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"Why Stay?" Experiences of Persistence in Former Education Support Staff who become Second-Career Teachers

Christine Bullock

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**"Why Stay?" Experiences of Persistence in
Former Education Support Staff who become Second-Career Teachers**

Christine Bullock

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A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of the
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“WHY STAY?” EXPERIENCES OF PERSISTENCE IN FORMER EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF WHO BECOME SECOND-CAREER TEACHERS, a Doctoral research project prepared by CHRISTINE BULLOCK in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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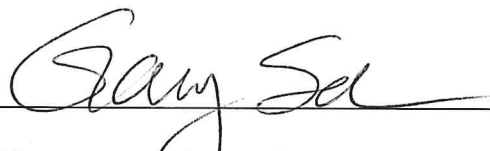
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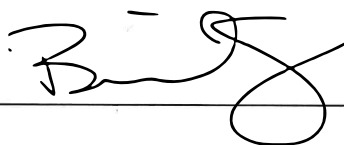
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ABSTRACT

Teacher attrition and shortages are a rapidly expanding issues across the U.S. that accelerated during the pandemic. Understanding why teachers persist in a profession where so many leave has become of paramount importance for educational stakeholders as they look to recruit, train, and retain new professionals. Second-career teachers now represent a growing percentage of these new educators; they enter a challenging field in the wake of so many departures. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the unique lived experiences of four current PreK-12 second-career educators who came to teaching from an education support staff role, and who have persisted in the profession at least five years. Through interviews and participant-created written artifacts, this study explored the nature of their persistence, along with how and why they chose to move from their role as *education support person* to *teacher*. Four overarching themes were identified: 1) intrinsic altruism served as both a motivator for entering the field and an influential factor for continued persistence, 2) the ethic of care was a core value, 3) participants prioritized practices of student-centered pedagogy, and 4) relevant prior experiences as education support staff influenced their work. This study offered insights and encouraged awareness about this distinct subset of educators while offering the possibility for supporting other teachers in the broader field. This study's implications point to the theoretical ideas of person-job fit and cultivating teachers' sense of self-efficacy as a means of understanding second-career teacher persistence.

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DEDICATION

For my granddaughter, Melody.

Find your fit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	ix
List of Figures	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Problem of Practice	1
Possibilities in ESS Recruitment and Persistence	3
Purpose and Significance of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Definition of Terms	7
Researcher Positionality	8
Limitations and Other Considerations	10
Organization of the Study.....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	12
Second-Career Teachers in K-12 Education	13
Motivations	14
Assets	15
Parenthood	17
Teacher Preparation and Licensure.....	19
Former Education Support Staff as Second-Career Teachers	20
ESS Prior Experience.....	23
Persistence	24
Characteristics Relating to ESS as SCTs	25
Factors Contributing to Persistence	26
Possible Theoretical Frameworks for Persistence	27
Concluding Thoughts	29
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	31
Design and Rationale.....	31
Epistemological Orientation	32
Hermeneutic Phenomenology	33
Researcher's Role	35
Relevant Background.....	36
Research Interest	37
Methodology	38
Participant Sampling and Population	38
Procedures	39
Written Documents	42
Pilot Study.....	42

Data Collection and Analysis.....	43
Limitations and Assumptions.....	44
Addressing Researcher Subjectivity.....	44
Audit Trails	45
Analytic Memos and a Critical Friend	46
Trustworthiness	46
Member Checks	47
Ethical Assurances	47
Concluding Thoughts	48
Chapter 4: Findings	49
Participant Profiles and Narrative Vignettes	50
Thematic Reading Across Participant's Stories.....	59
Intrinsic Altruism	61
Researcher Thoughts on Intrinsic Altruism	64
Ethic of Care.....	65
Researcher Thoughts on the Ethic of Care.....	69
Student-Centered Pedagogy	69
Researcher Thoughts on Student-Centered Pedagogy	72
Relevant Prior Experience as Education Support Staff.....	73
Researcher Thoughts on Relevant Experience as ESS	79
Composite Narrative.....	79
Summary of Findings	82
Concluding Thoughts	83
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	84
Synopsis of Essential Themes	85
Intrinsic Altruism	85
Ethic of Care	87
Student-Centered Pedagogy	88
Relevant Prior Experience as ESS	89
Connections to Literature	90
Job Fit.....	90
Self-efficacy	92
Integrating Researcher Experience.....	94
Implications for Educational Practice and Policy	96
Implications for School Districts and State Policy Makers	96
Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs	98
Recommendations	99
Concluding Thoughts	99
References	101

Appendix A	110
Why Stay? Google Research Participant Application Form	110
Appendix B.....	111
Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers	111
Appendix C.....	112
Interview Guide.....	112
Appendix D	113
Onboarding Information.....	113
Appendix E.....	114
Hexagonal Thematic Profiles of Participants	114

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	39
Lauterbach's Stages of Phenomenological Process	39
Table 2	51
Demographic Information of Second-Career Teacher Participants	51
Table 3	85
Emergent Essential Themes	85

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.....	8
Form of the hermeneutic circle (Bontekoe, 1996, p. 4)	8
Figure 2.....	60
Denise's Hexagonal Thematic Profile	60

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Crisis often reveals underlying fault lines and clarifies urgent needs. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the discomfiting trends that educational policymakers and stakeholders have warned were coming for the past twenty years. A significant U.S. teacher shortage is a rapidly growing problem, and during the 2019-2021 school years, it accelerated. As parents clamored for classrooms to return to normal, school districts grappled with finding enough teachers to replace those who left amid increased stressors introduced by the pandemic. A recent survey by Frontline Education reports that two-thirds of their 1,200 representative school leaders faced significant teacher shortages as they approached the new school year, an all-time high (Hoff, 2021). These shortages affected 75% of city districts, 65% of rural area districts, and 60% of suburban districts (Buttner, 2021). As the school year began, national news highlighted educational leaders scrambling to fill gaps in various ways, offering sign-up and retention bonuses to lure and keep teachers in their district, while others returned administrative staff with teaching licenses back to the classroom (Hoff, 2021; McCord, 2021). Holding on to quality educators and understanding why they persist in the profession has become of paramount importance for educational researchers.

Problem of Practice

These challenges to teacher staffing coincide with a time when fewer college students choose teaching as a profession. The teacher pipeline is significantly shrinking; enrollment into teacher preparation programs radically decreased from 2010-2017 by an average of 39%, and teacher program completion rates fell a sharp 27.4%, according to an analysis of National Center of Educational Statistics longitudinal data (Cai, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2016). Simultaneously, the number of K-12 students continues to grow, suggesting the need for an additional 2 million

teachers within the next decade (DeMonte, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). As a result, school leaders are searching for new ways to meet these demands while remaining mindful of the need to promote teacher diversity. Actively recruiting second-career teachers is considered one viable solution to these thorny problems (Chambers, 2002).

As a profession, teaching is known for "eating its young" as new teachers face serious induction challenges that lead to high attrition rates in the first three years (Podolsky et al., 2016). Across the U.S., this negatively affects student outcomes and district economics at 8 billion per annum in replacement costs (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Sutch et al., 2016). The impacts of attrition are long reaching as teacher turnover reduces student achievement, resulting in lower student scores in English Language Arts and Math (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Additionally, teacher attrition disrupts many aspects of school stability, staff development, and collaboration, resulting in a loss of vital institutional knowledge (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Specific to Oregon, the state where this study took place, there were 31,582 teachers serving 582,661 students in average class sizes of 25 during the 2019-2020 school year (Gill, 2020). Demographically, 71% of Oregon's teacher population were female, and 76% held a master's degree or higher, indicating Oregon's commitment to a "highly qualified" K-12 teaching staff (Gill, 2020). However, approximately 41% of Oregon's beginning teachers leave the field within five years, creating an ongoing and often unmet demand for new educators (Oregon Education Equity Report, 2018). Comparatively, this attrition rate is lower than the 50% national average (DeMoss & Yun, 2020). Regardless, many teacher shortages exist in Oregon, particularly in the neediest communities (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). When components of teacher quality such as certification, relevant training, and experience are considered, the shortage is even more acute. Rural and urban high-poverty schools suffer an

increasing loss of qualified teachers due to a revolving door of teacher entries and exits that disadvantage schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

The ongoing need for increased teacher recruitment and retention are unending drains on educational resources. Sadly, both teacher preparation programs and district induction models appear to fall short in preparing new teachers for their professional demands, as evidenced by high attrition rates (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017). Seeking to understand this trend, researchers often examine factors of teacher attrition and teacher persistence as polar opposites, seeking to understand teacher persistence as a remedy to attrition (Kelchtermans, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). As a result, most discussions of persistence ask teachers to identify key influences that enable them to endure difficulties and persist in the teaching profession. This study follows in that vein, by exploring what second-career teachers who came to the profession via an education support role say about “staying.”

Possibilities in ESS Recruitment and Persistence

To meet the cyclical need for new teachers, stakeholders are increasingly asking education support staff (ESS) to train for and become second-career teachers (SCTs). Education support staff serve in various school roles, such as instructional assistants, English language translators, bus drivers, coaches, tutors, library aides, and school secretaries. Oregon was at the forefront of national trends establishing alternative and non-traditional teacher preparation programs drawing from ESS populations beginning in the mid-1990s (Garcia, 2020). Many of these programs recruited explicitly from paraprofessionals as a means of developing bilingual educators of color. These hybridized programs were designed to meet the practical and logistical needs of many ESS and other career-changers already invested in schools, making these "Grow Your Own" programs highly attractive to educational leaders. Garcia's (2020) research indicated

that education support staff are one of the most stable elements of the K-12 workforce, with lower attrition rates than certified teachers.

As early as 2013, an estimated 20% of all SCTs pursuing licensure formerly worked as education support staff in some capacity, and those numbers have only continued to grow (Marinell & Johnson, 2013). Several research studies suggest that the first-year attrition rate of ESS recruited from career lattice teacher pathway programs remains significantly lower than traditional first-career teachers (Morrison & Lightner, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016; Rader & Pennell, 2019). Some researchers posit that this may be due to their ability to draw from prior work and longer life experiences, leading to greater perceptions of self-efficacy and person-job fit, and culminating in increased professional persistence (Morrison & Lightner, 2017; Rodriguez, 2007; Wyatt, 2015).

Demographics reveal that this subset heavily invests in the communities where they work and they are often altruistically motivated by service and caring (Chin & Young, 2007; Danyluk et al., 2020). This is not surprising, as research suggests that 60% of teachers work within 20 miles of where they grew up, demonstrating the generational power of roots even in a highly mobile society (Reininger, 2012). Many teachers from ESS backgrounds are parents and are comfortable working with children and teens (Marinell & Johnson, 2013). Their knowledge of schools as institutions and bureaucracies gives them relevant insights and realistic expectations as regular classroom instructors (DeMoss & Yun, 2020). Such attributes appear to contribute to their longevity in both rural and urban school settings (Danyluk et al., 2020). Diverse research studies of SCTs indicate that they bring many additional assets to mitigate some of the profession's most daunting challenges (Bauer et al., 2017; Castro & Bauml, 2009). These include low pay, demoralizing school environments, lack of administrative support and professional

development, all elements that are common to high-poverty schools where many first-year teachers begin their careers (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Gonzalez Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998; Rodriguez, 2007). Despite this emerging knowledge, teachers who come to the profession from an ESS background have diverse experiences, and they are a relatively new subset of second-career teachers, which means research aimed at better understanding their teaching journeys is warranted. Without it, districts and teacher education programs only have best guess scenarios in knowing how to support their longevity.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Further research that seeks to discover a richer and more nuanced understanding of why these former ESS persist as SCTs appeared to be timely and significant. Additionally, the timing of this study amidst the complex and rapidly changing challenges of COVID-19 revealed unique insights about persistence. Studying those who continued to commit to teaching "even during times of uncertainty" made it possible to understand the "growth that takes place when teachers move" through their lived experiences (Ellet, 2011, p. 3). Pandemic pressures were an emerging reality in teacher experience and persistence narratives. While some large-scale quantitative studies of SCT stability were available, a considerable gap existed in the literature for qualitative research on SCTs (Bauer et al., 2017; Wyatt, 2015). In Chapter 2, I share how my review of the literature also indicated there was minimal research examining the experiences of former education support staff as SCTs (Troesch & Bauer, 2020). Studies such as this one, which explored storied sense-making perceptions, expectations, and interpretations within phenomenological inquiry offered researcher opportunities for "microanalytical levels" of insight (Bauer et al., 2017; Wyatt, 2015).

Using hermeneutic phenomenology, this study explored the lived experiences of current K-12 second-career educators who came to the profession from an education support staff role, and who had additionally stayed in the teaching profession for a minimum of five years. Half a decade of teaching experience is an oft-named timeframe for professional persistence in most research; nationwide, five years' experience also qualifies teachers for roles as teacher mentors (Sutcher et al., 2019; Redding & Smith, 2016). This study sought to elucidate persistence perceptions based on participants' prior work experience within schools and confirm and build on previous SCT studies. Utilizing the hermeneutic circle in phenomenological research allowed me to explore the *essence* of these second-career professionals' unique lived experiences as teachers as themes they described from their experiences (Seidman, 2019; van Manen, 2007). One of the best attributes of this approach was its ability to look beyond the standard "elevator stories" of short, socially acceptable narratives of career attrition to understand what influenced teachers to persist professionally in a field where many quit (Clandinin et al., 2014, p. 10).

Research Questions

The research question guiding this study was: *How do SCTs who come to the teaching profession from an education support staff role describe their experience of persistence?* Two additional sub-questions were:

What prior experiences contributed to participants' journey in becoming teachers?

What key influences do participants acknowledge as significant for their persistence?

The timing of this study and the reflective practices involved appeared to give participants additional insights and empowered them to identify and articulate the support they needed to continue to succeed (Farrell, 2016). The information gained through this study may prompt other researchers to investigate connections between SCTs' prior experiences and ways

of managing early career navigation. This study also has potential to offer real-world strategies for districts seeking to retain and attract highly qualified SCTs by informing them of traditional barriers to persistence in need of support, especially in low socioeconomic areas (Danyluk et al., 2020; Rader & Pennell, 2019; Reagan et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2007). Finally, information gained from this study may be beneficial for teacher preparation programs designing courses that may simply need to reinforce skill sets specific to the knowledge and experience of ESS individuals (Morrison & Lightner, 2017; Nielsen, 2016; Redding & Smith, 2016)

Definition of Terms

Career Lattice- online and hybrid teacher education programs which assist education support staff development in gaining the necessary skills and opportunities to become licensed as general and/or special education classroom teachers (DeMoss & Yun, 2020; Morrison & Lightner, 2017).

Education Support Staff-spectrum of non-licensed or non-certified staff who provide specialized and unspecialized support for schools and students, also known as education support professionals (NEA, 2021). These range from educational or instructional assistants (sometimes known as paraeducators) who provide direct teacher and student support to administrative assistants, library aides, tutors and more (Garcia, 2020; Marinell & Johnson, 2013).

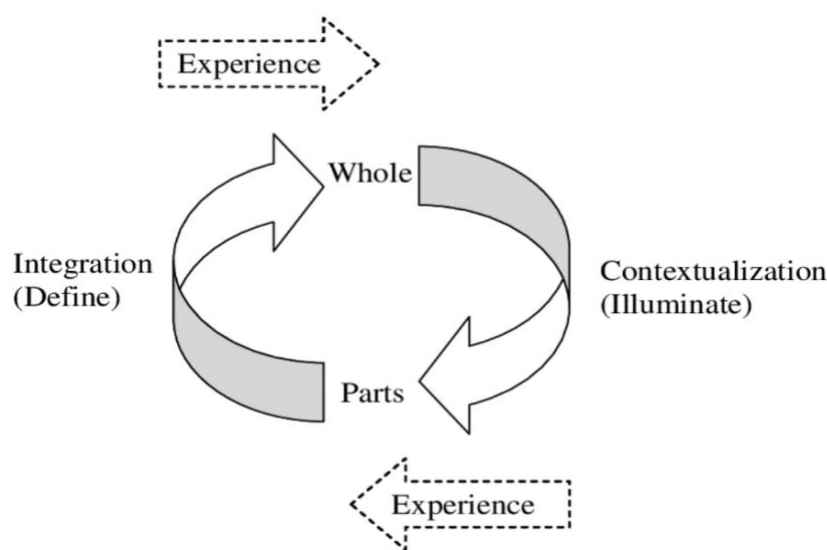
Grow Your Own Programs-partnerships between school districts and teacher preparation entities focused on the development and retention of new teachers drawn from local communities to address teacher shortages and increase diversity within the workforce (Garcia, 2020).

Hermeneutic Circle- This term refers to the research process in phenomenology where all experience is examined within its context and also apart from it in order to create a more complete picture. This process is circular, as researchers iteratively move their interpretations

and understandings from the specific to the general as they seek an understanding of the whole (Smith, 2013). From this perspective, understanding is contextually grounded in data texts (such as interview transcripts) and the researcher's culture, history, and personality (Bontekoe, 1996). Figure 1 illustrates how a researcher's experience (top arrow) and participants' experience (bottom arrow) work together to guide an analysis of the parts in the whole and the whole in the parts.

Figure 1

Form of the hermeneutic circle (Bontekoe, 1996, p. 4)



Persistence-also known as tenacity or grit, this proactive quality refers to the professional "stick-with-it-ness" of teachers who continue in the field (Hill-Jackson et al., 2019). It can refer to both a habit of the mind and a measurable outcome (as compared to attrition).

Second-Career Teachers-individuals who enter the teaching profession after first working in another career (Chambers, 2002).

Researcher Positionality

As a long-time teacher mentor and instructional coach, I came to this research based on many opportunities to observe new educators from various backgrounds. My first encounter with

SCTs came early in my career when a retired drill sergeant began teaching science at my school. Although his teacher training was more limited than traditional, first-career teachers, I remember how quickly he acclimated to the classroom norms and institutional expectations that came with the job. I noticed how his past experiences as a military-based educator effectively translated to his new career. Later, while finishing my master's degree, I met another distinct group of second-career teachers who were exclusively drawn from the ESS pools at schools where many continued to work as they completed a licensure program. They, too, seemed to have unique assets which smoothed their transition into teaching. From these observations I wondered how prior work experience in educational institutions might affect persistence, which gave me anecdotal attunement to stories of SCTs within my current teaching position at a rural high school.

