involuntarily, along with having a hard group of kids, it was really a tough year. But, I really didn't know then that it had the diversity and the poverty level that it had. (Participant 6)

Participant 6 provided more insight on the reality of where she currently teaches because of a decision made by the district, not one made in accordance with personal choices.

It is really hard to know if it's the school that made the difference or budgeting and finances, [or] lack of resources. I never thought I would teach in a school that had a full time Russian and Hispanic liaison help families mold into the school system. I just did not ever see myself in that kind of a situation so it chose me. (Participant 6)

Again, as with what the other participants cited in this section, Participant 6 felt ill prepared by her education for the challenges she faced.

I had absolutely no college training that would have prepared me for teaching in such a diverse, economically deprived population. None of my practicum or student teaching experiences emphasized or exposed me to such a population. I cannot recall reading studies, research on such students/schools, professors speaking of it or anything else along those lines. When I was becoming a teacher (back in the dinosaur age, at least) the training was very generic, one size fits all. (Participant 6)

Participant 6 suggested ways in which her own college experience might have better prepared her for a diverse teaching environment.

It would have been amazing to have even read studies on ‘our kind of population,’ even more amazing to talk with other teachers of such populations and to even know that teaching could be different than the text book classes, textbook lesson plans, and text book behaviors we studied. Visitations would not have been very helpful, as it takes a long time to get a feel for how different a population like this can be. However, a practicum or student teaching experience would give a good indication that most traditional strategies need to be refined or changed. I think, back then, it was thought that you taught to the majority and the few that struggled, well, too bad. Now, strategies that work for low income/diverse populations are good for everyone else, so teaching styles/lessons have changed a lot. I wonder if newer teaching programs have a component/class on this subject. I hope so, as it seems there are more of these schools popping up everywhere. (Participant 6)

While the three participants did not feel that they made the ultimate decision in choosing to teach among a diverse population, something has allowed them to stay with it, some for as many as 24 years. In both groups of teachers, whether they chose to teach in a high diversity, high-poverty environment, or whether they feel that the environment chose them, it is clear through their stories that they are dedicated to helping students in the classroom. It is also apparent that the majority of them did not feel as if they had proper and adequate training in college to enter a Title I environment, but through experience and perseverance, they have found strategies that have worked for them.

Research Question #3: What has kept the participants teaching there?

The final research question required the participants to think about the teaching

experiences they have had. I asked some to pinpoint times they might have wanted to leave which would ultimately contribute to the attrition rate. Finally, I asked all the participants to describe what keeps them in the teaching profession. In order to grasp why teachers choose to stay teaching in high-poverty schools, I needed first to have an understanding of whether or not the participants in this study had ever thought about being a *leaver* or a *mover* within current teaching positions. Of the six participants in this study, three previously considered leaving the teaching profession altogether. Four of the six participants have thought about being a mover and moving away from their current teaching position to seek a different position within the district, at a new school. Two of the participants sought, at one time or another, to be both a leaver and a mover, seeking refuge outside of the current teaching position, as well as seeking employment outside of teaching. Only one of the participants said she had never thought about being a leaver or a mover, and had only considered the idea when approached by the district about the possibility of involuntarily transferring because of low class numbers. Table II (below) illustrates participant intention regarding leaving or moving.

Table II: Leaver VS Mover Intentions

Participant	Thought about Leaving	Thought about Moving	Has not Considered Leaving or Moving
Participant 1	X	X	
Participant 2	X	X	
Participant 3		X	
Participant 4			X
Participant 5		X	
Participant 6	X		

Having read literature on attrition rates among teachers in high-poverty schools, and seeing what researchers had to say regarding teachers leaving these areas partly because of the challenges with students there was a difference between the research and what the participants felt. Of these six participants only one had made mention of wanting to leave because of the stress she felt from the classroom and students. Participant 6 described an involuntary transfer she faced. This last-minute decision put her in a new building where the district created a new class.

I had got all the kids who had no teacher request, and so the other two teachers had gotten the teacher requests, and I got what I considered the left over kids, the move in kids, because my class [had] lower numbers. I was really inexperienced on top of it.

(Participant 6)

This participant described challenging students with behavioral issues that did not adapt well to having a new teacher. Research has clearly shown that the highest attrition rates occur in the first three years of teaching; the involuntary transfer of Participant 6 occurred during her third year of teaching.

I did not think I could come back. I felt like “this is not what I signed up for, it was too hard.” Plus, I was involuntarily moved so I [hadn’t] asked to be moved. I really resented that. I had a lot of anger against the school district for doing that to me. (Participant 6)

This teacher could have very easily added to the rate of attrition because she did not feel supported by the district. However, with the support of family, and faced with the reality that she needed the job, she was able to find solutions that worked and helped her maintain the position.

Participant 6 was not the only participant who experienced an involuntary transfer. Participant 1 described her involuntarily transfer from one building to another then later being juggled around within that same building, through different grade levels, in order to fill staffing shortages. Participant 1 was in her third year of teaching when the transferring began. “There was a lot of juggling, and it was really hard because it makes you feel like no matter how hard you work, or what you put into it, it doesn’t matter; you’re just a number” (Participant 1).

While some of the reasons cited by participants for wanting to leave teaching were district created, other educators described wanting to leave or move due to issues that were unique to their specific position. Participant 2 expressed, “I had considered being a mover, not because of this population or these kids, or because I didn’t enjoy teaching them. It was more related to politics and administration.” This participant did not feel supported by administration within the building in regards to student behaviors, nor did he feel support with professional growth goals. Participant 2 sought feedback through administrative evaluations in order to continue growing as a teacher and did not feel as if he was being supported; the participant therefore sought support from peers. Other participants echoed the same sentiments regarding administration, with comments such as, “People were pitted against each other,” “You weren’t backed especially with parents and you weren’t backed with kids, especially in discipline issues,” “The student was never in the wrong,” and “The stress level in the building and unpredictability made it even more stressful” (Participants 2, 3, 4, & 6).

Table III outlines the common themes among the participants regarding the motivating factors they have described for staying in the teaching profession. Experiences shared by the participants in this study help further explore the themes outlined in the table below.

Table III: Motivating Factors to Stay in Current Teaching Position

Participant	Personal Quality of Life	Relationships with Staff & district administration	Relationships with Students and Families	Making a Difference
Participant 1	X	X	X	X
Participant 2	X	X	X	X
Participant 3	X	X	X	X
Participant 4	X	X	X	X
Participant 5	X	X	X	X
Participant 6	X	X	X	X

Participants had a variety of reasons for entering the teaching profession and the reasons they stated for motivation to stay within the profession are just as varied. While only two participants previously stated that personal quality of life was a motivating factor for entering the profession, all of the participants shared reasons for it being a motivating factor to stay.