The hermeneutic phenomenology structure of this study encouraged me to readily seek out and incorporate my own subjectivity on this research from the beginning. This started by identifying ponderings based on my experiences and recognizing their influence to shape and inform thought. Subjectivity is "like a garment that cannot be removed," and therefore, mindfulness of its impact enabled me to consider, excavate and illuminate my potential biases (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Such processes encouraged open-mindedness about which theoretical frameworks would prove useful in understanding participant experience.

From this perspective, I acknowledged how my studies leading to this research suggested the importance of teacher self-efficacy and person-job fit as strong theoretic paradigms to consider. This enabled a consideration of SCTs' prior work experience as a means to understanding their commitment to the profession.

Limitations and Other Considerations

In contrast to quantitative studies, which sample larger populations through statistical methods, qualitative research intentionally analyzes the storied landscapes of a select few. Such relational research includes the historical uniqueness of the individual and their circumstances by "gently and encouragingly" eliciting their storied sense-making (Erickson, 2014, p. 4). The narrow but intense focus of qualitative research creates possibilities for rich and nuanced insights into complex social systems. Educational researchers using qualitative methodology posit that this approach does not seek to produce generalizations but rather to cultivate a deeper understanding of the "whys" and "hows" of local conditions and practices (Erikson, 2014). As a veteran educator, this methodology resonated deeply for me; teachers innately acknowledge storytelling as a primary strategy for supporting student learning. In hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers glean themes and patterns from participants' stories that coalesce as "emerging theories [which] can be translated to other settings, as scholars use their own experience to consider the application points between research and their own spheres of influence" (Thornhill, 2021).

My interest in understanding the unique lived experiences of former education support staff was action-oriented; it advocated voice for a subset of SCTs whose valuable stories should be told. I recognized educator perspectives were rooted in what experience "pulls out of us" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25-26). Stories are change agents, as "our very identities are inextricably linked to the stories we tell of ourselves" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 214). These stories were not static, atemporal, or decontextualized; they were complicated mosaics. While capturing moments in time through the assembled stories, I created another story in another time and another place (Seidman, 2019). This worthy phenomenological tension required a "tolerance for

uncertainty" to coexist alongside compelling illuminations revealed by participants' stories (Seidman, 2019, p. 138). Analysis of these patterns offered opportunities to discover rich veins for further research.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. This chapter offered the educational problem of practice, the purpose of the study, and the research questions I explored. In Chapter Two, I present a review of the literature on educational support staff as SCTs and their unique demographics and assets, while discussing what the field understands about persistence factors. Chapter Three describes my study's epistemological and methodological underpinnings, along with my plans to recruit and select participants, collect data, and analyze information. In that chapter, I also address issues of trustworthiness and credibility and the role of self-reflection in phenomenology. In Chapter Four, I share findings derived through the hermeneutic circle, which offer the essence of thematic insights from data analysis. In Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of these findings and suggest how these may inform the field of education and future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on second-career teachers (SCT) is a patchwork assortment of investigations offering some insights and much room for additional study (Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015). Findings from these studies are somewhat mixed, as complex social systems like education rely on nuanced understandings of place and individual contexts, making replication of these studies difficult. My research sought to contribute to this varied landscape through a phenomenological investigation of one underrepresented subset that has not been well-studied: second-career teachers who came to the profession by way of an educational support staff role. This literature review addresses three major themes derived from research focused on understanding their experiences. I have conceptualized these themes as 1) SCT demographics, motivation, and assets, 2) current understandings about the unique features of former education support staff as SCTs, and 3) known elements of teacher persistence.

I gave particular focus to the most often cited peer-reviewed literature produced on this topic over the past ten years. I also included sources with historical and contextual significance. I examined varied qualitative and quantitative research from peer-reviewed journals of original studies and meta-analyses, published doctoral dissertations, and policy reports and briefs. The depth and breadth of reading I did indicate there was minimal peer-reviewed research focused on the persistence experiences of former education support staff who have become second-career teachers. This denoted room for additional studies seeking to understand persistence for this subset. As a qualitative researcher, I revisited literature after data collection and analysis to link this study's findings to broader research understandings.

Second-Career Teachers in K-12 Education

By the early 1990's, one of the most striking demographic trends in teacher preparation was the increasing number of newly licensed K-12 educators entering the profession at "age 31 or older" (Chambers, 2002, p. 212). Few formal preparation programs existed for SCTs before the 1990's, when career lattices or pathways for their licensure began to emerge (Marinell & Johnson, 2013). The impact of this development was noticeable across the U.S., as traditional universities, non-profit agencies, and for-profit businesses offered a plethora of new K-12 training programs (Garcia, 2020). With the advent of these diverse training programs, the number of second-career teacher entrants doubled from 1988 to 2008 (Marinell & Johnson, 2013; Sutchter et al., 2019). Today, SCTs represent over one-third of all new educators and are anticipated to account for 50% of teachers entering the field within the next ten years (Demont, 2015; Rader & Pennell, 2019; Varadharajan et al., 2019).

Research demographics indicate the average SCT is ten years older than their first-career peers and has a minimum of five years of previous work experience (DeMonte, 2015; Gonzalez Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998; Varadharajan et al., 2019). Attrition data analysis suggests SCTs may be less likely to change schools or leave the profession than their first-career peers (Marinell & Johnson, 2013, p. 769). While the significant majority of SCTs pursuing elementary education licensure are aligned with the predominant demographics of white female, notable demographic variances exist at secondary and subject-level areas. There are higher concentrations of male SCTs pursuing secondary math and science certifications and higher numbers of bilingual educators of color training for dual language endorsements (Garcia, 2020; Tigchelaar et al., 2008; 2014). Although many potential SCTs hold bachelor's degrees or above, most lack the knowledge and skills to work with students and require formal teacher education geared to their

particular knowledge spheres, spurring the development of new approaches to teacher preparation, such as Grow Your Own (GYO) programs.

Motivations

Unlike previous generations, it is a widely accepted hypothesis that Gen Xers and Gen Y will switch careers several times within their life (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). This phenomenon affects a variety of professions but is significantly shaping education with widely available and cost-effective training programs to meet teacher shortages. Motivations for SCTs' transition to teaching appear to include altruistic motives such as mission, agency, and calling, alongside extrinsic desires for job stability, advancement, and financial improvement (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Richardson & Watt, 2005; Troesch & Bauer, 2020). Research implies SCT motivations appear to be noticeably connected to "aspirations for self-realization, a desire to devote more time to the family and to contribute [meaningfully] to the community" (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014, p. 4). Former Education Support Staff (ESS) such as educational aides or student assistants also indicate an intrinsic satisfaction of fulfilling a lifetime dream. This is particularly relevant to their decision to become a teacher since they have worked in classrooms and understand the realistic dynamics of teaching as a profession. (Danyluk et al., 2020; Gonzalez Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998; Rodriguez, 2007). The high percentage of SCTs who are motivated in part by altruistic tendencies is particularly encouraging as research contends that this is the reason teachers cite most often for staying in the profession (Uusimaki, 2011, p. 332).

An estimated 85% of all SCTs indicate that they wish to make a "valuable societal contribution," while 94% acknowledge their desire for higher job satisfaction (Marinell & Johnson, 2013; Varadharajan et al., 2019, p. 482). In a profession that pays 60-65% of comparative degree positions, such intrinsic motivation is thought to be critical for their

professional persistence (Partelow & Yin, 2020). International educational researchers such as Tigchelaar et al. (2008) and Varadharajan et al. (2019) concur, noting that SCTs who seek to share their knowledge and love for subject areas find significant gratification at personal and intellectual levels.

Assets

For many SCTs and especially former ESS, a thoughtful and intentional career pivot repurposes their prior work experience as valuable "institutional capital" in their new careers (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Nielsen, 2016, p. 234). For ESS, this choice is often well-grounded in real-world knowledge gained through their prior work experience in schools. SCTs appear to have many natural advantages for becoming good teachers. For example, researchers suggest that mature learners are more intrinsically motivated and approach their teacher education with a strategic and "deep learning" perspective, often associated with significantly better learning outcomes (Hamilton & O'Dwyer, 2018). A gap of even one year, where teacher candidates had access to "other informal learning experiences," appears to positively impact their development as mature learners, as time and life experience naturally broaden personal resources (Hamilton & O'Dwyer, 2018, p. 259). Hamilton and O'Dwyer also contend that SCTs are generally more serious-minded and autodidactic. Therefore, they appear more likely to take responsibility for their learning compared to their first-career peers, who tend to wait for instructions. SCTs tend to explore and make intentional connections in their coursework, expecting pedagogical theory to directly inform their practice. They also seem to be more deliberate in seeking the intersections between their prior knowledge and the skill-building required to effectively manage classrooms, deliver lessons, and plan for student learning (Hamilton & O'Dwyer, 2018).

Several researchers noted that SCTs appear to be more collaborative than competitive, unlike their first-career colleagues (Chin & Young, 2007; Hamilton & O'Dwyer, 2018; Rodriguez, 2007). This collaboration may pay significant dividends in helping them navigate the hurdles that often stymie beginning educators; SCTs seem to seek out professional learning groups early on. Counterintuitively, most first-career teachers do not ask for help, while SCTs do. Most researchers contend this is due to SCTs having more advanced communication skills from their prior professional experience and increased maturity (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017; Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015; Morrison & Lightner, 2017). The ability to work well with others and collaborate effectively means SCTs are often "deemed to be more effective" by their peers and, as a result, may be more likely to persist (Player et al., 2017, p. 338).

Nielsen's (2016) research suggests SCTs tend to be more business-like and able to detach from the all-consuming nature of the profession, providing them with internal stability, suitable work-life boundaries, and insights that first-career educators may lack (p. 236). SCTs also seem to be better at "big picture and layered thinking," entertaining broader and more complex perspectives (p. 231). Compared to their first-career peers, SCTs also appeared to be more student-centered than curriculum-centered. However, there is some debate in the literature indicating that, later in their career, SCTs may also revert to the antiquated learning and teaching modalities that were predominant in their own school experiences (Marinell & Johnson, 2017; Tigchelaar et al., 2014; Troesch & Bauer, 2020).

Socio-politically, research such as Tigchelaar et al.'s (2008) study reveals that SCTs can quickly gain awareness of essential roles and power players within institutions and utilize this to tailor how they get things done, effectively garnering support for themselves and their projects. Understanding this critical process may alleviate significant stressors common to new teachers

during their induction period. Such political savvy also seems to move SCTs into greater influence and power earlier than their first-career peers (Neilsen, 2016). Some researchers attribute this to age and maturity alone, while others maintain that this is an effect of prior professional experience in navigating systems (Bauer et al., 2017; Coppe et al., 2021).

Recent research confirms that SCT cohorts are more ethnically diverse than first-career teacher demographics, effectively contributing much-needed representational assets in language and culture that are missing from many public education classrooms (Partelow & Yin, 2020). SCTs recruited from the local community are also more likely to possess the "cultural sensitivity" that contributes to student success; this makes them desirable hires for local administrators (Danyluk et al., 2020, p. 184). Compared to first-career teacher peers, SCTs see themselves in unique ways (Chambers, 2002; Varadharajan et al., 2019) and recognize how their prior work experience enables them to "adopt a wider perspective on the business of teaching" (Chambers, 2002, p. 215). SCTs expect to offer valuable real-world skills and perspectives to help students apply their knowledge in relevant and applicable ways, something that can lead them to be discouraged if they are not able to fulfill this vision (Tigchelaar et al., 2008; 2014; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). A recurrent theme in the literature suggested that SCTs who feel unappreciated, unvalued, or unheard are more likely to leave the profession. "Studies have shown that the experience of being looked upon as novices or beginners was frustrating;" many SCTs believe in their own competence and want others to validate their prior experience as useful in their professional educational practice (Haim & Amdur, 2016, p. 347).

Parenthood

SCTs often begin their teaching career as parents; asset analysis indicates this might play a substantive role in establishing precursors to teacher persistence like self-efficacy, empathy,

and problem-solving (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). Parenthood also cultivates other important characteristics for teachers, such as maturity and prowess in child/teen communication. These transferable assets give SCTs increased skill in navigating school politics, fostering colleague cooperation and collaboration, and establishing classroom management (Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015; Gonzalez Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1998; Marinell & Johnson, 2013). Parenthood also means they are busy and susceptible to universal stressors such as work overload, unfulfilled desires for career advancement, and precarious work-life balance. Despite this, research acknowledges that SCTs are expert novices who report feeling significantly less challenged by early career pitfalls than other early career teachers (Troesch & Bauer, 2019). They also report lower levels of job stress and higher job satisfaction than their first-career counterparts (Troesch & Bauer, 2019). Such attributes coalesce into positive intentions to stay in teaching and contribute to long-lasting persistence beliefs (Troesch & Bauer, 2019).

Cuddapah and Stanford (2015) noticed SCTs describe their varied assets in "grounded ways" rather than as "romanticized ideals," making it easier for them to mentally overcome the harsh circumstances that often shatter the idealism of traditional first-career teachers (p. 35). However, some SCTs also appear to have increased "movement capital" and less inclination to stay in the profession due to their prior career assets (Kelchtermans, 2017; Kelly & Northrop, 2015). This can be especially true among the "best and the brightest" or high academic performers from top-tier universities (Kelly & Northrop, 2015). Such movement capital may negatively heighten SCTs' perceptions of their induction challenges, prompting some gifted teachers to leave (Kelchtermans, 2017; Kelly & Northrop, 2015). Interestingly, this movement capital also appears to translate into upward mobility within educational institutions as SCTs

pursue the educational change they passionately believe in, making them more confident in pursuing teacher leadership (Neilsen, 2016, p. 235).

Teacher Preparation and Licensure

Because state standards and practices determine teacher preparation requirements, programmatic designs for curriculum and pedagogical study are based on what matters most in each region (Garcia, 2020; Martin & Mulvihill, 2017). The development of "Grow Your Own" programs seek to educate and equip ESS as highly qualified teachers and has become a growing trend across the U.S. as districts and state education boards work with universities and non-profit organizations like Teach for America to diversify the workforce (DeMoss & Yun, 2020; Partelow & Yin, 2020). Opponents to these often-truncated programs observe significant differences in the amount and depth of coursework these programs require, compared to traditional teacher preparation programs. Garcia's (2020) meta-analysis of alternative training centers across the U.S. notes that while some undergraduate programs expect candidates to take introductory courses on curriculum and assessment, similar degree programs may not (see also Partelow & Yin, 2020). However, empirical evidence indicates that student outcomes in standardized achievement tests show no "significant differences" between traditionally and alternatively trained teachers (Haim & Amdur, 2016, p. 345).

The wide variation of program designs across the U.S. worries educational leaders like Linda Darling-Hammond, who contend that teacher training disparities ultimately amount to inequitable educational experiences for students (Martin & Mulvihill, 2017). The most concerning of these are limited practicum experiences or an emphasis on practice over pedagogical theory (Martin & Mulvihell, 2017). Some say this leaves new teachers ill-prepared for professional practice (Garcia, 2020; Podlasky et al., 2016). However, SCTs are driving the

market for some of these variances as their existing obligations lead them to seek streamlined "completer" programs designed to help them finish teacher preparation quicker and cheaper than traditional university-based teacher education (Garcia, 2020; Partelow & Yin, 2020). The growing popularity of these online and hybridized programs underscores the financial realities and pressures that many ESS experience, as they can rarely afford to take time off of work to complete a traditional degree program. A recent Oregon Equity Report (2017) revealed many programs and grants have been established to make teacher certification more financially achievable for ESS teacher candidates (Oregon Chief of Education Office, 2017). Most of these programs are collaborations between entry-level community college pathway programs and education support districts (Willamette Educational Services District, 2021). Currently, sixteen Oregon colleges and universities work with these pathway programs to provide former ESS with initial licensure preparation opportunities (Teacher Standards and Practice Commission of Oregon, 2021).

Former Education Support Staff as Second-Career Teachers

Although there is little research specific to the experience of former ESS as second-career teachers, they are frequently referred to in research literature on teacher education trends (DeMoss & Yun, 2020; Garcia, 2020; Marinell & Johnson, 2013). Most of this research suggests that they are "well-prepared and deserving of exemptions" in typical training programs because of their prior experience in schools (Marinell & Johnson, 2013, p. 770). Case studies exploring the experiences of a few former ESS who became bilingual or special education teachers were the most represented in qualitative studies (Rodriguez, 2007). The policy briefs and reports I reviewed focused on increasing the number and quality of career lattices available for ESS to meet teacher shortages across the country. International studies of SCTs drawn from ESS

backgrounds revealed literature quantitatively exploring areas of the greatest teacher shortages, including secondary mathematics, science, languages, and vocational studies.

Study of this research indicated that teacher education programs tailored for this subset rely heavily on ESSs' unique ability to "learn backwards," to use prior experience and observations in school settings as a foundation for learning pedagogy. Since the field views ESS prior knowledge as distinctive and relevant, this empowered them to move more quickly and effectively into a primary instructor role (Morrison & Lightner, 2017, p. 4). Many districts and states eagerly moved these new teacher candidates directly into classrooms, as did New York in the early 2000s, when the state eliminated student teaching requirements for those with three years of support staff work experience (Rodriguez, 2007). Other states, such as California, have created teacher residencies, which allow education support staff to take over regular classroom instruction well before completing their certification. DeMoss and Yun (2020) note that this has been especially important for rural areas where severe teacher shortages were common.

Administrators seeking exemptions for ESS emergency licensure cite the asset research included in this review, highlighting the deep roots and strong community connections ESS have, which can support them as novice educators (Morrison & Lightner, 2017). They contend that induction and mentoring are organically more inclusive and community-based for this subset of new teachers, giving them wrap-around advantages that do not exist in standard student-teaching practicums. Research by Miller et al. (2020) appears to concur; findings indicate preservice teachers who are matched with schools that "align with their values, characteristics and professional goals" appear to fare better long term over those who are not (p. 401). This means community-based residencies may serve as positive factors for persistence.

Advocates for ESS as future teachers emphasize that as a group, they most closely mirror the demographics of the student populations they serve, helpfully contributing to highly valued yet elusive representational equity in teaching staff (Garcia, 2020). Policymakers and stakeholders assert ESS are often "well-positioned to help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps between staff members, students, and families" (Rader & Pennell, 2019, p. 49). As a result, alternative training programs traditionally boast higher ethnic diversity, especially among bilingual educators of color (Chin & Young, 2007) and many non-traditional programs tout high enrollment rates of former ESS. California is one such example, where 68% of alternative certificate program enrollees worked in schools before applying by 2006 (Chin & Young, 2007, p. 80).

Reflecting growing national trends, the most significant number of this subset were Hispanic females seeking elementary and bilingual classroom licensures (Chin & Young, 2007, p. 80). Chin and Young posit that the large representation of Hispanics "reflects the typical education and career progression followed by many immigrant groups" as the teaching profession has long been a viable gateway for "working-class people to enter the middle class" (p. 82). Hispanic teachers in their study reported less burnout and more career satisfaction when compared to others; indeed, Latinx teachers have the highest persistence rate compared to other ethnicities (Kelly & Northrop, 2015, p. 648; Nguyen et. al., 2019).

It is of note that demographically the majority of ESS are female with limited positional power in schools. Danyluk (2020) notes that "for these women, the lack of power and decision-making authority that came with the position... was frustrating and an impetus for the pursuit of a second-career teaching degree" (p. 187). She suggests that this pursuit may come in part from resentment over the appearance of being treated as "skilled workers or mothers" rather than as

respected and valued educational professionals (Neilsen, 2016, p. 237). Those who go on to become SCTs are often motivated by feminist notions of care, valuing "attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness" in their teaching practice (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017, p. 422).

ESS Prior Experience

Being familiar with schools' institutional nature seems to provide multiple advantages for former ESS as they encounter the same challenges all first-time teachers face (Troesch & Bauer, 2019). Meta-analysis on early SCT trends suggest "individuals who have experienced instructional roles and are familiar with school's organizational cultures" appear to make "rapid transitions to the classroom" (Marinell & Johnson, 2013, p. 770). These SCTs understand the steep learning curve endemic to a new school job, which seems to make induction less challenging (Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015; Danyluk et al., 2020). As a result, some research hypothesizes that they experience an easier integration into the teaching community, and they visualize or conceptualize themselves as competent future educators very early (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Cuddapah & Stanford, 2015; Morrison & Lightner, 2017). Such competency visualization is a recognized precursor to teacher self-efficacy known for encouraging persistence intentions (Castro & Bauml, 2009).

As SCTs envision mastery experiences for themselves, they gain greater self-efficacy, as posited by Bandura (1977; 1986; 1997; Morrison & Lightner, 2017, p. 4). Current TES theory suggests educators' self-efficacy is based on their perceptions of how likely they are to be successful teachers. A seeming ability to visualize themselves as competent means SCTs may have an inherent advantage, as their "adaptable teacher identit[ies]" and "resilient behaviors" are

associated with naturally higher self-efficacy and persistence (Coppe et al., 2021; Crosswell & Beutel, 2017).

Persistence

Teacher persistence has been most closely examined by investigating why teachers leave the profession (Nguyen et al., 2019). Kelchtermans (2017) argues that "as an educational issue, teacher attrition and retention refer to the need to prevent good teachers from leaving the job for the wrong reasons" (p. 965). However, this leads to a backwards look at teacher persistence, posing an interesting conundrum since research findings are clearer about why teachers leave than they are about why teachers persist. This means additional research on teacher persistence is critical (Wong & Luft, 2015). According to researchers such as Cochran-Smith (2004), the complexity of the issue requires multifaceted inspection, since "teacher retention is a multidimensional problem, requiring both macro-and micro-level analyses" (p. 390).

Generalized theories regarding teacher persistence come from implications or logically derived assumptions of examined factors. For example, most research findings regarding teacher retention coalesce into categories such as overall job satisfaction, good relationships with students, peers and administration, and deep personal commitments to teaching as a profession (Wong & Luft, 2015). The newest meta-analysis on teacher persistence suggests additional factors deserve consideration for understanding current trends: meaningful evaluation processes, merit pay, supportive federal policies, principal effectiveness, race/gender match to administration and student demographics, school reform methodology, and research-practice connections (Nguyen et al., 2019). These seem to confirm that "training, experience, ability/achievement, and specialty" significantly impact teachers' intentions to persist (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 8).

Characteristics Relating to ESS as SCTs

Recent meta-analysis building on Borman and Dowling's (2008) seminal study reveals significant changes in teacher attrition trends and trajectory reversals during the past thirteen years, which includes the growing number of SCTs drawn from ESS populations (Nguyen et al., 2019). Noteworthy transitions now suggest that females are no more likely to leave than males, nor are post-grad degree holders more likely to leave in comparison to those who only hold undergraduate degrees. Black teachers now appear no less likely to leave than their White peers, although Hispanic teachers appear 53% less likely to leave than White teachers (p. 22), indicating a positive shift in minority persistence trends. Other trends remain, as special education and STEM teachers appear to have the highest attrition rates, whereas those with standard certifications (licensure) remain more likely to persist than those who have alternative certifications or emergency licensures (p. 23). These conclusions touch on some of the significant characteristics of SCT demographic research that may directly impact former ESS who become SCTs (Redding & Smith, 2016).

Other noteworthy trends from Nguyen et al. (2019) suggest that marital status and new parenthood continue to play a significant role in persistence decisions. The youngest and oldest teachers still contribute to the famous U-shaped curve representing higher-than-average attrition on either end (Borman & Dowling, 2008). The timing of early-season teacher employment is also a mitigating factor for attrition, as late hires remain the most likely to leave as they frequently experience a difficult start with less support due to challenging circumstances. Interestingly, both formerly top-academic achieving teachers and those in the lowest quartile are more likely to exit than average-academic achievers, indicating the possibility of a Goldilocks' Zone of greater comfort for those in the middle. This finding was echoed in multiple sources,

encouraging researchers like Kelly and Northrop (2015) to hypothesize that this may be because top-academic achievers have increased assets such as movement capital, which may smooth their transition into other professional fields. But this finding also impacts those teachers from the lowest quartile from which many former ESS SCTs are drawn (Nguyen et al. 2019).

Sadly, research analyses of attrition and retention trends based on levels of teacher quality appear to suggest that the most effective and high-quality teachers may be more likely to leave the profession than those of average quality (Feng & Sass, 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2009). Increased understanding of this theory has been difficult to gauge as it is often unknown whether teachers are moving to other schools rather than leaving the field of education altogether. Timing is also significant since return rates to teaching later in life remain unknown (Goldhaber et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019). Some evidence points to a convergence of factors called teacher "assortative matching," meaning that in some cases, high-quality reading/language arts or math teachers may be more likely to stay if they have an effective and productive circle of peer colleagues at their school (Goldhaber et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019). Supporting teachers in acquiring advanced degrees or professional certification statistically increases in-district movement and retention. These points may be contributing factors to this study's subset's unique experiences of persistence.

Factors Contributing to Persistence

Job satisfaction plays a significant role in teachers' decisions to stay (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 33). Positive social relationships are essential for SCTs; peers and principals who view them as "proper teacher[s]" make invaluable contributions to their self-esteem as trusted professionals (Kelchtermans, 2017, p. 968). Well-designed and relevant professional development, with effective teacher in-service days, also appear to positively influence persistence, as do high

levels of administrative support (Redding & Smith, 2016). Elementary educators are the most likely to persist compared to middle and high school teachers; middle school teachers are the most likely to leave. Teachers are less likely to leave when they have access to quality teaching materials and other relevant teacher supports such as organized induction procedures and mentoring. Other factors like consistent wage and benefit improvements have been shown to improve teacher persistence. Schools with higher-achieving students hold on to teachers, while schools with higher levels of behavioral issues and lower-achieving students are more likely to lose them (Nguyen et al., 2019). Teacher evaluation and accountability practices "perceived more positively by teachers" encourage persistence, especially when connected with merit pay raises or bonuses (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 34).

Past studies have long hinted at the connections between persistence and belief. Wong and Luft (2015) assert that teacher beliefs are some of the most potent determinants for teacher persistence as educators generally draw from personal experience as children in classrooms. Teachers with strong student-centered beliefs were more likely to persist, holding tightly to the idea that they can influence others (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). It is noteworthy that a lack of recognition is a significant factor for SCTs exiting the profession, since teachers tend to perceive this as a general lack of support and become more easily disillusioned (Varadharajan et al., 2019).

Possible Theoretical Frameworks for Persistence

This final theme is related to the frameworks that are most utilized in the research on SCT persistence; my examination of the unique features of former ESS as SCTs evolved into an exploration of the characteristics contributing to persistence. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory is one possible conceptual framework that appears to dovetail well with the weighty factor of this

subset's prior work experience in schools and their ability to persist. As noted earlier, former ESS SCTs seem to be more likely to experience high levels of self-efficacy, which may lead to increased persistence. For SCTs, current research suggests that self-efficacy is relevant for professional well-being, perhaps partly because individuals with strong efficacy beliefs are more likely to change careers (Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Although I examined other possible theoretical frameworks, teacher self-efficacy was the most recurrent in the existing literature.

According to Bandura, there are four sources for building teacher self-efficacy: verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, physiological (emotional) arousal, and mastery experience (Henson, 2002). Teachers with high self-efficacy appear to be pedagogically innovative and maintain appropriate classroom management (Wagner & Imanel-Noy, 2014). Researchers suggest that the most potent component for increasing teacher self-efficacy is mastery experiences (Henson, 2002). Simply put, how teachers feel about what they do well significantly impacts their willingness to persist professionally. From the perspective of social cognitive theory, human action and agency can be "mediated" by strong self-efficacy beliefs. Meaningful changes in behavior, therefore, can occur because of changes in perception. Thus, strong positive beliefs influence teacher emotions, choices, and continuing efforts resulting in "persistence when facing adversity" (Henson, 2002, p. 11).

Other theories worthy of consideration include resilience, agency, identity, and person-job fit. Chief drivers of teacher resilience include intrinsic motivation or inner drive as a sense of belief in oneself and one's efficacy as a teacher (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017, p. 419). Some researchers contend that teacher grit scores reveal more about persistence intentions than any other determinant: "this measure of the ability to persist may be as important as academic achievement in predicting which candidates may be excellent teachers" (Demonte, 2015, p 12).

Demonte (2015) also notes that this is an area in which teacher preparation programs may improve their cohorts by choosing high-grit candidates who could theoretically go on to persist.

Overall, teachers' beliefs about their abilities to "support learning in various task-and context-specific cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social ways" determine their willingness to persist (Wyatt, 2015, p. 118). "A strong awareness of self as a teacher contributes to a powerful teacher identity which has a decisive influence on teacher retention, teacher resilience and teacher effectiveness particularly in the early years of teaching" (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017, p. 419). Being able to negotiate a teacher identity successfully is "pivotal to becoming a resilient teacher" (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017, p. 419). Additionally, components related to how well a person fits into their job suggest former ESS who become SCTs possess dispositions and occupational skills that serve them well (Wyatt, 2015). "Greater fit improves commitment to a job, reduces turnover intentions, and can be a source of intrinsic rewards" (Saatcioglu, 2020, p. 2). There is potential these accumulate to form a sense of "organizational efficacy" related to teachers' conceptualizations about the classroom and how they function as an educator (Friedman & Kass, 2002, p. 684). When teachers build on these ideas, they can meaningfully contribute to school-wide goals, improved relationships with colleagues, and effective teaching strategies and styles (Friedman & Kass, 2002).

Concluding Thoughts

Despite the assets they bring, SCTs with experience serving in educational support roles may remain a "vulnerable cohort" if their advantages do not cushion them from factors contributing to attrition (Farrell, 2016; Hamilton & O'Dwyer, 2018). These teachers face universal teacher challenges of managing student behaviors, creating lesson plans, and balancing heavy workloads. Research on SCTs suggests this balancing act is the most challenging, perhaps

partly because, as older individuals with families, SCTs must juggle greater competing demands than their first-career counterparts (Varadharajen et al., 2018, p. 743). Other factors like the financial constraints of working in a profession with 60-65% of the earning power of other fields cannot be minimized. This literature review also suggests that despite the many alternative pathway programs formed to meet their unique needs, SCT education appears to "fall short in preparing preservice teachers for the emotional demands of teaching and the ensuing requirement for on-going and consistent self-care" (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017, p. 428).

Skill transfer does not occur automatically for second-career teachers, nor are all prior work experiences as education support staff relevant or helpful for teaching (Haim & Amdur, 2016; Tigchelaar et al., 2008). Novice professionals encounter high levels of public scrutiny and accountability early in their career, along with increased bureaucratic responsibility, which can be difficult to surmount. Understanding persistence experiences matter to educational researchers seeking to inform practices that encourage persistence within a field struggling with increasing teacher shortages due to attrition and declining numbers of teacher entrants. Trends across this literature review indicate that much remains unknown about former education support staff as second-career teachers. Generalities are difficult to ascertain, pointing to the need for more qualitative research focused on micro levels of analysis to elucidate their experiences. In the next chapter, I outline hermeneutic phenomenology to explain the means by which this method might offer nuanced insights into this unique SCT subset's persistence experiences.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter encapsulates research study design, research methods, and my role as the investigator. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of current PreK-12 second-career educators who came to teaching from an education support staff role and have persisted in the profession at least five years. Specifically, I wanted to understand the nature of their persistence, along with how and why they chose to move from their role as *education support* to *teacher*. Little is known about this growing subset of teachers, often called second-career teachers or SCTs. Despite the field's lack of knowledge about their experience, much is expected of them given teacher shortages and the urgent need to diversify the teaching staff within schools. Phenomenological research allowed me to explore the patterns constituting the themes of the *essence* of these second-career professionals' unique lived experiences as teachers (Seidman, 2019; van Manen, 2007). This approach goes beyond the dominant elevator stories of brief and socially acceptable narratives of career attrition to cultivate a deeper understanding of why these teachers persist (Schaefer et al., 2014, p. 10).

The main research question guiding this study was: *How do SCTs who come to the teaching profession from an education support staff role describe their experience of persistence?* Two additional sub-questions deserved consideration:

What prior experiences prompted participants' journey in becoming teachers?

What key influences do participants acknowledge as significant for persistence?

Design and Rationale

Although I considered multiple approaches for this study, hermeneutic phenomenology fit my purpose to illuminate and reflect the meaning of select lived experiences. Because my

study centered around a particular group of SCTs with minimal prior research, gaining detailed descriptions offered a way to better understand this teaching subset.

Epistemological Orientation

Constructivism formed the epistemological underpinnings of my study as I sought to understand and reconstruct the experiences of SCTs to generate "more informed and sophisticated" consensus stories about their persistence (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112). Interpretation plays a crucial role in constructivist research as the researcher serves as an active participant, facilitating multiple reconstructions that coalesce, including my own (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Unlike other models of research, constructivists are not positionally situated as authorities but as co-learners. They assert that self-disclosure and collaboration allow for the critical interpretation of contextual assumptions by disconfirming evidence and engaging in lengthy field experience to produce thick, rich descriptions, and nuanced understandings. (Cresswell & Miller, 2000).

Like many constructivist researchers, I was personally driven by a sense of activism and advocacy for teachers striving to persist in a challenging profession. The interpretive work to merge participant reconstructions with a researcher's conceptual understanding of the field yields authentic themes, informed by the voices of the many. These "multiple knowledges" demanded that I stay open to new interpretations throughout the entire process of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). Because participant values are included in this paradigm, my inquiry ethics were "intrinsic" and appeared to provide a natural reward as a "process tilt" toward the greater willingness of revelation by participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 114). In my research study, this meant I prioritized the relational connections I made with participants as recognized

co-researchers. During onboarding, this began with an early explanation of their role as valuable communicators for the many other teachers they represented.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

In simple terms, phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and how the people at the center of these phenomena conceptualize, experience, and articulate them (Lavery, 2003). These phenomena serve as "the building blocks of human science and the basis of all knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Historically, phenomenology was introduced in the early 20th century through the seminal works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty before it became the principal philosophy of Europe (Smith, 2013). Husserl theorized that phenomena such as physical sensation, thought, desire, volition, memory, perception, or imagination are understood through conscious choice toward the things which compose the experiences (Lavery, 2003; Smith, 2013). This demands focus on objects and experiences as they are in the moment, place, and cultural contexts of their occurrence (Lavery, 2003; Smith, 2013). Meaning making in phenomenology, therefore, comes through the conscious connections we make with these experiences.

While Husserl claimed that phenomenological research should be a purely descriptive process, Heidegger viewed phenomenology as an interpretation of what it means to exist or live in the world. Hermeneutic phenomenology grew from Heidegger's assertions regarding the nature of cultural context in the interpretation of phenomena (Lavery, 2003). He argued that understanding the world is inherited and generationally passed on via grounding in historicity (Lavery, 2003). For him, hermeneutic phenomenology was concerned explicitly with lived human experience, and the lifeworlds participants describe (Lavery, 2003). Building on Husserl, Ricoeur elaborated the narrative function of phenomenology, elucidating how human meaning is

communicated through language, religion, myth, and art. He also contended that narrative storytelling revealed the connections with temporality in lived experience (Smith, 2013).

Heidegger's student, Gadamer, further situated hermeneutic phenomenology as explorations of human conversation while declaring the power of prejudice, historical context, and tradition, which inevitably affect human understanding (Moustakas, 1994). Gadamer's hermeneutics offered practical applications for phenomenology as he clarified the necessary circumstances where understanding occurred, noting that linguistic interpretation is where all meaning is created (Lavery, 2003). "Language," Gadamer (2004) suggests, "is the universal medium in which understanding occurs" and therefore was the foci of my study (p. 389).

When Heidegger and his followers spoke of hermeneutics, they discussed the interpretive skill of context, especially regarding social and linguistic contextualization (Heidegger & Stambaugh, 1996). In the 21st century, Max van Manen and the Utrecht school of phenomenological thought further defined the hermeneutic phenomenological process as a means to bring the *essence* of a lived experience alive through interpreting descriptive text with the understanding of its social and cultural complexities. This pursuit to discover the *essence* of experience is the standard in phenomenological research. However, this does not mean it is the only experience or even the constant experience, but like a snapshot, it represents a specific moment in time and place (van Manen, 2016). When the interpretative process reaches sensible meanings that resonate with both the participant and the researcher and are free of contradictions, understanding of the themes composing *essence* is achieved (Lavery, 2003).