Personal Quality of Life

Some of what the study participants had to say about remaining in the teaching profession had to do with the need to work because of the need to support a family. A few of the participants are the sole providers for families, and those that are not the sole providers described still having a financial need to work. One of the participants described having a teaching degree and not having any other profession to fall back on. Another's spouse supported the participant's desire to leave the profession, but when questioned about what the participant would do to help support the family, the participant was at a loss: teaching was all she ever wanted to do. Not

only do some of the participants have to work to support families, some of them described the logistics of the job as a motivation to stay.

In writing about the motivation to stay in the profession, Participant 3 described a candid conversation she had with a third-year teacher in the building, a colleague who is considering leaving the profession. Participant 3 chose to share the conversation because it illustrates some common frustrations within the teaching environment.

During this conversation we talked about the benefits of this job: finances, insurance, summer vacation, Monday-Friday work schedule and holidays. She asked, “How do you make it work year after year?” I think that if I still had young children it would be very difficult to find a way to balance the demands of home and school. (Participant 3)

Participant 3 sees the factors that she shared with a colleague as a motivation to stay within this profession, especially now that her children are grown. Participants 4 and 5 described growing to love the work schedule and having the same vacations as their own children, which provides a support structure for their families. When opportunities to teach during vacation times arise, both participants have declined those opportunities because they are motivated to recharge with family time and come back to the classroom feeling prepared and refreshed after vacations. Additionally, Participant 5 described having to work to help support a growing family and that not working was not an option.

Participant 2 noted that the schedule of teaching allows him to spend more time with his family and the steady paycheck allows him to support the family structure because he is the sole provider. However, moving away from paychecks and schedules as aspects of personal quality

of life mentioned by the previous participants, Participant 2 described an aspect of personal quality of life that also motivates him to continue teaching. “I feel an obligation to myself. I want to be good at what I do, and I know that if I don't put in the time practicing my craft, I won't be the best I can be.” Wanting to improve one's practice as a teacher helps lower stress levels, according to Participant 2. He also does not want to let family members down, which he feels would add to his stress level. Participant 2 said, “I feel an obligation to my parents who I want to be proud of me, and I try to conform to what I know would please them.” Similarly, Participant 5 also mentioned pride, stating, “I feel really proud being able to tell someone I am a teacher,” and explained that a different profession would add to her level of stress.

Unlike the other participants, Participant 1 does not find the teaching schedule to be a motivation to remain in the teaching profession. This participant explained that she becomes bored on breaks and begins thinking about other opportunities for employment. Participant 1 also noted that one of her motivations to stay in teaching that relates to personal quality of life is, “weighing the pros and cons of what's best for me at the time, so I can have a choice or decision before somebody makes it for me.” She described the stress she feels when thinking about district-made decisions without her input. Participant 1 needs to feel that she is choosing to stay in the profession rather than feeling like the district is making all the decisions for her.

In addition to enjoying the work schedule of a teacher, Participants 2 and 4 described the freedom to be creative, which they feel alleviates stress. They are grateful for the ability to have some freedom with lesson planning.

The kids love art, and with budget cuts and the demands of the standards we have cut so much of the enrichment that these students need. I have tried to build in some of the

active movement and creative aspects of learning that bring them and myself so much joy. (Participant 2)

I love being able to be creative, yet have standards to go by where I don't have to totally reinvent the wheel. Although, that seems like [it is] changing and you can be less creative. I really like that part of it, and that's what brings me back; being able to come up with a new unit on 3-D shapes, they have to know these certain shapes but I can teach them however I want. I can get online to get different ideas and play games with the kids that they [online resources] have. It is a lot of fun, so there's that creative side.

(Participant 4)

While schedules, paychecks, and creativity were motivating factors for participants, two of the participants described not being risk takers in life, explaining that they do not seek change. Participants 4 and 6 described feeling more stressed when they thought about leaving the teaching profession or when confronted with the idea of having to move buildings because of shifts occurring within the district, which would negatively affect their personal quality of life. This has been a major contributing factor into both participants staying within the teaching profession. According to Participant 4:

I'm not so good with change. So as far as like switching into say a different role like, "Oh, I think I want to be a title teacher, or an ELD teacher, or get into administration," no way! I am not that way. It is just that teaching is for me. I am happy where I am at. I would rather know where I am at than go to somewhere unknown. That's just kind of who I am. (Participant 4)

Like Participant 4, Participant 6 said that she stays in the profession. “Because of my comfort, I just am not a risk taker, ever, in any part of my life. And so I just never would leave.”

(Participant 6). Both participants described this being a motivating factor to stay because the thought of change is too overwhelming. Participant 6 further explained that while the thought of retirement is scary and stressful, it is motivating thinking about the possibilities of continuing work with children of poverty in other areas of life. Such experiences include those she has had with her own daughter’s teaching experience in another country.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of personal quality of life includes the level of stress in one’s life, the ability to make decisions, benefits, pay, and schedules. Stress levels affected all of the participants, in some cases creating the desire for the participants to become movers or leavers. For two of the participants, the district was able to provide enough support and hope to motivate them to stay within the profession. While personal quality of life was not an original motivation for some of the participants to enter the profession, this study has shown it to be a motivation for these teachers to stay.

Relationships with Staff

Positive relationships with colleagues have been highly motivating factors for all of the participants in this study to remain within the teaching profession. Some of the participants maintained relationships collaboratively within grade-level teams, while others described the relationships as true friendships that went beyond the teaching profession. Some of the participants described the importance of district-level relationships from participants seeking support outside the building for issues occurring within the building.

Recently, two of the study’s participants considered positions outside of the building

because of issues occurring within the building. Both of these participants confided in team members about the situation and finally sought support at the district level, forming a new sort of relationship outside the building. They both felt that the district heard their concerns. They also felt confident that something was going to happen to help change the negativity within their teaching environment. Both participants also felt that positive changes were on the way within the building and they hope that remaining in the building was the best decision. These participants named district administration as a key factor in their respective decisions to remain.

In addition to relationships outside the building, participants described relationships within grade-level teams as motivation to stay. Participant 4 described connections within the professional learning community (PLC) that are built over time as colleagues get to know each other. She notes, however, that forming these connections can be difficult when the team is constantly shifting.

It was one of those times in my career where each year, in the five years that I taught, I worked with a different team. Either somebody left to take another job or somebody moved within the building or somebody had a baby and left. The team constantly changed. There was no community because you were always kind of starting new. I was the only one who stayed consistent for those five years. (Participant 4)

Not only was this participant in a team that was not constant, for various reasons, the bond between the team members was not there during those five years. “Those were kind of the years that I missed my previous team because we were so close and I just wanted to come down the hall and work with them again” (Participant 4).