The procedural components of the hermeneutic process are multifaceted and iterative, focusing on facilitating participant dialogue, exploring textual meaning, achieving awareness of tradition, and investigating interpretation (Smith, 2013). These priorities are also constructivist in

orientation, since researcher and participants collaboratively explore and create an understanding of their lifeworld experience (Lauterbach, 2018). As researcher and participants acknowledge preconceived understandings and revisit phenomena through conversation, new meanings emerge (Lauterbach, 2018).

Adherents of Gadamer hypothesized that this construction of meaning occurs in a hermeneutic circle as participants and researchers collaborate. Repeated cycles of conversational discussion, textual readings, reflective writing, and participant feedback organically inform and modify a research process until a researcher can determine the phenomenon's essence (Lauterbach, 2018). Therefore, phenomenology was well suited for expanding my understanding of teacher persistence in the lifeworld of SCTs (Lauterbach, 2018) because

hermeneutics invites its participants into an ongoing conversation...understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre-understanding of the research process, the interpretive framework, and the sources of the information. The implication for hermeneutic inquiry is that research participants are also giving the self-interpreted constructions of their situation. (Koch, 1995, p. 835)

Researcher's Role

As a researcher, I acknowledge that my role carried certain responsibilities to anticipate and address potential problems related to my own biases and subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) notes the lifeworld of a human being is a holistic experience that cannot be legitimately compartmentalized, requiring ongoing and sustained self-reflection to recognize the ways these views are "embedded and essential to the interpretive process" (Laverty, 2003, p. 28). Contrary to other phenomenological methodologies requiring bracketing, which attempts to first name and then remove researcher positionality, hermeneutic phenomenology requires an overt naming of

one's assumptions through journaling, self-reflection, and shared meaning-making, particularly as it relates to how one arrives at a particular research topic. As the researcher, my relevant experiences became frames for my current perspective through writing. My journaling process within the research also constituted audit trails as I prepared for and processed discussions with other scholar-practitioners and research participants throughout the research process.

Relevant Background

I sensed what would become a lifelong calling to teaching when I was very young. My teacher asked me to share the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with my second-grade Sunday School class. I remember the excitement I felt as I carried home the smooth, white envelope of well-worn felt figures to prepare for the lesson. "What an eager beaver!" my teacher cheerfully chimed when I arrived half an hour early in my best dress the following Sunday. Some memories are etched deep into the soul. Looking back, I know I was drawn to the storytelling nature of teaching and watching the spark of shared knowledge grow in others' eyes. Experience taught me at an early age that stories were tools for discovery and sense-making.

After obtaining an undergraduate degree in History with double minors in Biblical Studies and Languages, I passed the National Teachers Exam and obtained K-12 teaching credentials. My professional journey into education officially began as a middle and high school social studies teacher at a private Christian school in the Southern Willamette Valley. As a young mother with a growing family, teaching was a good vocational fit, since it permitted me to be at home during crucial years of prioritizing my family. Good teachers were always in demand since private school teacher attrition rates are even higher than they are in public schools (Scheopner, 2010).

For 23 years, I served in a variety of institutional capacities in private Christian education. These culminated in my role as a founding board member of a rigorous, college preparatory, Classical Christian cottage school for grades 3-12. Like myself, many of the school's founders were talented and gifted (TAG) parents who sought to incorporate the best pedagogy, curriculum, and instructional staff we could find. This became an opportunity to design a dream school. Our board of directors maintained a unique cooperative model among like-minded educational leaders. Patterned like many religious communities worldwide, we divided our responsibilities based on calling, skill, and margin. My specific administrative role was curriculum design and development, aligning content from middle school to graduation. As a high school block instructor for seven years, I taught an integrated curriculum in the Humanities and Sciences. Taking on various educational roles such as administrator, teacher mentor, and counselor contributed to my interest in professional persistence. I came to care deeply about understanding how best to encourage, equip and mentor teachers to flourish and continue to grow in their profession.

Research Interest

As my youngest son's graduation approached, I reoriented to my long-held desire to complete a terminal degree in education. I completed my M.A.T. degree in secondary education at Northwest Christian University (now Bushnell University), where I encountered a new body of soon-to-be teachers who intrigued me. Most of the participants in this program were SCTs. They came to the teaching profession with rich past experiences to draw from as they stepped into public school classrooms for the first time. A significant subset of my peers in that program were former education support staff who held non-certified positions in public schools across the state. They were educational assistants, ELL translators, library aides, coaches, bus drivers, and

school secretaries. As I attended classes alongside them, I noticed they had unique institutional and personal experiences to share and wondered how those experiences would support them as beginning teachers. I suspected their insider knowledge would make it easier for them to overcome the significant obstacles associated with persisting in the teaching profession. Years later, I still seek to understand this more deeply.

Methodology

Unlike many other methodologies, hermeneutic phenomenology anticipates and expects change as research unfolds. Therefore, the researcher builds a solid raft by initially designing study methods with a full understanding of how the eddies and currents of human life are constantly in flux and may require navigational adjustments. A researcher's ability to respond organically to those shifts is viewed as a strength rather than a weakness by renowned phenomenologists, who often point out that this allows them the best opportunity to capture the true essence of the lived experience (van Manen, 2016).

Participant Sampling and Population

For this study, I utilized a small population of current second-career Oregon teachers. The number of SCTs is not currently tabulated by the state, although 16 state-approved programs exist to prepare them (TSPC, 2021). Because teacher attrition rates drop considerably after the fifth year, recruiting participants with at least five years' experience seemed like an appropriate marker to explore professional persistence (Luet & Shealey, 2018). Therefore, I solicited a sample of four classified PreK-12 SCTs with former education support experience and a minimum of five years' worth of teaching experience. I sent out initial email inquiries asking for research participants who met my criteria through my current school district and via gatekeepers at George Fox University, Willamette ESD, Bushnell University, and my own school district.

Those who filled out an accompanying Google Form registering their readiness to participate (Appendix A) offered enough demographic information to help me discern participants suitable for the study. For a good fit, I specifically looked for individuals who had solid communication skills and willingness to devote time to sharing their experiences with me. Those who agreed to participate signed the informed consent form contained in Appendix B.

Procedures

Small purposive sampling and conversational inquiry permitted me to focus on fine-grained details (Brinkman, 2018). I utilized processes informed by van Manen's (1984) four "concurrent procedural" stages as structures for this phenomenological methodology (Lauterbach, 2018, p. 2885). Table 1 illustrates Lauterbach's (2018) interpretive description of van Manen's stages in conjunction with the activities implemented throughout the process (p. 2887).

Table 1

Lauterbach's Stages of Phenomenological Process

Process Stages (derived from van Manen, 1984)	Procedural Activities (derived from Lauterbach, 2018)
Nature of Lived Experience	Orient to the phenomena and formulate the phenomenological question to explicate assumptions and pre-understandings.
Existential Investigation (Formal Data Collection)	Explore the phenomena by generating "data" using personal experience, obtaining experiential descriptions from subjects, and consulting phenomenological literature.
Phenomenological Reflection	Conduct thematic analysis to uncover thematic aspects, isolate thematic statements, and compose linguistic transformations to determine essential themes.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological
Writing

Read transcripts of the data, write reflections, revise,
and confer with participants to check accuracy.

This methodologic structure prioritized collecting interview data in multiple formats, such as eliciting written accounts to stimulate recall before topic-focused, semi-structured interview sessions. Research indicates that stimulated recall strategies improve teacher articulation of their thinking and their recall of key moments (Lauterbach, 2018). I used stimulated recall strategies throughout my interviews and discussions with participants by providing writing prompts and an interview guide to start conversations. Such techniques are known to encourage participants to fully engage in descriptive discussions around their experiences, cultivating metacognition that goes beyond mere memory and surface-level reflection (Lauterbach, 2018).

In-depth Interviewing

Much of the prior research on persistent teachers relies heavily on interviews as primary data sources (Lauterbach, 2018). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to replicate that process. One of the chief benefits of qualitative research is the ability to contextualize data that many quantitative studies necessarily strip away (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Therefore, interviews serve as dialogic conversations about phenomena and constitute the primary method of collecting information in this study. Max van Manen (2016) asserts that interviewing participants serves two primary purposes: as a method of exploration to develop a rich understanding while simultaneously encouraging collaborators to delve deeply into the meanings embedded in their experiences.

In phenomenology, all descriptive texts, including the researcher's own, are viewed as equally valid and reliable in the interpretation of data. Littlejohn and Foss (2010) note that these communications serve as the "vehicles" for the meanings we encounter (p. 49). General safety from possible deceptions is another significant bonus gained from this posture, as participants theoretically feel no need to hide or slant their sharing because the researcher experiences reconstructions as a co-participant (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lauterbach, 2018). The results of this in-depth communication were vivid descriptions of the holistic nature of complex phenomena, offering deep insights into participant experience (Brinkman, 2018; Vogt et al., 2012).

I implemented a three-interview format for this study, loosely adapted from Seidman's (2019) three interview model process. Zoom served as our virtual meeting space due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and its associated uncertainty, although I was able to conduct an in-person interview series with one of my participants. The convenience of Zoom appeared to mitigate participants' reluctance to participate in the study. Recent research about Zoom as a qualitative online video conferencing strategy suggests that interview quality does not decrease compared to face-to-face methods and may prompt online participants to be "more open and expressive" as it has become a 21st-century communication norm (Gray et al., 2020, p. 1294). This may be because of the perceived intimacy and yet protective distance from interviewers, meaning this strategy can work exceptionally well for qualitative research modalities (Gray et al., 2020).

Participants chose the timing of these interviews within a suggested two-week period, and I used open-ended questions to loosely guide each interview (See Appendix C). These meetings were approximately 50-60 minutes long. Referred to as an "in-depth interviewing series," the first interview explored each participant's life history and daily activities as SCTs

(Seidman, 2019). During the second interview, I asked participants to reflect on the possible connections and meanings they noticed from the previous conversation. Utilizing the echo technique of asking them to speak more about key thoughts allowed us to further unpack descriptions of their experiences (Seidman, 2019). In the final interview, I tasked participants to review my analytic thinking about themes I distilled from our conversations and offer any additional thoughts as a member checking activity. Schutz (1967) refers to such cascading interview processes as a directed "act of attention" designed to support sense-making for both the participant and the researcher (p. 71).

Written Documents

During my initial onboarding meeting with participants, I asked them to create two documents during the research process to help them reflect on their experiences and feel ready to share during interviews (Vogt et al., 2012). The first included a timeline of the life events that stood out as relevant to their journey in becoming teachers (See Appendix D). The second was a written reflection about the meanings or themes they noticed during their interview experiences. This was a non-intrusive method of collecting an overview of significant touchstones in participants' lives while awakening them to descriptive narratives and meaning (Moustakas, 1998). These documents helped us identify sense-making trends worth exploring, leading to significant themes (Lauterbach, 2018).

Pilot Study

I performed a brief pilot study to help me gauge the need for design adjustments. My pilot participant offered feedback on the onboarding session allowing me to modify directions to better prepare the interviewee ahead of time (Roberts & Hyatt, 2018). Additionally, I discovered how well the interview guide questions elicited information helpful to the research questions,

which led me to create better follow-up questions. Finally, I used my pilot study to better estimate the time necessary to complete the full study.

Data Collection and Analysis

I audio-recorded each interview and initially transcribed interviews using transcription software. These recordings were saved into password protected files. Immediately following each interview, I carefully listened to the audio recordings to check and correct errors in the transcripts while adding field note observations as informed by Seidman (2019) and Moustakas (1994). My process of close reading identified points to revisit or clarify before the next interview, naturally informing the direction and attention of the final research texts (Seidman, 2019).

I created participant profiles using demographic information, participant supplied artifacts, interview transcripts, and my own researcher journals and fieldnotes (Seidman, 2019). During early transcript extract analysis, I grouped interviewee responses into emerging coding categories based on similar themes, patterns, or ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Proceeding through the stages of reading, re-reading, and pulling out critical sections from the transcript, I built toward the discovery of overarching themes (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 2019).

Early on, one of the images that I described in my analytic memos was the patchwork quiltlike nature of my participant's descriptions. Thinking of the reality of my participant's lived experiences as fitting together as "parts of the whole and the whole of the parts" through the hermeneutic circle, I designed a hexagonal visual tool to explore the intersections and nuanced overlapping of themes both visually and verbally for further analysis (Appendix E). This was helpful in my member checking meeting with participants when I asked them to include additions and corrections to emerging themes, prompting them to reiterate what was most

poignant and surprising for them. The close examination of critical passages and comparisons of transcripts identified practical and theoretical concerns for further research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Limitations and Assumptions

Due to its exploratory nature, this research was limited in several ways. Inherent limits to phenomenological research include the inability to generalize or theorize based on a small sample size of self-selected participants. Using a single interviewer over Zoom video conferencing may have produced additional limitations with technology glitches or exchanges that likely did not explore all possible responses.

At its heart, this study design was action-oriented since it advocated for those being studied as I sought to hear and recognize the meanings they drew from their lived experiences. The narratives I assembled must be understood as being temporally bound (Seidman, 2019). In another time and another place, another story could also be created. This acknowledged limitation of phenomenology requires a "tolerance for uncertainty" coexisting alongside compelling illuminations revealed by participants' stories (Seidman, 2019, p. 138). Yet, analysis of these patterns offered valuable themes and directions for further research. And others who read this research may find transferability to their own contexts and experiences.

Addressing Researcher Subjectivity

For the past three years, I have been employed as a 12th grade English, Yearbook Journalism, and 9th grade AVID/Study Skills teacher in a small rural district near Salem, Oregon. As a former private school educator navigating the career shift of a public-school induction, this has been life changing. However, as a veteran teacher, I recognized the uniqueness of my knowledge and need for support. I carry a lifetime of perspectives that flavor

my current understanding and experience. These perceptions may contain potential biases and prejudices that I must be aware of as a researcher; I know I do not stand "behind a one-way mirror" recording and observing human phenomena without influence or interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 p. 106). All research includes natural connections that discredit absolute objectivity. Qualitative research, however, accounts for this by acknowledging the influence of the researcher's role in the process and methodologically looking for ways to identify and reduce bias.

Audit Trails

Idealistically, acknowledging one's own subjectivity and its shaping effect on interpretations and findings can limit it appropriately. However, Peshkin (1988) cautions how one's unconscious subjectivity "has the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue" throughout the entire research process, thereby rendering aspects invalid if unaccounted for (p. 17). Therefore, all qualitative and quantitative researchers should carefully examine and identify their subjectivity during their research process. Reflective journal writing is one process whereby qualitative researchers can conduct audits of their subjectivity, as they "observe themselves" in focused ways, and look for influences on their understanding and conclusions (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18). Therefore, I maintained a subjectivity audit journal for the entirety of the research process and reflected regularly on these issues to stay responsive to them. Self-monitoring strategies such as these enable researchers to attune to the places "where self and subject are intertwined," revealing both positive and negative biases in perception (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20). Specifically, I utilized subjectivity audit journaling to explore how my experience as a veteran teacher, teacher trainer/mentor, and former private school administrator shaped the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Vogt et al., 2012). Furthermore, I used a research

journal to brainstorm, mentally process and revise interpretations as one more way to productively engage in the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger & Stambaugh, 1996).

Analytic Memos and a Critical Friend

Another way to monitor and manage my subjectivity was through analytic memos and incorporating the help of a critical friend. Moustakas (1994) advocated for researchers accounting for their intersubjective reality by recognizing that "every perception begins with my own sense of what an issue or object or experience is and means" (p. 59). Cultivating my awareness of this relationship as a "co-presence" through analytic memos informed my reflexivity and thinking, indeed, it was a necessary first step for understanding the experiences of others outside my natural lenses (Moustakas, 1994, p. 37). Analytic memos encouraged me to track my thinking as I interacted with participant transcripts and written documents to cultivate critical consideration of my analysis. Finally, I asked a well-qualified and highly respected qualitative methodologist to serve as a "critical friend" to help me identify areas of weakness in need of improvement throughout the process, recognizing that hermeneutic phenomenologists essentially learn as they go and can benefit from reflexive conversations. Email exchanges, Zoom conferences, and text messaging were all methods I used to stay connected to my critical friend during my research.

Trustworthiness

The chief components of trustworthiness in qualitative research lie in the ideas of credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Cope, 2013). My study design sought to achieve these criteria by implementing strategies such as analytic memos, reflexivity, and replicable interview formats. Additionally, utilizing a critical friend as oversight at each stage of my research process facilitated dependability (Cope, 2013).

This study design measured worth via "within-project evaluation methods" such as member checks, and audit trails (Morse, 2018, p. 798). Embedded internally throughout the inquiry process, these processes produced "certainty" rather than quantitative "hard data verification" to ensure validity (Morse, 2018, p. 799). While no one strategy alone ensured validity or trustworthiness, taken together, they offered dependable and robust structures.

Member Checks

I utilized member checking as a strategy to enhance credibility and manage my own subjectivity. I shared interpretive documents with participants within the research process, asking them to clarify, amend, or verify my interpretations of the themes they touched on throughout our conversations. Most methodologists describe member checking as a crucial strategy for developing credibility in qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Morse, 2018). Internal consistency measures were used within the three interviews to check for emergent themes as I sought to artfully capture thorough reconstructions of participant communications to build authenticity. Together these structures increased the trustworthiness and credibility of the final research (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Seidman, 2019, p. 104; Vogt et al., 2012). Additionally, member checks served as strategies for assessing confirmability and transferability to other SCTs within this subset (Cope, 2013).

Ethical Assurances

All participation in this study was voluntary and confidential. I gained university IRB consent following the approval of my proposal and maintained all data files securely. I assigned pseudonyms to ensure participant confidentiality and reminded them that they could withdraw at any time for any reason. I based my onboarding and informed consent process on feminist ideals of concern for full disclosure, careful respect, and the desire to develop an authentic relationship

with participants throughout the research process (Seidman, 2019). I ensured participants that they had the power to remove or veto aspects of my interpretation; this commitment was important for maintaining a high ethic of care for all involved (Seidman, 2019). Although this research methodology was considered low-risk, participants were forewarned that reconstructing difficult past experiences might produce emotional distress (Seidman, 2019); I was sensitive to this during interviews and adjusted, as needed.

The principles of hermeneutic phenomenology models are intentionally designed to build equitable relationships between participants and researchers despite the inherent advantages that all researchers typically hold (Seidman, 2019). This ethical concern for participants was also intrinsic to this qualitative paradigm because of the "inclusion of participant values in the inquiry" process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). As a current K-12 educator, my own career journey means I cultivated relationships with participants where we shared reciprocal power dynamics, which may have encouraged mutual understanding and rapport.