Participant 1 felt a similar need for strong professional relationships at work. She

described the positive aspects of building relationships over time:

Our team worked well together. It was a great team. We meshed well and we were efficient. We had time to, not just talk about work, we were, you know, able to know each other on a different level, a more personal level, which I think is great. When you work with someone, it is hard to have that surface level relationship where you ask “What are we doing today?” When you get to know somebody, it is just more meaningful when you come to work, I feel like. That’s really important, I think, when you’re working with someone so closely. (Participant 1)

Participant 3 stressed the importance of a collaborative work environment. She described working closely with a team and building collaborative relationships but dreading the logistics the district mandated around the work accomplished in the PLC process. Participant 6, like Participant 3, spoke about the PLC process. Using a PLC model, Participant 6 explained that positive peer support reinforced feelings of strength and capability in her teaching efforts. She described the fear of her involuntary transfer and having to start completely over, proving her competence to new people.

Moving beyond the levels of relationships described by the participants working in a PLC, the participants spoke at length about the deeper connections made within teams and among staff members. Participant 5 described relationships that went beyond the workplace with team members and staff members. She also explained the bond formed among educators.

I feel like there’s a brotherhood in education, just like there is in the police force and the fire department. You work hard together and sometimes you are together with a group and that I think that it is a community. Educators in this country work *really* hard to do

the best that they can do under any circumstance, in any situation. Like in any field, some of us are better at our jobs in comparison to others. Some of us struggle in one area and not in another, but I feel that education is an important part of this country and its future. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 noted that educators need to form these bonds with each other and help one another grow in order to help the students. Participant 2 reflected similar sentiments, stating, “I think the teachers here are great people, but they are also great teachers who care a lot about these kids, and they work hard together to make sure that they succeed.” Participant 2 went on to describe, much as Participant 5 had, that building relationships with other staff members outside of a team setting was important:

I had formed relationships, friendships my first year at this school. My first year the team that I worked with was a strong team; we worked together well, we made decisions efficiently, we planned together well, shared resources and the workload, and it was extremely good. I still enjoy working with those teachers, even though I’m not at the same grade level. (Participant 2)

Participant 3 described that the relationships she formed with teammates, old and new, top her list of personal motivations for remaining in the profession. She expressed a joy for bonding with team members and across grade-levels by having potluck lunches together once a week. “Having the ability to take 30 minutes, once a week, to eat together, talk together, and share stories helps build trust and maintain a level of commitment among peers” (Participant 3). This participant also recounted that:

On Wednesdays, my teammate and I have two hours of time to use for planning and the

discussion of student progress. I truly look forward to this time spent with my team, building a collaborative relationship as a co-worker and as a friend. It's these kinds of relationships that have kept me specifically in this building and it's these relationships that keep me coming back, year after year. (Participant 3)

The majority of the study's participants have spent time together outside their contract hours to work on relationship building. In the interviews, they expressed how they have shared moments of laughter; enjoyed dinners on the weekends at restaurants or one another's homes; participated in family game nights; maintained healthy lifestyles together through activities; and shared times of fellowship with one another, discussing professional and personal matters. The bonds go beyond the classroom walls, beyond school walls, and beyond district boundaries. These teachers truly care about one another, and support each other through life's difficulties.

Relationships with Students and Families

Study participants described relationships with students and their families as another motivation to remain in the teaching profession. Participant 1 stated that having students in the classroom who provide challenges also allows opportunities for relationship building with that child. She appreciated being able to find ways to make a difference in the lives of students:

Driving to work today, I was thinking of my motivation to come to work and all I could think about was that one student from yesterday. I was thinking about how today would be a better day. I was thinking of all the ways to praise her once she walked in my room. (Participant 1)

Participant 1 also described being away from her classroom for meetings one day. She felt anxious to get back to the classroom so she could see how her students did with the substitute

teacher. This participant likes to praise students for work well done. Participant 1 was excited to share the substitute's positive report with her students.

Participant 3 also described building relationships with students, but partnered it with maintaining expectations for learners and individuals in order to keep the classroom functioning. She explained that in order to keep the classroom running, the teacher has to have a working relationship with students that goes beyond just being their teacher. For this participant, seeing students take risks in learning because they trust her as the teacher has had a great impact on her.

Today it was great to come into work and greet my students in the morning, and check in with them, and just have this time to connect with them as individuals. This year I had the opportunity to loop with a majority of my class, and this has given me a greater chance to have a deeper connection and relationship with many of these students.

Making sure that the classroom is working smoothly and just knowing that I have plans for the kids in here is important. Because I know my students, I know how to push them. I know how to get them up and going. There is a lot that you know only you can do, especially when you have those relationships and patterns established with students. That makes a difference. (Participant 3)

Participant 2 described forming relationships with students' families over a period of time.

You form relationships with parents you know. Not having been here very long, I still have parents that ask [for] me to be the teacher of a sibling of one of the other kids from their family that I have taught, and that feels good. Leaving, I would have to start that all over. Getting to know families and parents and forming those relationships again, that's a lot of work. (Participant 2)

In addition to forming relationships with students' families, Participant 2 went on to discuss the relationships he has created with the students themselves.

I feel an obligation to my students that they have consistency because I know that many of them lead lives outside of school where adults create very inconsistent patterns for them. I want my classroom to be different from that. I feel like I know these kids better than most people do, including some of their parents, and that I can do the best job educating them right now. Another thing that keeps me coming back is that sometimes we are asked to do such ridiculous things, it makes me laugh. In my box was a stack of papers to send home with students. The papers were letting families know that they could get their cats spayed or neutered for ten dollars. I thought it was a joke at first. When I passed them out one of my students who was wearing a hooded sweatshirt with pointed ears on top announced, "I'm a cat, you can fix me!" I laughed so hard. These kids can be so funny at times. I love our relationships. (Participant 2)

Participant 4 described her ability to connect with families within the school setting through more district-provided opportunities.

I like knowing the kids and getting to know the families. I love when it is time for conferences, as much as I [used to] dread it before. When it is actually time to sit and talk with the families about how their child is doing and funny things that they have done at school and things they have gotten successful at, I love that. I think being a parent, I know I like hearing that kind of stuff from my kids' teachers, and that personal stuff. I really like that part of it. That definitely brings you a good feeling coming to work. (Participant 4)

Relationships with students and their families made an impact on Participant 4 and her desire to continue teaching. She explained that one never knows when one will influence the life a child by something one says or does in the classroom:

The relationship with the kids is important. You see the kids in the grocery store or in Costco or in Target and they will be like, "Teacher!" Sometimes they're not even kids that you have in your class, they're just kids in the building and you'll see them and you'll be like, "Oh my gosh, I don't remember your name" and I'm just mortified and I kind of freeze. It is so cute when they see you and remember you. I was just at the hospital with my mom when she had knee surgery and one of the nurse assistants came in and was like, "Are you a teacher?" and I said, "Yeah," and he said, "Oh!" He ended up being one of my students. He totally remembered me. I'm like, okay, that's pretty amazing, when this 21 year old kid can remember being in my class. It's just a good feeling to see these kids later on and outside and see what they're doing and you know it's a reason why I stay here. (Participant 4)

Similarly, Participant 5 truly enjoyed the relationships she had built with families throughout the years. In detail, she described the importance of getting to know families and being involved in the community.

The most rewarding part about being here I should say is the families. Knowing the community, knowing the families, and I also have the benefit of knowing my children attend this school district as well, where we work. I know I feel connected: like my students that I am sending on are eventually going to be friends and in places with my own kids. Now my kids are older, so I have less of that, but there are siblings of them. I

have [lots of] little siblings of friends and kids and that again helps build that community. I live in this area, I teach in this area, and my kids go to school in this area. So I feel extremely connected, so that is the benefit. I do not care if it is Title I or high end. That is the part, that no matter where I am, that I feel like that is where I am rooted. I get rooted in the community itself and the relationships with the families that we have.

(Participant 5)

Participant 5 described the beginning stages of building relationships with the students and making a difference in the lives of these children. She had previously described teaching in a classroom with children who were facing judges and attorneys at a young age because of crimes they had committed. Being that one constant in the life of a child was important for this participant.

It's a great feeling to feel like someone really needs you and it feels like you're making a difference: and that you know for six hours, they're safe. For six hours, someone cares about them: they have a place to stay and the rules are going to be consistent: so that felt good. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 also mentioned building a relationship with one particular child, focusing on implementing strategies to improve his (the child's) behaviors in the classroom.

Working through my day today, I had the challenge of implementing a new behavior contract for one of my students. The first day of a behavior contract can be tricky. In my attempts to start this off in a positive manner, building the relationship, I had to work extra hard re-teaching and explaining how his current behavior was right on target, below target or off target. If I marked the chart without this step, he would have failed at

reaching his goal by the first hour. In the end, he did not meet his goal but he was very close. As he left he was disappointed, but proudly pointed out to his grandma that he was so close to making his goal. The process wore me out, but I know it is necessary until he has a clear understanding of what actions/behaviors impact his daily score. (Participant 5)

Much like the other participants, Participant 6 shared in the belief that the relationship formed with families and students is one of the most motivating factors in staying with the profession. This participant has been with the school for quite a few years and described seeing many siblings pass through her classroom doors. Participant 2 explained how he enjoyed parents asking him to be their child's teacher and Participant 6 felt the same way.

There's been really amazing experiences where I have had repeat kids. I've had first kids, second kids, third kids, fourth kids, etc. placed in my classroom where I feel like I have developed really strong relationships with families and they continue to reaffirm that I have done a good job and they're happy with how I've challenged their kids or helped to have them go through this grade. Those preadolescent years are tough on kids, they are tough on families, and they are tough on teachers and each other, peers. Then there have been families that think I have been too hard on kids: I do not understand their child, but I think that is there no matter where you go. It's about building relationships. (Participant 6)

Unfortunately, Participant 6 did not have strong relationships with her own teachers while in school. Forming bonds with students was one of her motivating factors for entering teaching; this motivation also helps keep her in the profession.

There was a highlight today I hoped for, but didn't expect. Each Tuesday we do a five

minute timed test on basic facts. I have a dear student [who] gets closer and closer each week. I encourage her each week to keep going: she will make it. I have assured her many times. Her New Year's Resolution was to practice more at home. It has been difficult to watch her try so hard and not achieve this goal. She thanks me each week for believing in her, encouraging her and helping her. She has written me nice notes and thanked me personally. Today she did it! She and I had tears in our eyes. Her classmates high-fived her and congratulated her. It was a great moment: a perfect example of perseverance and effort. I am so proud of her. This is when you know that even the little "Atta Boy" moments can make a difference for some students. I needed that moment to remind me that all the annoyances of the day are truly not important. The relationships I have with my students, and that the students have with one another, are what's important. (Participant 6)

Each of these participants had unique stories and experiences to share regarding relationships they had formed with families and students. These rewarding bonds kept many of them engaged in their current school setting and unwilling to leave because rebuilding relationships would take a lot of work and energy. Additionally, all of the study participants expressed the view that they felt as if they were part of a community and that they could truly make an impact on a child through these relationships.

Making a Difference

Making a difference was a motivating factor for some educators to enter the teaching profession, which I originally categorized as "personal fulfillment." However, after speaking with these participants and asking them if making a difference to the child was personal

fulfillment, they stated that once they got into teaching, it was more about the impact on the child. It took the perspective from internal motivation and feeling good about one's self to truly having an impact on another human being and focusing on the feelings of the other person.

Participant 1 described making a difference for children academically and behaviorally, explaining that creating stability is a powerful experience.

After school on Wednesdays I teach an after school math class. This is when I really enjoy what I do: teaching a small group of kids and seeing the light bulbs come on and that they are getting what I am teaching. It is amazing to see them succeed. State testing is right around the corner. I will be back next week for testing to see how my students are doing. I am actually really excited for the testing. (Participant 1)

Seeing students succeed showed Participant 1 that she was truly making a difference. She continued, talking about a specific student who had been struggling with math. Being able to find an area in which the student excelled helped make a difference, allowing the student to believe in herself.

It's a great thing when you're talking to a child about their math or whatever and we're trying to teach them about math and they just get so frustrated and one day it just clicks, and they're like, "I got it! I get it!" A particular child I am thinking about has been struggling all year with addition, subtraction and multiplication, and now we are doing fractions, which is a little bit more difficult for some kids. She is solid with this, and she just feels good about herself and she is working to be a self-manager. All these things, it's great to see these kids that are so hard on themselves and they feel like so less of a student and I find one thing they can do and it just brings them up, and it's so great to see

that. (Participant 1)

Participant 4 also described the progress of children as a motivation to continue teaching. She pulls students from various grade levels to provide additional educational support. Much like Participant 1, this participant described truly enjoying her work with small groups:

I started out my morning post-assessing kids who were absent the day before. It is a very rewarding feeling to see the gains they have made and get excited with them as they learn. I taught my students a new game called, Fiddlesticks, to practice letters and sounds. They really enjoyed it and seem to be remembering the names of letters. I look forward to doing a quick assessment on Thursday when they bring their letter practice homework back. One student who is in a small group I teach came into my classroom with a note. On it were the letters she still needed to learn. Her teacher had written down ten upper and lowercase letters. The little girl was so excited to show me. When I got excited for her, and told her she had learned so much, she got a big grin on her face and nodded her head. I love when they get proud and excited about their learning! Seeing gains, I know I am making a difference. (Participant 4)

Making these connections with students is important to these participants. Participant 2 discussed his joy and satisfaction of making connections with each child, working to understand them. He further explained that children need support and consistency in diverse environments in order to be successful academically and behaviorally. The participant had not been feeling well for a while and refused to take a sick day because he felt an obligation to the students in his classroom.