Concluding Thoughts

As a scholar-practitioner, my highest aim for this study was to give voice and grow understanding of an under researched group of emergent second-career educators. Capturing the experiences of this subset may provide valuable information that others could use to encourage their continuing persistence. The goal of this chapter was to describe the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology in my research as a strategy to analyze questions surrounding the persistence of SCTs with prior experience as educational support staff. I anticipated contributing to this knowledge base with careful attention to ethical considerations, participant selection, and design implementation. In Chapter Four, I share the findings from the data collected through the hermeneutic circle process described in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This hermeneutic phenomenology study explored the lived experiences of second-career teachers with prior work experience in schools. The chief question driving the research asked: *How do SCTs who come to the teaching profession from an education support staff role describe their experience of persistence?* Two sub-questions were additionally considered: *What prior experiences contributed to participants' journeys in becoming teachers?* And *What key influences do participants acknowledge as significant for their persistence?* In this chapter, I share the stories of four participants, along with an analysis of the themes coalescing from them. As a scholar-practitioner, I was most interested in enacting the "promise that phenomenology can make to practice" (van Manen, 2007, p. 13) by identifying and deepening my understanding about this group of teachers. Increasingly, school districts and state policy makers seek to draw new SCTs from their current education support staff to meet the growing teacher shortages they are experiencing. As this subset of teachers grows, it is important to understand their persistence stories in order to sufficiently recruit and support future SCTs as new professionals.

Data informing these findings consisted primarily of participant interviews, which I conducted via Zoom, or in person, depending on constraints from the COVID-19 pandemic. Each audio-recorded interview was approximately 50-60 minutes long and initially transcribed via Otter AI. I conducted an interview series with each participant in a one to two-week window, beginning in early December 2021 and ending in early February 2022. All follow-up member-checks occurred within one to three weeks from our final meeting and constituted an opportunity for participants to interact with me around the emergent themes I saw in their stories; I encouraged them to correct me or add additional detail in this final conversation; all of them did so willingly.

Organizationally, this findings chapter is divided into three sections; the first offers a brief profile of participants and their respective journeys into education. These profiles were constructed from interviews and timeline artifacts they created. The second section of this chapter outlines the essential themes derived from participants' descriptions of their persistence. The third and final section provides a composite narrative and general summary of findings based on my work within the hermeneutic circle, which is a term that refers to the iterative process of critically reading and interpreting individual elements to arrive at an understanding of the whole. This was a contextual process, where I weighed my understanding of participants' lifeworlds along with my own, as the researcher. The circular nature of this process enabled me to explain the patterns and emerging essences of SCTs' lifeworld experiences of persistence in education, despite great challenges.

Participant Profiles and Narrative Vignettes

Four PreK-12 Oregon educators volunteered for this study and shared their stories through written artifacts and in-depth interviews. These participants were scattered across diverse regions in Oregon; none had any knowledge of or association with other participants. At the time of the study, each had been employed by their current district or program for at least three years. Two participants had previously worked in other regions and districts around the Pacific Northwest, while the other two worked in the schools where they originally started as teachers. I selected suitable pseudonyms and obscured any potentially identifying information in order to protect their confidentiality.

At the time of the study, Anna was a Head Teacher of a community college Head Start site; Cruz was a dual immersion fourth-grade teacher at a school with a large migrant population. Denise was a sixth-grade humanities block instructor teaching English Language Arts and Social

Studies in a coastal community, and Mark served as the Director of Education in a rural K-12 district, having previously taught high school social studies for a decade. Pertinent participant demographic information is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Second-Career Teacher Participants

Name	Gender	Prior Job Experience	Prior Educational Support Staff Role	Years in Education	Current Grade Level
Anna	F	Certified Nurse Aid, Hospice Support	Afterschool program support	5 years	Pre-K
Cruz	M	FedEx, Army Reserve	Teaching Assistant, Counseling office, and Administrative Assistant	8 years	Fourth grade
Denise	F	Paralegal; Administrative Case Manager	Educational Assistant, Resource room staff, Instructional Assistant	12 years	Sixth grade
Mark	M	Probation and Shelter Care Counselor	Boys Basketball Coach	30 years	9-12th grade

What follows are brief narratives of my participants' respective journeys into education. These vignettes describe their unique experiences as second-career teachers along with their prior work experiences in education support staff roles.

Anna: "All the struggle is worth it because the students are worth it."

Anna was a native Oregonian who lived less than 10 miles from where she grew up. Her job as a Pre-K Head Teacher at the local community college Head Start site was one she enjoyed deeply; she came to it because she has "always had a heart for helping others." Her work with

some of the most disenfranchised in her community was personally meaningful due to her own experiences of growing up as "the underdog" in her early school years. In her first career, Anna worked with elderly and hospice patients as a Certified Nurse Assistant. This was grueling and challenging work but exemplified her innate desire to help the weakest and most vulnerable, along with her intense work ethic. Anna did not easily quit. According to Anna, her former supervisors knew she could deal with grumpiest, most challenging patients and they frequently placed her where others refused to work. She carried these traits of empathy, compassion, and perseverance into her second career as an educator.

Working with children was something Anna has done since she was a high school student serving in youth and children's ministries in her church. It was there that she first heard the suggestion that she should pursue a teaching license. "They thought I was good with children, but I just wasn't ready for that yet." Anna explained that she was initially deterred from the idea of becoming a teacher because school was not a safe place for her when she was a child. She experienced systemic bullying and apathetic teachers; it made her leery of pursuing education as a profession: "Why would I want to go back?" Despite this, Anna found herself drawn to working with children in non-school settings, such as teaching Taekwondo to "Tiny Tigers" who were 3-5 years old, to volunteering in afterschool enrichment programs for elementary school students in her local area. These experiences confirmed Anna had a good rapport with children, could effectively manage groups of students, and worked well in school environments.

In her early 30's, Anna decided a life change was in order and began to look for other options. Working with hospice patients was logistically challenging, with an unstable work schedule and poor pay. Professionally, education offered more stability and consistency along with a more "hopeful atmosphere of life." Taking an education path also promised good

insurance, which was a big draw for Anna, given that she was a newly married woman hoping to start a family. She found an online hybrid teacher preparation program that was flexible and affordable, which enabled her to continue to work as she earned her BA in Early Elementary Education. Her first teaching position was as a 3-4 teacher at the Head Start site where she continues to work today. The site supervisor appreciated Anna's work ethic and leadership skills; by her second year in the job, Anna was promoted to Head Teacher of her own cohort, managing a classroom of 25 students alongside two assistant teachers in an extended day program. Teaching is the job Anna never thought she wanted but is glad she discovered. She believes deeply that teaching is the best fit for her talents; she has finally found her place.

Cruz: "You think of others rather than yourself. It's my job to serve kids."

Cruz's first experiences in the classroom did not happen until his early 40's, when he volunteered in his wife's classroom; she was a dual immersion fourth-grade teacher at one of the most challenging schools in the Willamette Valley. This newcomer school served "migrant children of a rural agricultural community with a demographic of over 80% Hispanic" and had a reputation of "bad behaviors" that resulted in a revolving door of teaching staff. Cruz and his wife felt strongly that their community school was worth their investment. She asked him to help her with mundane tasks like "cutting paper, grading, and sharpening pencils." Cruz noted that he "was hesitant but wanted to help her." As a man of faith, he believed schools were in dire need of outside support, "I was listening to church leaders speak about the statistics of our community, and the lack of help, and need for leadership." He described this to me as a call to action that he would eventually answer by pursuing a teaching license. During this time, Cruz was undergoing a significant life transition. For fifteen years, he had worked for FedEx in a variety of roles while simultaneously serving in the Army Reserve. As his contract with the Army ended, he was

authorized to take a one-year leave of absence in which he was able to return to college; this gave him the margin to volunteer in his wife's classroom.

His initial plan was to complete a master's degree in Counseling and work for the VA to assist soldiers transitioning back to civilian life; "Teaching was never in my plan, and it never crossed my mind." His own experience as a Latino in the Los Angeles school system had not been an easy one. He remembered feeling academically abandoned and unsupported for most of his K-12 experience. "I was one of those kids that slipped through the cracks, and no one noticed. They said, 'it's a job or the Army for you.'" There was no talk of college or any actual career development, and his high school counselor lost the paperwork that would have allowed him to graduate with his class on time. Cruz shared that he frequently felt like he was treated like dirt. Motivated by social justice, "before it was a thing romanticized or idealized by education," he strongly believed no student should suffer what he experienced.

Cruz's willingness to serve and his strong identification with student needs led his wife's principal to offer him a job as a teaching assistant. This gave him an additional paycheck while he completed his degree. This TA position put him in a variety of school situations. Because the school was understaffed, he "was working with the counselor, helping the principal with special tasks, and at the same time doing everything a TA does." Working in a school setting while doing "a little bit of everything" daily made Cruz aware that his skill set in Counseling was exactly what many students needed. "I didn't study education. I studied human behavior. I saw and knew that what these children needed was mentorship." In year two, his school principal began to suggest to Cruz that he should switch his major and pursue education instead. At first, he resisted, "It took a while. I kept saying no." But before the end of another year, he found himself pivoting:

I realized I was going into the wrong business. I had wanted to help returning vets just back from the combat field. But soldiers are adults and already formed. If we get students when they are young, especially in these early years, I knew I could make a difference and give them a much better start in life. (Interview 1, 01/04/22)

Since he was an education support staff member and growing more comfortable with the idea of education as a career path, "it just all connected." Cruz switched his summer course load to pursue a Master's in Teaching degree, and that fall, at his principal's request, he took over his wife's 4th-grade class to free her to assume responsibility for another grade level class. He worked under emergency licensure while he completed his teaching preparation program. This is the same class in the same school where he continues to teach today, eight years later.

Denise: "You really have to put your whole heart out there."

Losing her father when she was in the third grade was a life event that unmoored Denise's childhood world. Today, she draws from this experience to help her identify and support the walking wounded she encounters teaching her 6th-grade block. Being a "champion and role model" for students lies at the heart of Denise's passion as an educator. Like me, she knew early on that she wanted to be a teacher, and she shared her memory of playing school in her family home as evidence of her long-held desire that took until her late 40's to achieve. She was "an active student, and a driven athlete, but not a high academic performer in high school." No one from her Upper Midwest family had ever attended college, and she had no role models to show her how to study or improve the Bs and Cs on her report card. Despite this, she eagerly shared her interest in becoming an educator with her high school counselors, who derided her plans by telling her that she "didn't have the grades or emotions" to enter a teacher preparation program.

Instead, she was advised to investigate a certification, such as the paralegal secretarial program she decided to pursue.

In her first career, Denise found early success and achieved upward mobility, eventually handling the complex case management of several partners in a major law firm. This experience taught her various translatable skills such as "organization, multitasking, attention to detail, data collection, managing conflicting concerns, and carrying heavy workloads." But despite this success, she was uneasy: "I knew I had the ability to be something more." After a divorce and a new marriage to a supportive and empowering spouse, Denise dared to ask if it was finally time. Surprisingly, her lawyer husband asked a similar question about his own life, offering the adage "full wallet, but an empty heart" as the rationale for a midlife shift to work in education. Together they embarked on retooling their career paths and became certified teachers. They enacted a significant life change to follow their teaching dream, along with their grown children from the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest.

Denise's husband quickly earned his secondary licensure in social studies; it took her longer to begin and complete a BA from the beginning. During this time, she started volunteering at their local elementary school, and was eventually hired as an educational assistant in the resource room. She worked in "push-in and pull-out" instruction for four years as she completed her M.A.T. and gained K-8 licensure. This experience confirmed for Denise that she "loved being with children." Graduating in 2010 in an economy reeling from the Great Recession, she was initially forced to work as a substitute until two teaching jobs opened along the Oregon coast, offering a good work opportunity for both her and her husband. She spent two years teaching fifth grade before moving up to middle school and taking over team leadership of the sixth-grade cohort. Today she continues to teach at this school, although she is back in

college, along with her spouse, adjusting once more to earn SPED licensure after seeing the severe shortage of SPED teachers common in rural districts. As a lifelong learner, Denise seeks to be the role model she never had, helping the students she loves to reach their dreams.

Mark: "There aren't many jobs with such a great chance to impact so many people."

Mark is a public education veteran who came into teaching as a second career in 1992. He is currently serving as the Director of Education in a rural district in the mid-Willamette Valley after working in high schools around the state for 30 years. As a student, Mark was a high achieving athlete scholar, which allowed him to attend a prestigious private Christian college in Southern California. Mark followed up his undergraduate degree in Psychology with a Master's in Counseling. He knew early on that he was interested in a helping profession and initially planned to "devote [his] life to work in marriage and family counseling." After graduation, he spent his first few years as a shelter care counselor for homeless youth in the mid-Willamette Valley before becoming a probation counselor in the juvenile justice system in central Oregon, near where his extended family resided.

As a long-time volunteer in church youth ministry programs, Mark was familiar with many students who attended the local area high school. Before long, he took on an additional job as the freshman boys basketball coach. It was through this education support staff role that he drew the attention of the local high school principal. At the beginning of a new school year, the principal approached Mark with a proposition to fill in for a high school teacher on a leave of absence. The teacher who was stepping out for a year served as a part-time counselor and part-time social studies teacher. In the early 1990s, counselor teacher combinations were difficult to find, especially for rural districts. This required an educator who held both a teaching license and

a counseling accreditation. The principal arranged for an emergency teaching license for Mark, confident in his ability to connect with students after closely observing his coaching and teaching styles. "Academic content can be learned," the principal told Mark, "and a lot of the tools in a master's in counseling are going to be the same tools for building rapport and relationships with students." Mark said yes.

The transition into this new role went remarkably well, and Mark found it both rewarding and a good fit for his skills and personality. He appreciated how his teaching role gave him the ability to invest in daily relationships with students rather than "once-a-week check-ins as a counselor." This increased his opportunity to "impact students in a way that was a healthier experience" for everyone involved. There were typical first-year struggles, but Mark found that he genuinely "liked working with high school students in an educational setting." It was a significant contrast to his previous job as a probation counselor, where most of his clients were "already in such a bind with dysfunctional patterns well established that it was kind of late" for interventions. Those young adults were hard to reach and challenging to help. However, the high school students he taught and coached were eager. It felt like an open doorway for him, although he notes that he did not think he would have ever "considered switching into education" without his high school coaching role. Seeing the "positive impact of early mentoring and coaching" changed his perspective about the best way to spend his professional life.

Looking back, Mark stated that before the year was up, he had already determined that education was a "great fit" for him, so when the principal asked him to stay on permanently, he agreed, fully knowing that it would require him to go back to school yet again to receive his teaching credential. In our interviews, Mark often spoke about the power of "trajectories" in student lives and the ability of educators to affect a great number of individuals. This was the

primary motivator for his career switch. He spent ten years in the classroom before becoming an Athletic Director. Switching schools after moving back to the mid-Willamette Valley, he took on more administrative positions before becoming principal of a high-achieving school he served for 15 years. In the year before this study, Mark navigated into district administration, believing that he could "still make a difference for many kids" in this role before he retires.

Thematic Reading Across Participant's Stories

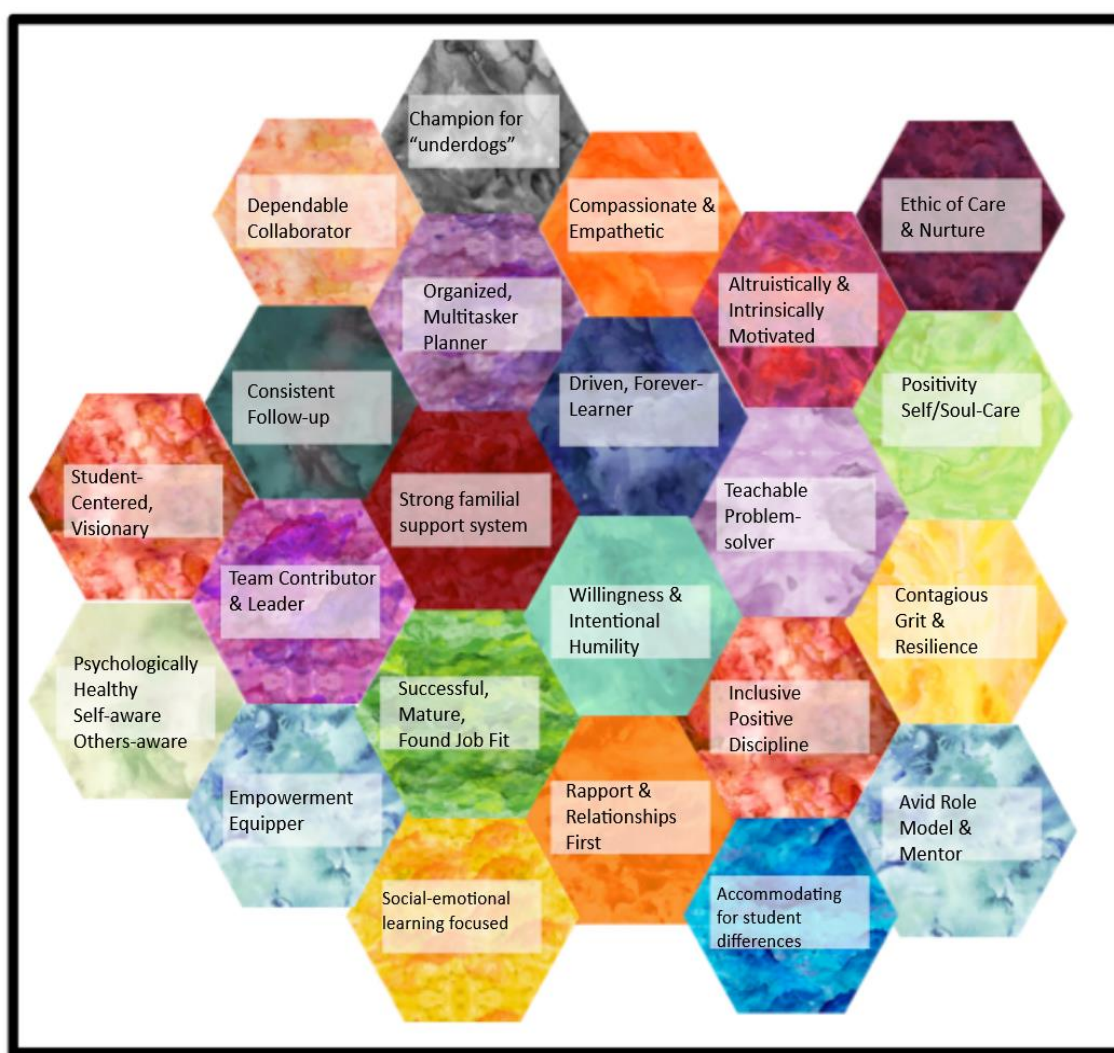
Although my participants each came from quite different backgrounds and experiences, four overarching yet interconnecting themes became evident through my analysis. I began identifying these by conducting three iterations of extract analysis on interview transcripts, with a special focus on the in vivo descriptions referring to participants' attitudes, beliefs, and internal experiences of their phenomenon (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). Hermeneutic researchers use such data to craft stories that "reveal aspects of phenomena" that are essential but rarely noticed or often forgotten (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 827). By working with these textural descriptions from dialogue and written artifacts, I sought to grasp and articulate the "play of understanding" first for individuals, and then for the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 141-142). However, interpretation never happens in a vacuum and is not a linear process. Because the researcher's understanding is "inherent in hermeneutic phenomenology," my own thinking and reflective work became a key piece of my circular interpretive process (Crowther et al., 2017, p. 827).