There are also students who I have begun to really get good work from them, and by

missing a day I fear that it could be a setback. There are students who I am planning to run intervention groups for tomorrow. I would not feel comfortable asking anyone else to run those groups for me. This would mean that my students would miss out on a day of intervention, and with the tight schedules that we have, I would rather just come to work. (Participant 2)

After finally taking a sick day, Participant 2 provided a journal entry he completed, providing insight into the struggles he has with his sense of obligation.

I did think about my kids today, and worried about how they would be. I found out that the sub I had requested was not able to make it and a random sub came. That always makes me worry, too. I have a student whose dad just walked out on the family and I wonder if my being gone, without letting him know ahead of time, causes those feelings to surface for him. I have other students with unstable homes and I worry that by being absent I am taking away some of those consistent, positive messages that they receive from me. A substitute does not know their background and might not have the patience I am able to have by empathizing. I have a student who has just started having minor seizures. I worry that a substitute might not be looking for those signs as vigilantly as I would, since I care so much for this little girl. It makes me want to take care of myself today, so I can be there for their needs tomorrow. I sometimes cannot believe that the district pays me to play literacy games with kids or that I get to celebrate their birthday while being paid. I would gladly do it without pay. My class brings a lot of joy into my life and I really love the time I spend with them, even if the job occasionally brings along needy parents, hard to deal with coworkers, or unrealistic demands. I feel that I make a

difference when I am at work. (Participant 2)

All the study participants discussed the desire to make a difference for their students on a personal level, not just academically. Participant 4 shared a story about a mom who asked about her faith, and how that question helped serve as an inspiration for her to maintain a positive attitude.

I remember a long time ago, in one of my first years of teaching one of the parents was cleaning up because their child was playing with blocks. I was helping the child and her put the blocks away. She was like, “Are you a Christian?” and I said, “Yeah.” You know, I do not have anything religious up in the room and I do not read Bible stories, obviously, but she was just like, “Oh I could tell.” I always think about that when I feel like I am getting just kind of a grumpy attitude or something with the kids. You know, this might be one of the only smiles that they see, or one of the only happy, safe places for them to be at, especially these days with the students. So I hope I make a difference in that way with the kids. (Participant 4)

Making a difference through positively influencing students also had an impact on Participant 6. She commented on the influence negativity can have on the classroom, expressing in a journal entry that one day the class had struggled with name calling, behavior issues, kicking, and insulting. She began feeling the stress level rise within the classroom. Participant 6 said, “I need to work harder to keep the climate positive, because a majority of the students want to learn and do a great job in school, so letting a few ruin that isn’t ok.” The participant said it was a great feeling to work with a teammate who reminded her that negativity breeds negativity, and that working on the positives creates a much greater influence on learning.

Participant 6 also described being excited to see the learning that was going to take place in the classroom. She planned a multi-content unit that made students very excited. Participant 6 explained she was just as eager to see the students learning as the students were to take part in the proposed project.

Our class economy is going well and they are very motivated to earn class cash. This is a unit on financing and encompasses all aspects of saving, spending and budgeting. I have told them this week there will be an emergency/negative scenario so be ready to spend some of their hard earned savings. All students are on pins and needles waiting for the catastrophe to drop. I look forward to distributing the scenarios tomorrow. I cannot wait to see their faces! They tried their best today, to get some hint of what was going to happen. I did not give up any information. They seemed to have forgotten that this is a life lesson they are learning. Making learning so much fun and valuable at the same time is one of the reasons I became a teacher, and remains as one of the reasons I stay. It is awesome when a unit sparks thinking, conversation and motivation. (Participant 6)

These types of experiences with students, providing excitement in learning and being motivated to make a difference, were an inspiration for Participant 6 to continue teaching.

Usually Mondays can be tough days in our classrooms, but today the students seemed ready to go. We discussed their responsibilities as learners and how I can provide them the information needed to progress through the year, but they are responsible for making it knowledge. We discussed how learning is a shared responsibility. They certainly seemed receptive, and many said they had never thought of it that way. I was happy to have enlightened them. Now we will see how many really take that piece of knowledge

to heart and work harder to do their part. Even at my worst, students say “Good Morning,” “How was your night?” “Have a good night,” “How was your weekend?” and so on. They are sweet kids. I care about each of them and only want them to work to their full potential. I think they know that and most of them appreciate how hard we all work for them. (Participant 6)

While many of the participants mentioned making a difference in the lives of their students, only one of the participants made direct mention of making a difference to her colleagues.

I approached a principal several years ago, now it’s been over 10, about switching over to her building. We talked for a long time and one of the things we discovered was that every building has certain needs. You have your chiefs and Indians, and the people that take on different roles. At the time, I felt that it was more important that I stay in the building where I was at, because what I brought to the staff was something our staff needed and they did not really need at the other building. They were already that same type of “go getter” that I would have brought. Therefore, I just made the decision to stay where I was. And I don’t regret it at all, it’s been great. (Participant 5)

Ultimately, being able to work closely with fellow staff members and offering one’s own strengths to the collaborative effort allows teams to grow. Not all teachers have the same strengths; a good team combines individual strengths to create a stronger whole. Participant 5 spoke to the depth of preparation needed to teach successfully. Teachers create lesson plans, assess students, analyze data, and form small groups for instruction, in addition to finding necessary materials. This participant described the feeling of success she felt when she had time

to work as part of a strong team.

At the end of the student contact day my teammate and I again worked as a grade level team to complete the work we started in the morning; making charts, running off our assessments, etc. What made this day stand out is the fact that we were not spending our non-student time in meetings directed by the district, but meetings we *chose* to conduct to help better prepare and serve our students. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 also described the planning that took place and how well prepared she felt, which made her day run more smoothly for her students.

I was able to meet with my guided groups in all subject areas and even found a few minutes to re-screen one of my struggling students. Happily, she has made many gains and we were able to celebrate her hard work. Then when my Title I support later came in, she was able to give extra practice with the one student who had not shown as much growth. Time and timing is everything. Today I had both working for me. My student on the behavior chart met his goal! Having days like today makes tomorrow that much more exciting. (Participant 5)

While not all participants in this study had the same motivating factors to continue in the teaching profession, they each found something that works for them. Some of these participants have also inspired other teachers within their school who were struggling against external adversity or inner doubt.

Conclusion

It is important to remember that the commonalities discussed in this chapter are from a small sampling of teachers and do not fully represent all teachers. Each of these six participants

shared very personal reasons for entering the teaching profession. Some of them explained wanting to teach for logistical reasons, such as money and benefits, while others wanted to teach because of relationships they enjoyed with former teachers. Still others wanted to teach because they wanted to feel good about making an impact in the life of a child. Not only were each of the stories the participants told about entering teaching unique, so were their reasons for teaching in a diverse Title I school.

Each of the participants was willing to share information about teaching in a high-poverty, diverse setting. Some of them described feeling called to the position because of their faith, while others felt they could make a positive difference in that particular environment. Some chose the school because it was a job and explained that the dynamics of poverty and diversity changed over time; others did not feel as if they chose to teach in such a setting, and that the setting chose them by way of circumstance. Whatever reason the participants provided, whether a choice or not, they have successfully remained in the teaching profession and have not contributed to the already high rate of attrition.

All the study's participants were open to sharing their reasons to continue teaching despite frustrations, setbacks and feeling ill prepared in training. While it was not a highly motivating factor to enter the profession, all of the participants described personal quality of life as a reason to stay. Steady income, benefits, the ability to be creative, and a schedule that allows personal time to recharge and be with family were all listed as strong motivations to remain within their current setting and profession. Every participant also mentioned choosing to stay in the profession because of relationships with colleagues, as well as those formed over the years with families and students. Not all the participants' stories were the same; each was unique to specific participants and the experiences they had faced, but all felt hope and satisfaction in their

capacity to make a difference, one way or another.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

I have been a teacher in a high-poverty, diverse, Title I school for several years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to work with numerous teachers. Additionally, I work as an adjunct professor of education at a local university. In that role, I mentor pre-service teachers during their student teaching experience and their initial teaching positions. In both circumstances, whether working alongside a teacher within my elementary school building or mentoring teachers new to the profession, I have seen the effects of teacher attrition. Many great teachers leave the district to go to another one, or leave the profession altogether. Additionally, I have seen many great teachers seek to move to another building within the district. This piqued my interest as I wondered why certain teachers decided to stay in their positions in a high-poverty school. In order to answer this, I wanted to first explore the reasons these teachers entered the profession as a first career choice or a later career choice. The purpose of my study was to explore the reasons behind teachers' entering the teaching profession and explore what has helped keep them in those teaching roles. The literature review showed that the rate of attrition was higher in high-poverty schools, as I had seen within my own school setting. I decided to focus on research in this area because it has direct application to my current position and school setting.

I chose a narrative research approach involving personal interviews and participants' reflective journals in order to gain insight into how to retain teachers in high-poverty settings. Within my research I explored three areas of interest: (1) participant descriptions of original motivations to teach, (2) participant descriptions of why they chose to teach in a high-poverty,

diverse, Title I school, and (3) participant descriptions of the motivations that keep them in their current teaching positions within this school. The final sample for this study included six licensed teachers, with three or more years of experience in a single high-poverty, diverse, Title I school located in the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Of these participants, five were female and one was male, with teaching experiences ranging from five years to twenty-four years. In this research, I explored the experiences of these teachers and the motivations that have helped keep them in this profession and in their current school.

Summary and Conclusions

Research Question #1 – Considerations

Why did the study's participants decide to become teachers?

Through personal interviews, participants shared stories about why they chose to enter the teaching profession. The three main themes that emerged related to this research question were personal quality of life, personal fulfillment, and relationships built with mentors prior to entering the profession. An equal number of participants identified the themes of personal fulfillment and relationships with mentors.

For research participants, personal fulfillment included enjoying working with children and the ability to see that their professional decisions made a positive difference in the lives of their students. Participants shared experiences of the first time they worked with children and saw that “light bulb” come on. These experiences made the participants feel good about the work they were doing and the possibilities of how much more they could do with other children if they entered the teaching profession. Others discussed having experiences when they were growing up and seeing that those same experiences were not a reality for children of poverty. For that reason, the teachers wanted to provide such experiences for children who might not

otherwise have them. The reasons provided by my participants corresponded with the research I noted in the literature review about teachers' desire to make a difference in the life of a child, in some cases by providing new experiences (Ewing & Manuel, 2005; Hellsten & Prytula, 2011; Hughes & Manuel, 2006; Simmons, 2005).

The second theme that emerged from this question was personal quality of life. Of the participants, only two identified personal quality of life as a reason for entering the teaching profession. Personal quality of life referred to items such as salary, benefits, and work schedule. The literature review supported what I saw in this study in as much as monetary reasons are not significant factors in choosing to enter the teaching profession (Hughes & Manuel, 2006). However, participants mentioned having a flexible schedule that allowed more time with a growing family as a motivating factor. Earlier research also identified this as a factor (Ewing & Manuel, 2005). One of the participants who entered the teaching profession had previously worked with children in a daycare setting, but was unable to support her family financially and therefore went back to complete a degree in education. This drew her into teaching because she would essentially be doing the same kind of work, but the pay and benefits far exceeded those in the daycare field. The other participant who mentioned entering the teaching profession because of pay had done so through the university because of a higher paying work study program. While these two participants noted that monetary considerations played a small role in their decisions to become teachers, both of these participants had also mentioned building a relationship with a mentor as a factor that helped solidify the decision to enter the teaching profession.

All but one of the participants mentioned personal relationships with formal and informal mentors, whether it was a colleague or a childhood teacher who inspired them, as a reason for

their decision to enter the teaching profession. When these participants spoke about the relationships they had formed with childhood teachers it was clear that, for the majority of them, this was one of the solidifying factors in their becoming a teacher. Forming relationships with childhood teachers helped make a difference in the lives of these participants, a finding that earlier research supports (Burke, 2000; Hughes & Manuel, 2006). One of my participants noted the lack of a relationship with a mentor in her own life and in turn stated that she wanted to play the role of mentor.

It is important to see the role that early mentor relationships played in the lives of these participants. Participants who had experienced the benefit of having an adult who acted as a mentor during their formative years wanted to serve future generations of students by providing a similar mentor-student experience. As I will note later in this chapter, relationships play an important role for educators. Not only have these participants noted that they entered the profession due in part to a relationship formed when they were younger, but they also expressed the view that relationships with families and students, as well as peers, are highly motivating factors for staying in the profession.

Research Question #2 – Considerations

What factors drew the participants to teach in a diverse Title I school?

Through interviewing the participants in this study, I learned that not all the teachers in this high-poverty school purposely sought a teaching position in a high-poverty, diverse area. One of the participants explained that she had no prior knowledge there was a difference in types of schools, because she had never been exposed to a high-poverty, diverse demographic area. Thus, when she took the position, she was shocked to learn the differences among students with far different needs. This was different from what she expected based on her previous

experiences in college. Another of the participants described how when she first entered the classroom in this school it was more in alignment with her previous teaching experience in a more affluent school. Over the years, the district changed as rates of poverty increased. Finally, one of the participants described her involuntary transfer as a third year teacher going from one school to a high-poverty school within the district. This was an extremely stressful time for her and during this time she thought about leaving the teaching profession. Teacher attrition research shows that young teachers and those in the first three years of teaching leave at the highest rate among all teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; Keigher, 2010; Sass et al., 2012). Even though these participants experienced extreme circumstances such as difficult behaviors, lack of parental support, legal representation of students by lawyers, and a variety of other factors, they all have found ways to persevere and stay in the profession.