My critical reading of transcripts led me to code and categorize in ways that I needed to represent visually. I created mind maps of hexagonal thinking to represent the themes emerging from my first interpretations. These patchwork quilt visuals enabled me to easily share my thinking with participants during member check meetings. This helped me understand and

confirm my understanding of participants' stories. Denise's hexagonal thematic profile is listed in Figure 2, as an example.

Figure 2

Denise's Hexagonal Thematic Profile



By examining all four thematic quilts and assessing them, I began to notice strong trends. The analytic quilts for other participants along with one outlining emerging themes are contained in Appendix E. This process helped me identify four emergent themes: 1) intrinsic altruism served as both a motivator for entering the field and an influential factor for continued persistence, 2) the ethic of care was a core value, 3) participants prioritized practices of student-

centered pedagogy, and 4) relevant prior experiences as education support staff influenced their work. I repeated the process of breaking down the parts and integrating them into the whole through the hermeneutic circle until I felt confident that the phenomenological horizon of understanding had been achieved (Crowther et al., 2017; Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020).

Intrinsic Altruism

Chief among these themes was the idea that participants possessed an intrinsic altruism that became a primary motivator and sustaining influence in these SCTs' lives. I define intrinsic altruism as internal motivations which include "practical actions performed voluntarily and intentionally with the primary goal of benefiting another person" (Feigen et al., 2014, p. 2). As I attempted to categorize and define this phenomenon, I returned to the literature to research intrinsic motivation and altruism. It surprised me how many times this theme appeared in each participant's narrative. I found myself wondering whether this was just the way teachers speak of their profession from the perspective of a contextual language domain or if this intrinsic altruism was indeed a distinctive experience they held in common. After multiple readings, I noted that although participants used different words to describe it, it was the same phenomenon. Working with everyone's data, I noticed the nuances of their accounts; like the facets of a diamond, each teacher reflected distinct aspects of a rich and abiding sense of altruism as they described their inner lifeworld experience.

Cruz's altruism was deeply connected to his faith and a desire to help his community. Like his fellow peers in this study, his altruism was refined by experience, marked by maturity rather than idealized naivete. When he spoke of his social justice concerns for his elementary Latino students and their families, he clarified that this was not the "romanticized social justice so common now in education" that in his view, burns out quickly and accomplishes little in the

way of real-world reform. His intrinsic motivations to persist professionally were deeply entrenched in his aspiration to affect future generations by equitably serving all learners. He noted that surface-level altruism "only lasts so long" until students' challenging behaviors start, the funding dries up, or the resources disappear. Then, Cruz suggested, "you realize this isn't what you signed up for." Cruz believed that having a heart oriented to students was the only way to persist because "[teaching] is a purpose and a calling. Without that, you just would go somewhere else." Despite the enormous challenges and heavy workload he faced in his high-needs school and rigorous dual immersion program, Cruz said,

I saw the need and how fulfilling it was at the end of the day, even though it was tiring.

It's a lot of work but it's very rewarding. It's a different kind of satisfaction than I got as a driver or military leader. (Interview 1, 1/4/22)

Anna's intrinsic altruism helped her manage the day-to-day challenges of her Head Start Pre-K classroom. She expressed, "I feel like God has put me here," while also acknowledging, "It's not easy. COVID has made it really hard on our kids. There are so many socioemotional gaps we are trying to mend." As an extended-day Head Teacher, Anna's three and four-year-old students often came to class with more issues and struggles than she felt prepared to handle. But she repeatedly affirmed that none of that mattered because, in the end, "that child will go off to kindergarten and hopefully now has a good start in life." The tone in Anna's voice softened when she spoke about her students by name. This towering blonde with a black belt in Taekwondo melted as she told me about a "child with deep sensory needs" whom she discovered could manage his behaviors better after receiving a big hug from her each morning. She recounted asking him to give her "all the squeezes" each day so he would be less likely to hit or push others. Erratic student behaviors are common in Head Start programs, according to Anna, many

if not most of her students come with unique challenges that are often unidentified and unnamed as they enter her program. Typical preschools and daycares often refuse the students her program welcomes. When she explained why she persisted despite such difficult student situations, Anna said, "I'm a teacher because I can reach little ones like him. I stay because it's where I'm supposed to be." Regardless, she went on to explain,

You don't realize how tired you can be at the end of the day when you've dealt with putting the classroom back together yet again, and everything has gone to hell in a handbag because you just survived another room clear. But you come back the next day because that little guy needs a clean slate. And he is worth it. (Interview 1, 12/1/21)

Intrinsic altruism showed up in Denise's story in the ways she motivates, equips, and empowers her middle school students to dream big. Her intrinsic altruism was rooted in her aspiration to be the role model she never had. She was willing to work with the "underdogs" even if it was difficult, which certainly happened during the pandemic:

I'm subbing during my prep time three days a week. Do I want to scream? Yes! But I know that this is why I'm here with these kids. I'm going to be the best person I can be to make sure they want to come to school every day. (Interview 1, 12/31/21)

Denise tried to counterbalance the negative trends she observed in her school's low socioeconomic neighborhood by intentionally offering hope and opportunity to her classes.

Most of my students have already given up. They have already decided that they can't go to college or don't have the ability to become somebody who does something big. I never had anyone say to me that I could do anything. My students need a champion and someone who believes in them. (Interview 1, 12/31/21)

For Mark, intrinsic altruism was deeply grounded in his sense of purpose and was also derived from his faith. Although he never set out to be a high school teacher, Mark longed to impact students' lives in positive ways. As a servant-hearted leader, he spoke often of purpose:

Life is way more important than what happens between now and retirement. Finding a way to have an impact on the world, both emotionally, academically, and in my case spiritually, is the best place to be. I can't think of a better place than education. I feel like the best people ought to be in this job. Because if you are truly trying to make your society better, education gives you a significant chance to make a lasting impact.

(Interview 2, 02/10/22)

Researcher Thoughts on Intrinsic Altruism

When I first identified this theme and began to see it everywhere in the data, I initially felt concerned that I might be seeing something I wanted to see. As a long-time educator with a deep abiding Christian faith, I acknowledged intrinsic altruism's primary role in my own professional life. I teach because I feel vocationally called to do so, and I seek to be the best teacher for my students for the same reasons. In emails with my critical friend, a qualitative methodologist, we discussed my own experience compared with that of my participants and the overlap. Like many researchers before me, I asked if my questions were too leading and how to determine if my interpretations reflected their actual experience.

I returned to the literature to better understand how contemporary hermeneutic phenomenologists might ascertain answers to the questions I was asking (Suddick et al., 2020; Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). In so doing, I discovered an unrelenting battle of the minds between those who doubted the science of phenomenology entirely and those who dared to assert that the true *essence* of things could *only* be found through such qualitative processes. There

were no universal rules for hermeneutic phenomenology. As a social science, it gravitated towards the thematic essences of storied lives, which granted it an inherent and unique ability to researchers, who were responsible to pull back the layers, revealing deep truths that would otherwise remain unseen.

In correspondence with my critical friend, I compared my processing at this stage to a passage of scripture that reminded me that in this world, we see "darkly," but between the wisps and reflections amidst fading light, we do *see*. As a researcher, this inspired me and resolved my questions. It made sense that participant descriptions of intrinsic altruism resonated with me. They were no less accurate because of that resonance. Like often recognizes like in human nature. Processing such tension through the hermeneutic circle was an ordinary and necessary piece of my analysis process and synthesis of essential themes (Suddick et al., 2020).

Ethic of Care

The second central theme revealed by my analysis was the ethic of care. This was a formational and core value system for each participant. In this study, the ethic of care served as a specific approach to moral theory that influenced participants' thoughts and daily practice on behalf of others. These teachers all expressed a profound sense of responsibility to nurture and care for their students as a moral obligation. Like many who work in helping professions, they described their experiences with their own parents as influential in helping them decide to work with students. There were overtones of nurturing, albeit with a distinctive flavor, in each of these teachers' educational practice. Denise and Mark shared that they were parents of grown children. Cruz and his wife served as foster parents who frequently took in international students, and Anna drew from her observations of good parenting practices in close friends and family.

Denise's descriptions of working with middle school students were avid and endearing, "I love their weirdness. I love their goofiness. I love their change. I love all those aspects that make them middle schoolers. You need to love all of that as a middle school teacher." Denise did not chafe against performing nurturing aspects of teaching that looked and felt much more like social work and counseling than they did delivering academic content. While she understood why many of her peers bemoaned the current push to add social-emotional responsibilities to already heavy teacher workloads, she believed that it was an essential part of her mission.

Denise contended that in her own teaching, her "mothering instinct is strong; it's the emotional component of why I feel it's necessary to be a part of those kids' lives." She shared a poignant story of a defiant tween who had been challenging her all year. At her wit's end one day, her spontaneous, caring response was to pull him into the hallway and look him in the eyes and say,

I want you to know something. I believe in you. And I think you are really hurting and that these behaviors are a result of whatever is going on. I want you to know that no matter how badly you treat me, I... Believe... In... You...[speaker emphasis]. You have a purpose, and you have a future. I just want you to know that. (Interview 2, 1/1/21)

The young male student broke down in tears and nodded his head. After that conversation, his behavior settled down. "It's not perfect, but it is a lot better," Denise noted, "and he is trying because he knows I truly care."

Coaching often requires a balance between embodying a caring ethic while pushing student athletes to achieve in their sport and in the classroom. Mark's first experiences as a coach and counselor significantly shaped the ways he interacted with his students as an educator. While academics were important, he never looked for that as the only marker to gauge true student

health. When describing one of his worst moments as a teacher, he shared a story of finding out about a student's suicidal ideation after the school year had ended. He went to the student's house and "made sure a safety plan was put in place," but since school was out of session, he could not check up on the student as often as he usually would have during the school year. He continued,

There's that sense that there's a lot here sometimes that we have no control over.

Although I might feel like I am semi-responsible for everything, I know I can't fix everything. With hundreds of kids struggling in life, things go sideways all the time.

(Interview 2, 2/10/22)

Mark followed up with a story about a student who got up on the school's roof and refused to come down during lunchtime one day. The fire department was on its way, but the moment was fraught with stress, so Mark "shimmied up the pipe and got up on top of the roof to talk the student down." He told this story matter-of-factly, pointing out that kids come with "a lot of baggage" that nobody knows about until a crisis hits. The way Mark handled these sorts of scenarios indicated his deep sense of concern for his students; he sought to cover all the bases and support families.

From high school coach to early childhood educator, Anna spoke with an almost maternal pride about the success of seeing her "little ones" reach milestone accomplishments like "pulling up their pants by themselves for the first time." Simple, practical actions on behalf of those in her care fed her persistence; she daily reaped the rewards of her nurturing nature:

There is something so precious about watching a child laugh and play for even 10 minutes as they build a tower or explore their world. When they dig up the worm and excitedly share their grimy treasure, there's something wonderful there. (Interview 1, 12/1/21)

Anna had ample opportunity to manifest her caring ethic within the daily struggles of educating young children. When faced with a child who refused to get into the bus car seat, she recounted that she tried to patiently and calmly "play the game of redirecting their attention." She did this in hopes of preventing students from having a "bad end to their day." Her ethic of care kept her fully engaged and invested as she observed, "I have to come up with new strategies all the time and be clear and firm when it is time to be clear and firm," implying that students' wellbeing was her chief focus.

For Cruz, being a male elementary teacher has placed him in the unique role of being a "father figure" in a field so dominated by women. He confidently shared that the cultural stigma of being one of the only men in the building does not embarrass or bother him. With a sense of paternalistic pride, he mentioned a letter he had recently received from one of his former students who is now in high school. He shared bits of this letter as examples of what keeps him in the profession. In it, the student thanked him for being her father figure during a time of trauma and crisis when she had no one else. For her, Mr. Cruz's classroom was a place of safety and physical and emotional protection. This letter confirmed to Cruz that his caring ethic made a difference, noting "children need mentorship." He further explained, "people respond to those who care for them." Cruz believed in the importance of helping children experience a nurturing environment and was excited to be part of that work.

Like other participants, Cruz observed more frequently occurring behavioral challenges as students returned from a long season away from school settings, post-pandemic. Seeing his students struggle with the consistent routines they had managed before "made [him] want to learn where the problems were all coming from, whether...from the immediate family or a lack of training in schools." This thought process reflected his caring ethic, seeking to identify and

mitigate negative influences for his students. He wanted wounds remedied, pain reduced, and stress alleviated so they could get back to the important work of learning and growing together.

Researcher Thoughts on the Ethic of Care

My research memos about this theme touched on the moral ethics of education: "teaching is by its very nature a helping profession. Caring is intrinsic. Everyone I talk to in the field wants to help" (1/20/22). However, my experiences as a life-long educator testify that this is not always the case. Not all teachers feel morally obligated. Partway through the study, I realized that my research was naturally more likely to attract participants with an ethic of care. Those who would agree to be part of a study like mine would be making a gesture for the benefit of others. Grappling with this, I noted in my analytic memos, "should I have found another way to gain research subjects than asking for volunteers? These participants have been volunteering their entire lives! Should I capture another perspective?" (1/21/22). With time, I resolved this tension by recognizing that natural limitations of any study prevent every story from being told.

As I worked with transcript extracts, I recognized again that the distinctive descriptions emerging from my participant stories were very individualized expressions of the themes rising to the surface. While similar, they were unique. In conversations with a fellow researcher, we discussed how we were endeavoring to look at data from macro and microscopic perspectives. Alternating between a big picture view and a word-by-word analyses tilted our themes askew at times. The work to enfold multiple categories as nuances of major themes gave us the fusion of horizons we sought, as directed by phenomenological processes.

Student-Centered Pedagogy

Each of my participants indicated a strong propensity toward student-centered pedagogy. This meant they sought to empower their students to become more adept at managing their

learning with the help of more capable peers or teachers as guides. For them, learning was clearly a process and not merely a product. Therefore, they did not emphasize their power as a teacher or even the importance of the content as much as they emphasized the student as learner. Such a perspective encouraged their persistence since they viewed themselves as facilitating learning alongside students, rather than being solely responsible for it.

Anna shared a story demonstrating this perspective when she spoke of a young student who struggled with lunchtime behaviors that required her to "set unusually clear and firm boundaries that all the students of the class had to do as well." She noticed that,

Even though the other kids didn't need this, he did. When he knew that everyone had to abide by the new lunch rules, he didn't feel singled out, and it became a game for him to try to do what they did. He was learning from them. And if they made a mistake, he was the quickest to notice and point it out as a 'helper.' It was a good learning experience for everyone (Interview 1, 12/1/21).

I viewed this as an example of student-centered pedagogy since Anna enabled peers to demonstrate the skills that this student needed. Such scaffolding activities were particularly necessary for her non-neurotypical students. She recognized how much she needed to "work on being present" to do this work effectively. Looking at a child's offering required her to pause "mentally managing a million things in my head." Instead, she noted, "I needed to stop to really look at their worm. Even if the worm was dead, it was still the worm they found." With these words, Anna emphasized the importance of paying attention to the seemingly trivial things that intrigued her students, rather than directing them to particular curricular aims.

Denise's middle school student-centric pedagogy began with her own attitude and mindset. She noted, "I have a natural ability with kids" and explained students respond well

when she models resilience with declarations such as, "You're making your way there. Keep going. Don't give up!" She felt her prior education support staff work with special needs students impacted her practice significantly; even as a general classroom teacher, "I'm always accommodating for all these different students every day." When her principal introduced a new intervention program called "positive discipline" that was student-centered, Denise was excited to see what it could do. Despite her peers' disparagement, she found herself leading the charge stating, "Come on guys, we have to at least try!" When I questioned her about this response, she observed that the program was more in line with her usual way of interacting with students, whereas some veteran teachers "appeared threatened by it." She intuited that this program would work in her room since she did not expect respect until she earned it, unlike "older teachers who came from a generation that expected respect from day one." Denise worried that this conflict of worldviews within teaching staff was an indicator of a "major cultural paradigm shift" that has caught many educators off-guard. Dauntless, she looked forward to finding innovative ways to engage students "collaboratively and positively" using the tools provided by this program.

The most noteworthy evidence of Mark's student-centered pedagogy came from his descriptions of how he encourages students. He wanted them to view themselves as capable of taking ownership over their problems and creating solutions. He focused on prompting a vision of their future life after graduation; as a social studies teacher in a rural agricultural district whose primary employer was the local lumber mill, this often-meant limited local opportunities. A vital part of his job was "helping families and looking for positive things" for students' future lives. He used collaboration and student discussions as everyday activities to get students engaged in topics and content. He also described his student-centered approach in his college and career classes, "I spoke to kids with 4.0 GPAs about how they never thought they would go to

college or how [their] parents didn't understand because no one in their family had ever attended college." He empowered them by presenting wider opportunities and options and asking students to work together to find possibilities. Equipped with knowledge, they found they were more capable of making decisions independently.