The participants who did seek out a position in this type of environment felt a connection to children of poverty, which ultimately led them to teaching in a highly diverse, high-poverty school. One of the participants described wanting to work with children of poverty and took the position because it was a teaching job, not necessarily because of its location. Another participant described feeling called to the position because of personal faith and feeling that he was a change agent for Christ. Having had previous experience in working with homeless families, he felt that what he had to offer these children would benefit them and he could truly make a difference. The last participant experienced an involuntary transfer and explained that while she wanted to teach in a high-poverty school, the transfer placed her in a school of higher poverty status than her previous teaching experience.

One important revelation from this research question was how ill-prepared some of these participants felt when faced with working with children of poverty in a diverse neighborhood.

While some of the participants sought out these experiences, others had no idea what they would experience when entering the classroom. These experiences included high rates of absenteeism, lack of educational support, language barriers, criminal activities, and lack of stability in relationships with adults. The participants, whether they sought to teach in this geographic community or not, did not feel they had enough experiences in college courses with real-world reading material that would adequately prepare them for positions within highly diverse, high-poverty school settings.

The two participants who faced involuntary transfers did not feel that they had the support system in place from the district or the building in order to embrace their new roles. The work done by Danielson supports the idea that experienced teachers can be mentors for incoming teachers when a Professional Learning Community (PLC) is stable so that the team can create shared vision, provide support, and commit to work collaboratively for the well-being of students (1996). This cannot happen when teachers, such as one of my participants, continue to transfer year to year depending on the needs of the district. The constant shift in school personnel contradicts what some research shows about building relationships with peers and feeling supported by administration (Allen, 2005; Schaefer et al., 2012).

It is important to look at support systems in place for teachers who may or may not choose to enter the teaching profession in a school that is diverse and high-poverty. This can begin at the pre-service level and can continue with support through the district. Through my research, it is clear that the participants feel supported by their peers within the profession. Unfortunately, not all the participants felt supported at the district level.

Research Question #3 – Considerations

What has kept the participants teaching there?

While much of the research has been on why teachers leave the profession, I did not find significant research on what keeps teachers in the profession. It was amazing to see the relationship between reasons for entering the teaching profession and those for staying. One area of significant difference related to personal quality of life. With reference to the first research question, only two participants mentioned personal quality of life as one of their reasons for entering the profession, however all of the participants stated personal quality of life as a reason to stay within the profession. Participants mentioned the ability to have freedom to spend time with family because of a flexible schedule. In addition, the reality of needing the salary and benefits to support the family unit was motivation to stay. One participant also mentioned not having a career to fall back on if she left the profession. None of the participants directly stated that the reason for staying was the salary; it was merely to support the family structure. An additional factor that emerged from the interviews was stress. Some of the participants cited examples of creative freedom in lesson planning and projects with the students that helped lower stress levels, equating this with a better quality of life. Entering the teaching profession, there will no doubt be stress from a variety of sources. However, the freedom for teachers to find an outlet to lower their own stress level and provide rich and creative lessons for students has proved to be one motivation for some participants to stay within the profession.

I found it interesting that what teachers deemed to be aspects of personal fulfillment, including the ability to make a difference, having a love for children, and truly enjoying the profession, changed when in relationship to reasons to stay within the profession. Some of the teachers noted their desire to make a difference in the life of a child was motivation to teach

because it provided feelings of self-worth. However, the reasons participants gave as to why they wished to make a difference in the lives of children were clear: they wanted students to be successful. While the district placed some of these teachers in positions at a high-poverty school, these participants continue to persevere, working hard to make a difference in the lives of children.

Building relationships with students and the students' families was a highly motivating factor for participants' continuation of teaching. Being able to teach multiple siblings from the same family was highly rewarding. It helped solidify the need for these teachers to be in this locality. For some of the students, their relationships with their teachers are the only stable relationships that they have with adults, a fact that other research confirmed regarding children of poverty (Bigelow, 2006; Jensen, 2009). Fortunately, this school district employs some very dedicated teachers who consistently think about the bonds they have formed with students, the obligations they have to these children, and the need for them to continue service with these children because of what may occur if they are not in the child's life.

Just as all the participants cited relationships with families and students as a highly motivating factor to continue teaching, they described the same motivations in regards to relationships among colleagues. It was apparent through the interviews that some of these relationships with peers extended beyond the workplace and have flourished into friendships over time. I noticed that it took time for these relationships to grow beyond the workplace because a level of trust and commitment to other people on a team had to form. These relationships have continued among colleagues, even as PLC teams have broken apart for a variety of reasons. Some of the participants described being on teams where levels of trust and cohesiveness were not present, explaining how this affected the dynamics of the relationship

between the team members.

It is important to see the significant role of relationships within the teaching profession. This can help lead to a clearer understanding of why teachers choose to stay within the profession. In order to continue fostering these relationships, school districts need to limit the juggling of these professionals; I have seen the impact moving had on two of the participants' desire to move or leave the profession.

Recommendations and Implications

As the researcher, I found great value in the detailed stories and experiences these participants shared with me. It was helpful to see the overlaps between teachers' reasons for entering the profession and their reasons for staying in the teaching profession. A limitation of my study is the inability to generalize its findings to all elementary teachers in high-poverty, diverse Title I schools. I designed this study in order to build upon pre-existing research and to identify future areas for study.

I also wanted to develop a basis for making recommendations to districts regarding the policies and practices that influence the retention of teachers in high-poverty schools. In view of my research, I make the following seven recommendations.

Recommendation for Further Research

First, I believe there needs to be continued research using case studies and narrative research regarding teacher motivation for staying in high-poverty schools. Having a long-term understanding of teacher motivation to remain in the profession could be of great benefit to school districts in order to help lower the rate of attrition. I also recommend further research on the impact of involuntary transfers on teacher attrition. Finally, I recommend further research regarding the training pre-service teachers receive in order to be well prepared when working

with diverse student populations. If we can begin looking at pre-service teachers and provide supportive opportunities prior to their entering the classroom, we may have a chance of lowering the rate of attrition.

Recommendations for Practice in School Districts

First, school districts should gather research and insight concerning districts' involuntary transfers of teachers. Districts should take into consideration placement of teachers in buildings where they have little or no experience in high-poverty demographics, without properly supporting how to work with children of poverty.

Related to the first recommendation, school districts also should exercise control over continued involuntary transfers of teachers. Involuntary transfers ultimately lead to the inability to form a cohesive PLC, which is of utmost importance to districts who wish to have a positive impact on their students' achievement.