Cruz consistently felt led to "find ways to engage kids and figure out how to make them successful." His student-centered pedagogy shaped his classroom management style. He noted, "you can't just whip them into shape. You have to build rapport and slowly, you know gradually, win their hearts and minds. That's one thing I learned in the Army." After gaining their trust, Cruz believed he could shift their focus to the many activities in the eight subjects he taught daily. When he encountered students' significant academic gaps this year, he volunteered to teach the after-school art program, viewing it as one more enrichment opportunity to help them "connect the dots." Using art to teach core content in fun and fresh ways was further evidence of his student-centered pedagogy in practice.

Researcher Thoughts on Student-Centered Pedagogy

During the analysis stage of my research, I sensed that student-centered pedagogy was the most natural approach for these SCTs because they truly respected and cared for their students. Thinking about my work with high school students reminded me of the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote by my desk, "The secret in education lies in respecting the student." From my own experience, I have found respect to be a powerful pedagogical tool. When students feel respected, they feel emboldened to participate more fully in their own learning process; they are less inclined to be spoon-fed. I noted in my journal that participants "were in charge in their classroom because earned respect garnered them greater student engagement" (1/25/22). As they spoke about current classroom dynamics, I remarked in my analytic memos that rapid changes in

pedagogy were common, but these changes appeared more reactive than proactive during the pandemic. Teaching online or in hybrid environments made student-centered pedagogy more difficult. Yet most of the participants felt they had accomplished this challenge with varying levels of success.

Late in my analysis, I journaled about how participants responded to pandemic pressures and how these constraints profoundly affected their experiences. They had added new technologies but stayed true to creating student-to-student collaboration and peer-guided learning opportunities whenever possible. I thought of Anna explaining the difficulty of getting her three- and four-year-old students to focus on the screen for any period of time while she was teaching them the alphabet. Singing with her students worked far more effectively than flashcards. My participants described their focus on maintaining this pedagogy as paramount and primary, even when it felt impossible. As a fellow educator who has faced many of the same challenges, this resonated with me. I often found myself echoing the phrase "some is better than none" while modifying my curriculum. My perspective as a researcher and teacher gave me great empathy for all it took for my participants to maintain this commitment to student-centered pedagogy.

Relevant Prior Experience as Education Support Staff

During my literature review on second-career teachers (SCTs) and their experience, I discovered that many SCTs transferred valuable assets from prior work experiences that helped them persist through normal first-year challenges as they entered the classroom. These skills were varied and often dependent on their type of previous employment. The SCTs in this study described significant and distinct benefits they gained from working as education support staff in diverse educational settings. As a result, they arrived in their first classrooms with skills and perspectives that helped them overcome some of the pernicious challenges of teacher induction.

As the most veteran educator in this study, Mark expressed the least amount of struggle with professional persistence. He was also the most concrete in affirming his ESS experience as the pivotal element that moved him into teaching and influenced his 30-year persistence in the profession. Mark sensed that if he had not coached or had relationships with school-based administration, he likely would never considered becoming an educator. He noted that coaching confirmed his ability to "manage 25-30 plus kids doing a variety of things, be it small groups over here, or one-on-ones over there," which was a vital skill to possess as a teacher. But while the ability to "keep kids engaged and organized while managing two or three things simultaneously" as an ESS was significant, there was a greater factor he acknowledged.

For Mark, the primary impact of his ESS experience was his ability to develop community with his colleagues. Meaningful relationships with peers and supervisors were a significant factor for his persistence.

No matter what, there are going to be days when whatever you are doing isn't enough to make you excited about teaching. There are going to be days when the room is cold, or the kids are crazy, and you don't feel like you made any impact. But if you have colleagues you are connected to when it's tough, it helps see you through. (Interview 1, 2/7/21)

Mark genuinely enjoyed the people with whom he worked. He remarked that many of his best friends and closest relationships existed because of his career. His longevity played a role in this, along with his genial relational skills. Mark also reported this came from being able to fully engage in generally good work environments. He recognized the importance of having a committed community that "goes all in," which was how Mark described his own investment in school functions and activities outside of the school hours. These "all-in" colleagues positively

rewarded and reinforced his commitment to the schools where he worked and appeared to make it easier for him to navigate the hurdles that contribute to other teachers leaving the profession.

In many ways, Cruz's ESS experiences were the most diverse of all the participants. Although his official title was teacher assistant, he worked everywhere within his elementary school prior to beginning his teacher preparation. He spent time at the front desk translating for incoming families, worked in the counseling office finding resources for needy students, and often helped with special administrative projects. He also willingly and frequently grabbed a broom to "help sweep up messes in the hallway." Nothing was outside of his purview. If he saw something that needed to be done, he volunteered because "behind the scenes really intrigued me. It just fascinated me." This gave him an insider's knowledge of the institution which served him well as he began teaching. For example, he shared a story about how glad he was that he knew where the supplies were kept and how the copier worked because he observed other new teachers grappling with these stresses daily. Although this was a bit of a joke, he had astute political insight into how his building worked and knew "whom to give the \$20 bill to so things would get done." Such political savvy served him well in a variety of ways, smoothing out some of the rougher circumstances that might stymie other new teachers.

Cruz's willingness to see the big picture and his strong work ethic allowed him to get the most out of his professional development experiences both as an ESS and a new teacher. This mindset served him well since his professional development obligations ramped up considerably as a full-time teacher, "I knew all the trainings helped me become a better TA first and expected them to help be me a better teacher. I was able to apply the methods they were teaching, and they worked." At his newcomer school, this meant extra hours of dual language immersion and culturally responsive teacher training as well as curriculum training for his schools' unique math

and language programs. "It was like boot camp. But in the end, you were ready to teach dual immersion anywhere."

Despite finding all this training useful for himself, Cruz admitted, "that's the stuff that overwhelms people...the trainings on top of not enough time to prep while learning a new curriculum" and "making up our own textbooks and activities as we go." The learning curve was steep, and the attrition rate at his school high. Cruz, however, felt like he knew what he was getting into because of his ESS experiences; this enabled him to better manage the challenges. He also had access to the fourth-grade curriculum developed by his wife, along with her emotional and practical support. Relationally, he knew nearly everyone in the building, and enjoyed established peer collegiality and credibility by inheriting a classroom he had worked in as a teacher's assistant. Close community ties further influenced his sense of belonging at his school. All of these are known factors for increasing persistence in teachers, which are discussed further in chapter 5.

Anna believed her most significant education support staff experiences began while she was evaluating her career switch. Up to that point, her part-time work in after-school enrichment programs "felt like a ministry more than education. Yes, I was helping with some skills, but I was basically a body in the room." As a teacher's aide, she began to intentionally notice how different educators ran their classrooms, managed discipline, and dealt with families. Since she became freshly attuned to these dynamics as she went through her own preparation course work, Anna asserted, "they taught me how to teach" because she was ready to learn. However, it was the kids who influenced her the most.

Her close observations of the children she worked with confirmed what she already knew from managing Sunday School classrooms and her Taekwondo classes: "Kids are kids wherever

they are." She recognized there was not some special magic about a formal learning space; she could see teaching was all human interactions and "building rapport." She believed that understanding this ahead of having her own classroom helped her navigate some of those doubts that occurred in her earliest years. Additionally, she entered teaching knowing about the heavy workload teachers carried since she observed this in the teachers she assisted. Although it did not intimidate her, she did indicate surprise about the sheer amount of time required for paperwork. "No one really knows how hard teachers work until they are on the inside," she said, "The paperwork is endless." Therefore, she was not entirely caught off-guard when her paperwork load became heavy at Head Start; she was balanced about recognizing this was part of the job and planned for work-life balance.

The most vital thing she learned from these experiences was which age range "clicked" for her, as a teacher. Anna discovered that she was especially drawn to the youngest learners and this influenced her choice to major in Early Elementary Education. This clarity gave her laser-like focus during her teacher preparation program; she could see the relevance of her coursework to her future. Proudly, Anna shared that her GPA went from 2.0 when she first started at a community college right out of high school to a 4.0 upon her graduation with her BA. Finding this passion gave her impetus to finish well. In turn, she transferred that focus, drive, and persistence into her new profession.

Juggling multiple expectations was not a new experience for Denise. Her first career as a paralegal case manager and then as a SPED-focused ESS taught her various skills that she took directly into her classroom. She remarked, "My organizational skills, practical and life skills were invaluable, even my skills as a mother. All that experience I had before I went into teaching made a huge difference." However, her ESS experience was essential in helping her identify

which grade levels she was most interested to teach and the types of pedagogy that would work best for a "wide range of student skill levels." She observed,

Every student was so different, and it was hard. Teachers were supposed to be teaching all levels. How do you handle that? I didn't understand everything the teacher was doing, but I got a bigger picture of what was expected. I think without that, I would have been really blindsided... As a resource EA I saw it all. (Interview 1, 12/31/21)

Denise pondered whether the lack of such experiences for other new teachers could explain the high turnover rate at her rural coastal school, "I look at teachers who are always strung out and wonder if prior experience might have helped." She explained that the perfectionist nature of her prior work in the legal field meshed with the responsibilities she had as an ESS and then as a teacher leader,

This made it easy for me to team lead the sixth grade, to see what the principal needed and how I could work with what I had and with various people, especially in special education, and follow through on what I said I would do. I see teaching as a very simple and straightforward process of follow-through. (Interview 1, 12/31/21)

On the flipside, Denise stated that working as an ESS had its downsides, I think the hardest part of being an EA was being looked down upon. They don't always value you or treat you like you are adding value to them in their classroom. I took that feeling of not being valued and connected it with how students must feel. Maybe they don't feel valued and feel overlooked as if they can't or won't accomplish much.

(Interview 1, 12/31/21)

Denise knew what it felt like to be "at the top of her game" before "moving down" to an entry-level position as an ESS. Instead of being derailed by these experiences, she channeled

them into positive perspectives to help students. She summed up her total experience as an ESS as being very significant in her ability to persist.

Researcher Thoughts on Relevant Experience as ESS

Contemplating the varied but unified aspects of this theme reminded me of the value of movie trailers. In my journal, I noted that, like a good movie trailer, a life preview is always helpful to determine if we want to be a part of any experience or not. My participants' ESS experiences were like job shadowing and interning, allowing them to try on the feel and the weight of possible future selves. In hermeneutic phenomenology, this theoretical framework is referred to as foresight or fore-conception and is a means of describing the experiences individuals have that give them windows into what could be (Peoples, 2021). Through their ESS roles, my participants described how valuable it was to have a preview of what their futures as teachers might look like. Some of their preconceptions were right; others were wrong. Cruz stated that he generally knew what he "had signed up for." Mark drew from meaningful relationships with peers and supervisors, clarifying what mattered most to him was professional engagement. Anna and Denise had experiences that clarified their best age groups, enabling them to focus their teacher preparation efforts with helpful foresight. These insights into educational practice and experience greatly benefitted them when they entered the field.

Composite Narrative

As a group, the participants in this study were dedicated and committed second-career educators whose diverse life experiences supported their professional persistence. Although varied, their lifeworld experiences contained unifying influences and themes. For example, all indicated that they were intrinsically motivated and driven by a strong work ethic. When asked if they planned to stay in their current position for at least two years, each said they did not see

themselves moving unless they laterally navigated to another educational posting. Two of them entered the field before their mid-30's while the other two migrated in their late 40's or early 50's. Each acknowledged that entering the field at an older age had given them some instant credibility, but also less direct support since people assumed they were well-prepared to teach due to their comparative maturity. All had spent a significant amount of time in other professions before becoming ESS, and all indicated that they were undergoing times of substantial personal transition when they began their move into education.

Individually, all were motivated to pursue education as a profession, guided by a mature and stable form of altruism that they rarely idealized or romanticized. This appeared as individualized actions for social justice, equity for all learners, and community investment and concern for students and their families. All worked in low socioeconomic districts or programs; most served in rural areas. Each participant expressed personal responsibility to mentor and be positive role models for their students. Three of the four had taken on teacher or administrative leadership at some point during their tenure, while the fourth participant had been invited into leadership several times but declined because they believed their presence more important to classrooms. This indicates their prioritization of student need. Three were vocal about their faith and its role in helping them cultivate altruistic incentive, encouragement, and motivation as educators.

All participants suggested their ethic of care was a core value that informed their relationships with students, showing the need for empathy, compassion, patience, and perseverance. Each expressed humility manifested in simple, practical actions of service on behalf of others. I found it noteworthy that most had negative public school experiences as children, which influenced their desire to do better by their students. They expressed compassion

and sympathy for students who were experiencing struggles. Therefore, it was not surprising that most employed pedagogical practices aimed at empowering students, while embracing a "whole child" teaching philosophy. Although weary at times by the extra work, most acknowledged that they were missionally motivated to provide additional social-emotional learning as well as general content. Many provided extra services that appeared closer to social work or counseling, especially when compared to other teachers in their building.

Community values and support were important to all participants, although some did not believe this was easily gained or maintained. Each participant addressed the unique cultural realities of their communities, most indicating them as positive supports for students. Working with equally invested and engaged peers mattered, since collaboration and synergy made their jobs easier. Some expressed frustration with peers who did not have equal buy-in for school-wide programs or interventions, which they believed would help students. All participants had a cheerful outlook about education in general and believed their teaching role was vital and valuable to society at large. Most implied that they were content where they were currently situated even despite the pressures and pendulum swings of policies and strategies necessitated by the pandemic.

Strong family support was another influence for all of them. Three of the four had spouses who worked in the school system either as fellow teachers or as administrative assistants; the fourth had a supportive spouse and extended family that included former educators. Sharing similar schedules and calendar holidays was a positive perk seen as advantageous for family life. Some related that these supports gave them safe spaces to vent on difficult days; most believed this familial support was vital to their ability to continue to teach.

Additionally, all felt their experience as ESS was instrumental in providing them with essential skills that mitigated early challenges as new teachers. Some indicated that without their ESS experience, they would not have even considered becoming teachers, while others indicated these experiences guided early career choices. All spoke of strong mentors who aided them through the earliest stages of their professional life. These mentors were college professors, direct school supervisors, or co-teachers. Each believed that other first-career peers had different experiences, sometimes sharing thoughts on why some were successful in staying and others were not.

In addition to their ESS roles, most indicated that they drew valuable skills from other job experiences. It was interesting to note that two of my participants shared a counseling background before switching to education. These participants' expressions paralleled the other's in describing students and peers, emphasizing the role counseling played in their relational skill-building. All suggested that peer collegiality and collaboration were important but not necessarily essential for persistence. Most signaled a need for work-life balance and self-care in their professional lives, especially given recent pandemic pressures that stretched them more than any previous season they had faced as teachers. Most suggested that self-awareness and self-reflection were vital tools for encouraging persistence. All viewed themselves as "forever learners" who continued their professional education by choice, as well as district mandate. Most named mindset, attitude, and resilience as elements of their professional persistence and foundational to their teaching practices.

Summary of Findings

Following in the footsteps of van Manen, the final step of a hermeneutic circle of analysis is to name how essences I derived from the lifeworlds of my participants might contribute to an

understanding of the broader population from which they are drawn. The following are essential themes derived from this study:

1. Intrinsic altruism may serve as a primary motivator and sustaining influence for persistence in SCTs with prior ESS experience.
2. For SCTs with prior ESS experience, the ethic of care may be experienced as a moral obligation, eliciting a profound responsibility to nurture and care for students.
3. Teachers who use student-centered pedagogy to empower student learning may be inspired to persist or persist because they employ it.
4. Relevant prior work as education support staff may supply significant and distinct assets for new SCTs as they begin teaching, making it more likely that they view it as an element of their ability to persist.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter explained findings derived from interviews with four individuals. As educators, they entered the teaching profession through a unique but important pathway. Despite the diversity of experience they brought to their work as teachers, there were clear core themes; I recognized their entry points had more in common than surface details might immediately suggest. Whether they were coaches, tutors, or instructional assistants, each traveled that path to where they felt they really belonged: teaching. Their experiences confirmed long-held dreams and aspirations. I sense that for every Mark, Denise, Anna, and Cruz, there are countless education support staff who do not choose to become classroom teachers. But for others who want to pursue a pathway like these participants, it may be that this research may smooth the way. In the next chapter, I discuss the significance of these findings, possible implications for professional practice, and offer suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

As the Omicron variant of COVID-19 swept across U.S. school districts in early 2022, a member survey of the National Education Association representing 3 million U.S. teachers indicated that 90% of teaching staff were burned out. Fifty-five percent of teachers surveyed planned to leave education altogether, compared to the 37% who planned to do so just six months earlier (Jotkoff, 2022). This significant increase in anticipated departures from the field in such a short span points to an encroaching exodus; pandemic pressures have only exacerbated already stressful circumstances for educators across the country (Jotkoff, 2022). Based on reporting from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are currently "567,000 fewer educators in America's public schools today than there were before the pandemic," (Jotkoff, 2022), showing how essential it is to understand teacher persistence in a field so many are leaving. This study explored second-career teacher persistence; a growing subset of the teaching workforce that is minimally studied or understood. Educational researchers know a great deal about what is not working; now they need to know what is. This study's findings suggest several noteworthy ideas about how these teachers persist in a challenging field, which is especially significant considering recent events.

This research focused on the persistence stories of four second-career teachers who came to the field through a unique pathway as education support staff. Their journeys into teaching provided "opportunities for evoking and reflecting on [the]practice" of SCT persistence (van Manen, 2007, p. 20). Josselson (2015) points out that "narratives are the only means by which people can communicate what goes on inside them and what links them to others" (p. 3) since "narrative research projects are grounded in the idea that identity is organized narratively" (p. 13). Interview participants often share willingly because they wish to be known and have a deep

need to be understood. I observed this need for validation and understanding in my discussions with the participant teachers who shared their stories with me.

Synopsis of Essential Themes

In examining and analyzing my participants' storied lives, I identified four overarching themes distilling the persistence narratives these participants shared. These are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Emergent Essential Themes

Essential Themes	General Description
Intrinsic Altruism	Practical actions performed voluntarily and intentionally with the primary goal of benefiting another person
Ethic of Care	Sense of responsibility to nurture and care for students as a moral obligation.
Student-Centered Pedagogy	Learning approaches, academic-support strategies, and activities that focus on student needs, interests, cultural backgrounds, and collaborative experiences as opposed to teacher or content-centered educational approaches
Relevant Prior Experience as ESS	Valuable transferable assets such as skills and perspectives from work experience as educational support staff

Intrinsic Altruism

In its simplest form, altruism is described as living for the sake of others and stands in direct contradiction to selfish actions (egoism) "motivated solely for the benefit of oneself" (Kraut, 2020). Like all worldviews and theories, altruism is not without its critics. Opponents suggest pure altruism does not exist, theorizing what people seem to do for others' sake is actually for their own good (Kraut, 2020). However, altruism appears to be a universal human value, identified across the world in discussions of ethics, human rights, and social justice. Although it is known by other terminology in other domains, altruism is a central moral value in

most world religions. Indeed, altruism is evident in the modern sciences, where advocates for altruism trace its ideology through philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and evolutionary biology (Kraut, 2020).