Third, districts should provide professional development centered on teaching children of poverty. With new standards and continuous high expectations for learners and professionals, teachers need support in meeting the behavioral, emotional and academic needs of these children.

Fourth, I suggest that districts should begin, continue, or reinstate support programs for first year teachers. Having the opportunity to meet with other first year teachers provides a sounding board for educators that some do not currently have. The participants in this research found that having that sounding board was helpful.

Recommendations for Universities and School Districts as Partners

Fifth, I suggest that universities should foster relationships with school districts that support pre-service teachers in student teaching and practicum experiences and provide a continued

mentor experience during a first year teaching position.

Sixth, I believe school districts should encourage universities to provide courses on teaching diverse student body populations. This could include courses on teaching English language learners, courses related to children with special needs, and courses focused on students from different socioeconomic statuses.

Recommendations for Universities

Finally, I suggest the creation of extensive university-supported opportunities for pre-service teachers to gain hands-on experiences in diverse, high-poverty schools using community partnership opportunities with local schools.

Conclusion

I learned a great deal from the participants in this research project. While I knew relationships with staff members were important, I did not realize how much some staff members rely on those relationships and view them as mentoring opportunities. I see this as a greater opportunity for me to take on a leadership role within my own building and to use my expertise to help other teachers who can benefit from my strengths. I also see the benefit of holding cross-grade level PLC meetings so those teachers who do not have the support from members of their own team have another source of support. Such support to happen in this school will require a shift in the current PLC model to allow conversations between grade levels to occur. The benefits to the teacher, who ultimately has the biggest impact on student learners, may be worth changing the current model.

In addition to lessons learned about supporting elementary schools, I gathered important concepts for my work with pre-service teachers. As a mentor for student teachers and practicum students, I will investigate the possibility of inviting my students to take part in professional

development opportunities offered within the district. These may include book studies among teachers or school-wide meetings that occur within the building. Additionally, I have seen the importance of bringing practical applications and materials into the university classes I teach in order to provide pre-service teachers with more information about teaching diverse learners. I also understand the need to open my elementary classroom up more for university students to get in and experience the benefits and challenges of teaching students of poverty. The exploration of teachers' motivations for staying in the profession provides insight that more research needs to occur in order to retain teachers in high-poverty, diverse, Title I schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Poverty Statistics

Poverty Thresholds for 2012 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years									
Size of family unit	Related children under 18 years								
	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight or more
One person (unrelated individual).....									
Under 65 years.....	11,945								
65 years and over.....	11,011								
Two people.....									
Householder under 65 years.....	15,374	15,825							
Householder 65 years and over.....	13,878	15,765							
Three people.....	17,959	18,480	18,498						
Four people.....	23,681	24,069	23,283	23,364					
Five people.....	28,558	28,974	28,087	27,400	26,981				
Six people.....	32,847	32,978	32,298	31,647	30,678	30,104			
Seven people.....	37,795	38,031	37,217	36,651	35,594	34,362	33,009		
Eight people.....	42,271	42,644	41,876	41,204	40,249	39,038	37,777	37,457	
Nine people or more.....	50,849	51,095	50,416	49,845	48,908	47,620	46,454	46,165	44,387

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

(United States Census Bureau, 2012)

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation**Letter of Cooperation**

January 28, 2013
Mr. Sam Bryer
Superintendent of Centennial School District
18135 SE Brooklyn Street
Portland, OR 97236

Mr. Bryer,

I am currently enrolled at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon working towards my EdD. I am in the process of writing my dissertation and seek your permission to conduct a research study within your school district. The attrition rate among teachers is increasing, especially in high-poverty schools. The study I am conducting looks at the attrition rate of teachers in a high-poverty school and is entitled, "Teachers at high-poverty schools: What draws them and how do we keep them?"

The purpose of this narrative research study is to hear the stories of experienced teachers within one of the schools in your district. Ever more specifically, I will examine the motivation behind experienced (three or more years of teaching) teachers entering the teaching profession, what factors have drawn those teachers to teach in diverse, Title I schools, and what has kept them teaching in that type of school.

I hope your administration will allow me to conduct interviews with six to nine elementary teachers. If I am granted approval, I will begin interviews as soon as teachers from the elementary school sign a letter of consent. I will send emails, as well as have personal conversations with staff members to find participants for this narrative inquiry, interviewing them each once for approximately 45 minutes, and another interview if needed or desired on their end. This study will be done on a volunteer basis. The district, school and teachers will remain anonymous and the participants will sign consent forms before any data is collected.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,
Ms. Julie Ann Owens
Graduate Student
George Fox University

Appendix C: Research Questions

Research Questions

- Tell me about your decision to become a teacher...
Further prompts if necessary:
 - Why did you become a teacher?
 - Was this your first choice for a profession? If not, tell me your others, and what drew you to this profession.
 - Did someone inspire you that made you want to teach?

- How would you describe what drew you into teaching in a high diverse, Title I school?
What has kept you there?
Further prompts if necessary:
 - Was teaching in this environment a choice?
 - What do you find rewarding about teaching in this environment?

- Have you thought about leaving the teaching profession? If so, tell me about what made you think about leaving and what helped you decide to stay?
 - Tell me about what has made you think about leaving.
 - Was the thought of leaving ever put into action with letters of interest to leave or transfer...or seeking other employment?
 - If the thought of leaving the teaching profession hasn't been a factor, what keeps you coming back day after day?

Appendix D: Letter of Consent

Letter of Consent: A Narration from Educators in High-Poverty Schools

Dear Professional Educator,

My name is Julie Ann Owens and I am a student at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am conducting research on what draws educators to teach in high-poverty, high diverse Title I schools and what keeps them there. I am inviting you to take part in a 45 minute personal interview about what made you choose the teaching profession, your beliefs on what brought you to teaching impoverished students and what has kept you there. The questions are rather general and relate to your background and your personal views on education. If needed, another interview will be scheduled. I will also ask you to journal for a one week period about what your motivations have been to come back to teaching each day.

The findings will help to reveal greater insight on the self-reported stories and opportunities educators have experienced in teaching in high-poverty, high diverse schools.

The risks associated with this research are minimal. The personal interview questions are innocuous and should not create distress. Nevertheless, please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at anytime or decline to answer any question at your discretion. The results of this study will only be used for research purposes, may be used for presentations at a professional conference and/or academic publications. Personal interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed. Information will be analyzed and presented in an anonymous fashion and no individual will be personally identified. I affirm to keep any personal information and identities confidential. All research materials (i.e., audio recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

I thank you for your time in considering this project. If you choose to participate, please be aware that you are making a contribution to furthering educational research. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at (503) 201-0514. If you have any additional questions you may contact my chair, Dr. Ken Badley at (503)554-2843 or by email at kbadley@georgefox.edu.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant signature _____

Researcher signature _____