In their systematic review of research about altruism, Fegnin et al. (2014) suggest that in work and daily life, "an intrinsic altruistic motive exists in which a person's empathic response to another's distress, coupled with a cognitive sense of the other, provides a basis for a motive" leading to action (p. 4). They posit that intrinsic altruism generates expressions of sympathy, compassion, and personal affection; each of these were attributes I observed in participants' persistence narratives. This was unsurprising given research suggesting altruism is a significant factor for educator persistence and the most common motivation expressed by teachers who remain in the profession (Uusimaki, 2011, p. 332).

Students were the most frequent recipients of my participants' altruistic concern. Teachers showed their altruism through their distinct awareness of others' needs; they self-sacrificially sought to make a difference in their larger communities, especially for those who were challenged or struggling. As an example, Cruz named his concern for social justice for his Latino students as altruistically motivated. He did not want his students to suffer the same inattention and educational neglect that he experienced; he decided his example as a male Latino elementary teacher would create and sustain safe spaces for student empowerment and growth.

In education, intrinsic altruism often aligns with teachers who take a comprehensive approach to their work. These sorts of teachers seek to share power and decision making, and actively promote community building (Mulinge, 2018). Denise reflected this reality as she discussed her role as team leader for the sixth-grade cohort and her struggle to prioritize what was best for students rather than be distracted by difficult agendas or debates with "veterans who

didn't want to add one more thing to their to-do list." She strived to balance the perspectives of her overworked peers with the needs of students who would benefit from different interventions. Maintaining an altruistic attitude helped Denise navigate these conflicts and prioritize her commitments.

Ethic of Care

Initially introduced by feminist theorists, an ethic of care is a distinct philosophical motivation often associated with the traditional roles women have been assigned, primarily in service to family and home (Brown & Pringle, 2018; Conroy & Ehrensall, 2021). Current discussions concerning care ethics are in a period of transition as many seek to decouple it from the feminine ethic established by scholars such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. Rather, present trends attempt to establish care ethics as a more fundamental aspect of being human (Brown & Pringle, 2018; Conroy & Ehrensall, 2021). Despite efforts to move it away from gendered associations, the ethic of care is always relational, revealing clear ties to education, nursing, and other helping professions. I thought of Anna's descriptions of care and nurture for her young students while reading Brown and Pringle's (2019) notions that this ethic represents the best of humanity as it seeks to replicate the "powerful and pure desire of mothers for the holistic wellbeing of their children" (p. 23).

Each of my participants demonstrated a uniquely authentic, practiced, and self-reflective care ethic. As one example, Denise noted that her "mothering instincts were strong," revealed in the ways she approached her middle school students. Each participant viewed their role of caring for students as a moral obligation and identified with the move toward a universal ethic of care. This attribute was strongly related to the ethic of justice, enabling students to gain social capital through public education (Brown & Pringle, 2018; Conroy & Ehrensall, 2021). These perceptions

were apparent and affirmed within my participants' stories; each indicated their strong belief about what students needed, along with their sense of responsibility and capability to meet those needs.

Student-Centered Pedagogy

I found it interesting to note that the pedagogical methods my participants described as being vital to their classroom management and student success were directly connected to the practices they said helped them persist. Research indicates that content-specific beliefs about pedagogy are potent players in teacher attrition and retention; as those who left the profession often "held the belief that they were heavily responsible for students' learning, not realizing students' own role and effort in the learning process" (Hong, 2012, p. 431). On the other hand, those who implement student-centered pedagogical styles appear to view themselves as facilitators and guides, which may lessen negative and reinforce positive self-efficacy beliefs (Hong, 2012; Van Overschelde et al., 2017). Increased self-efficacy is a known factor in teacher persistence (Wyatt, 2015).

Participants' instructional practices were primarily student oriented. They focused on helping students develop skills and techniques oriented to lifelong learning and independent problem-solving. Most of my participants had observed such approaches as ESS within varied settings and gained perspectives on how to best use them when they became general classroom teachers. These exemplars gave my participants early information to build on as new teachers, such as Cruz's descriptions of working alongside his wife in elementary dual immersion classes and Denise's experiences as an EA in a SPED resource room.

These types of narratives echo early forerunners of educational thought such as Charlotte Mason, Lev Vygotsky, and Marie Montessori, who value educational practice that prioritizes

student interests, collaboration assets, and accommodation needs within the learning process (Orlich et al., 2018). As participants described their roles as mentors and facilitators, it was apparent these practices contributed to positive rapport with students and strong social-emotional learning environments (Van Overschelde et al., 2017). Students and teachers who work in such spaces feel more positively about the work of learning and relating to one another; such environments seem to yield teachers who are both effective in enacting such practices and more likely to persist in the profession (Saatcioglu, 2020, p. 3).

Relevant Prior Experience as ESS

Since each participant worked as education support staff before becoming certified, they all had unique opportunities to see behind the scenes of the educational complex before committing themselves to it as teachers. They described this experience as pivotal for confirming their career change. It also benefited them in adjusting their initial expectations as they entered the profession. Although they did not know everything, in general, they knew what "they signed up for," in Cruz's words. Thus, the experience of becoming a teacher as former education support staff was essentially self-vetting. They entered the field believing they could do the job despite their awareness of the discomfiting realities of school as an institution. As a result, they were unsurprised by what they encountered. They either had or quickly developed the strong work ethic necessary to manage heavy workloads, growing piles of paper, and ever-increasing responsibility for professional development. These SCTs had learned to be teachable and flexible, not expecting perfection the first time. They practiced resilience and were "gritty" from the start. They knew how to contend with feelings of being overwhelmed and, as Anna reported, shift their personal "work-life balance" one way or another "until it normalized again." This knowledge of the "hidden curriculum" necessary for teacher life not often included in typical

teacher preparation programs was beneficial as it stripped away illusions and grounded my participants in reality (Van Overschelde et al., 2017, p. 33).

Their previous experience helped them understand the ebb and flow of educational work and avoid overcorrection or overreaction, as Cruz described when he felt his early years of professional development training were all-consuming. Instead of quitting or believing he could not adjust to increased professional responsibility, he held fast, knowing the work would be worth it. Practical skills such as managing classroom dynamics, organization, planning, and problem-solving were well-used skills each participant possessed on day one. Each of them grew and refined their skills, but they did not begin at "ground zero," in Anna's words. They acknowledged the advantage of beginning in an ESS pathway and attributed this experience as supportive of the fact that they all became teacher leaders early in their teaching careers.

Connections to Literature

After analyzing these emergent themes, I returned to the literature to better understand how they related to existing research. Early in this research process, I found research theories of persistence related to person-job fit and teachers' sense of self-efficacy; they proved relevant in light of this study's findings.

Job Fit

I found it very telling that participants frequently used the word "fit" to describe their relationship to teaching as a profession. Teacher-job fit is defined as the "degree to which a teacher possesses a core set of skills and related dispositions associated with the nature of the teaching profession" (Saatcioglu, 2020, p. 1). Existing research suggests that person-job fit is "related to individual performance and adjustment at work and significantly predicts attitudes toward an organization" (Player et al., 2017, p. 332), suggesting it affects how a teacher might

relate to the education profession, as a whole. Each participant in this study described the sensation of fitting well in education, which confirmed they were, in Anna's words, where "they were supposed to be." Significantly, most participants recounted feeling this way even when they were working as education support staff.

I found this significant as a notable influence in my participants' early and long-term persistence perceptions. Perceived job fit as ESS appeared to be a precursor that motivated them to pursue teaching as a second career. Additionally, the felt experience of belonging, such as described by Mark, provided most with staying power early on. In his case, person-job fit supplied him with the energy and focus necessary to complete an extra degree while teaching full-time and raising a young family. I noticed a similar trend in Denise's comparison of her feelings about teaching with how she felt during her first career in law, which demanded "perfection" and punished error. This was in sharp contrast to the confident peace that settled on her during one of her first teaching lessons, where she misspoke. Instead of panicking about verbally stumbling in front of the principal, students, and parents, she "knew it was ok" because it gave her a teaching opportunity with her students. Transparency is a good thing in education according to Denise: "everyone makes mistakes; it's what we do afterward that really matters. I wanted to work where mistakes were teaching tools." This anecdote points to person-job fit for Denise, underscoring why she found it easy to thrive in a vocation that suited her better than her previous work.

Finding the right job fit is a recurrent theme in second-career teacher research (Chambers, 2002; Marinell & Johnson, 2013; Miller et al., 2020; Troesch & Bauer, 2017). Although any teacher can carry ideals into their work, career changers commonly self-assess their own personalities and skillsets with astute self-awareness (Chambers, 2002). My

participants pre-processed their move into education with varied specificity based on what they believed would be best for them as individuals: Anna joined Head Start, Cruz participated in dual immersion elementary teaching, and Denise pursued middle school grade level placements. Interestingly, an additional component of job fit relates to how well a job's environment fits a group of co-workers, which is something Mark noted regarding his sense of collegiality in his school communities (Saaticioglu, 2020; Wyatt, 2015). He was drawn by the environment that education afforded him as much as he was by the impact he hoped to achieve. His 30-year tenure in the profession indicates he was correct in believing such a thing was possible for him; indeed, elevated levels of person-job fit "are positively associated with organizational commitment and negatively associated with the intent to quit" (Player et al., 2017, p. 332). This study's findings underscore the idea that when teachers feel like they belong in education, they are inclined to persist (Saaticioglu, 2020; Wyatt, 2015).

Self-efficacy

As proposed by Albert Bandura, Social Cognitive Theory is a conceptual framework for understanding teacher self-efficacy, which contributes to persistence. According to Bandura, people build their efficacy through four sources: verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, physiological (emotional) arousal, and mastery experience (Henson, 2002). Researchers suggest that the most potent component for increasing teacher self-efficacy is mastery experiences (Henson, 2002). Very simply, "how we do what we do" is a significant determinant of teacher self-efficacy, which shapes a teacher's willingness to persist professionally. The participants in this study had many unique opportunities to develop mastery experiences, or foundations for their self-efficacy as teachers, during their time in education support staff roles. They vicariously experienced what good and bad teaching looked like and felt like; they saw the results of positive

classroom management and how skillful teachers handled challenging circumstances. They also had the luxury of experiencing all of this from a helper's perspective, at times they themselves were not necessarily "on the line" to enact a particular outcome. As ESS, they were emotionally invested in their students and their communities, and yet they were not necessarily fully responsible for helping students experience academic or behavioral results. This likely offered a lower-stakes type of mastery experience that may have contributed to their high quality as teachers.

Serving as ESS proved to be powerful; from the perspective of social cognitive theory, those experiences positively mediated their self-efficacy beliefs as they became teachers. Since teachers' beliefs about their abilities to "support learning in various task-and context-specific cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social ways" determine their self-efficacy perceptions, I believe these teachers had significant advantages (Wyatt, 2015, p. 118). Restated another way, these teachers benefited from having a positive mindset about themselves as future teachers; this was something they drew on when they entered education. Additionally, these solid positive beliefs appear to have influenced their emotions, choices, and continuing efforts resulting in "persistence when facing adversity" (Henson, 2002, p. 11).

These experiences accumulated to form a sense of "organizational efficacy" related to how they conceptualized their classrooms and their role as educators (Friedman & Kass, 2002, p. 684). Researchers suggest that strong teachers can help their communities understand and adopt such conceptualizations as collective ones evidenced in strong school-wide goals and improved relationships with colleagues. Indeed, Mark, Anna, and Denise all described personal strategies and styles of teaching they adopted as a result of their strong sense of self-efficacy (Friedman & Kass, 2002). Research on early teachers indicates that those who gain early proficiency in these

skills during induction heightens perceptions of teacher self-efficacy and encourages persistence; these things may have helped my participants persist during the intense crisis of the past three years (Coppe et al., 2021; Troesch & Bauer, 2017).

Integrating Researcher Experience

As a fellow educator, I strongly related to many of the same struggles and concerns that my participants discussed during our interviews. We shared our "new normal" in the form of teaching around masks, dealing with chronic absenteeism, adjusting to learning gaps, and intense socio-emotional behaviors. I commiserated with how stressful it was to find these new concerns placed on top of the "normal expectations" we have as PreK-12 educators, all of which formed increasingly unstable towers we kept straightening as we pulled out one expectation at a time to address and reinforce. To call it overwhelming would be an understatement, yet we also experienced immense joy in having students back in our classrooms, hearing and seeing student achievements, and watching students relax in our spaces. Surprisingly, I was finding myself more satisfied as an educator than I had been in years, partly because I knew that I was making a real difference in ways that had not been so clear in the years before. Most of my participants echoed this feeling, using different words and descriptions for their weary but enthusiastic persistence in a field that is more taxing than it has ever been. Despite it all, none of them planned to leave; neither did I.

I deeply considered my role as an observer, even as I sought to untangle and understand these complex and contradictory ideas, knowing "human experience is layered and complex. Behind every story told about an experience is another story, with different shadings and linkages to the first" (Josselson, 2014, p. 9). Although I am not a second-career teacher by definition, I share some commonalities with my participants since I spent over 20 years as a

private school educator before transitioning into public education. In some ways, I was like them, having worked with students in a different way, according to a different set of rules in a different place. Like them, my first-career experiences provided me with valuable assets that I carry today. In my analytic memos, I noted that I was grateful that the methodology of phenomenology recognized that, "the idea of a neutral interviewer is a myth" (Josselson, 2014, p. 12); the hermeneutic circle made room for me and my experiences to inform my analysis. Because hermeneutic phenomenology is relational, it seemed natural that our Zoom meetings often began with short, "what's new with you and COVID in your area?" conversations as participants debriefed with me about the most recent challenges they were facing.

As I examined transcripts during early extract analysis, I began to sense that the timing of this study, occurring as it did during the COVID pandemic, had a direct effect on the types of themes my participants shared. The ever-evolving situation and policy shifts stretched and pummeled educators, keeping us from normal school routines. I believe conducting this study during this period elicited strong themes that my participants felt were more basic, deeper, and perhaps most relevant. Our conversations repeatedly returned to efforts to identify the "most important parts of persistence," as if the pandemic had stripped away the more mundane or superficial discussions that could have filled our time. I pondered in my journal, "altruism was a primary motivator, but is it even more so now in due to the circumstances teachers were facing?" (1/29/22)

The pocket questions I came prepared with in case my participants fell silent in interviews stayed in my pocket as each participant passionately shared their thoughts with me. They spontaneously offered their thinking about why other teachers struggled and left around them. Although these other educators were nameless, my participants wanted to talk about them

and the meaning of their departures from a field in such significant need. Sometimes my participants were frustrated; other times, they felt defeated, unable to comprehend how longtime veterans could leave when students needed them so much. The driving research question for this study took on deeper meaning than why teachers persist, to why anyone *would*.

Implications for Educational Practice and Policy

The nature of this small study and its thematic results cannot be generalized to the experiences of all second-career teachers who come from education support staff pathways. However, such insights are valuable as they encourage awareness and offer possibility for future support of this subset of teachers in the broader field. This study offered thematic insights into their primary motivations, sustaining ethics, and practical approaches that may prove significant to future SCTs drawn from ESS roles.

Implications for School Districts and State Policy Makers

The influence of person-job fit and self-efficacy by virtue of mastery experiences were significant in this study. District and state policy makers could use information from studies like mine to develop more effective ESS recruitment programs, honing in on the "self-vetting" nature of ESS experiences as a tool to recruit them and support their success in the field. Indeed, "hard to recruit" locales and rural districts may come to depend on such "Grow Your Own" pathways to sustain the profession (DeMoss & Yun, 2020). Other districts may use such information to recruit difficult-to-find teaching resources such as SPED and dual-language educators (Garcia, 2020).

Specifically, administrators should more closely examine their current district staffing for individuals who constitute "hidden treasures" in their districts. These individuals may be volunteers or paid classified staff who have prior knowledge and experience that may make them

excellent teachers. Administrators who expand their perspectives to analyze the strengths of individuals like Mark, the basketball coach, and Cruz, the husband helping his teacher wife, may reveal a subset of exceptional second-career teacher candidates in each district. Some of these individuals may already have college degrees that can be retooled to make quicker jumps into classrooms; others, like Denise, may require lengthier programs while they continue to work for the district as education support staff. Offering an increased variety of career lattice options for achieving state licensure could be beneficial.

Additionally, state policymakers should consider expanding financial support for "Grow Your Own" programs in hard to staff regions of the state. Administrators and state policymakers should capitalize on the assets SCT bring in the form of person-job fit and self-efficacy through mastery experiences. They could do that best by assessing and anticipating the best placement for new teachers drawn from this subset. They could also design professional development focused on growing these new teachers' sense of self-efficacy through high value prior experience. To be effective, this professional development must be tailored to the advanced knowledge and skill levels many former ESS SCTs possess (Miller et al., 2020; Wyatt, 2015). This approach could "level up" educators more quickly and efficiently than professional development designed for first-career teachers.

Understanding and responding to what matters most to these SCTs may also increase the likelihood of retaining them. Strong identification with altruistic motivation appeared especially significant for these participants during the COVID crisis (Chin & Young, 2007, Danyluk et al., 2020). Understanding what sustains teachers through difficult times may prove important for district policy planning. Lessons learned today may have great value for the future in retaining quality educators undergoing challenges. District development of connected, collegial

communities of practice for this subset may also prove valuable, since high levels of community investment and connection also appeared significant in my findings. Research indicates that such engagement may also increase longevity (Exley, 2021).

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

Teacher education programs tasked with training more SCTs than ever may find the discoveries of this study useful to support former ESS who may more naturally pair pedagogy with practice, effectively maximizing current assets for future classrooms. Teacher preparers should explore the future of SCTs drawn from ESS pathways and consider the best way to support their longevity within the field. It is possible that providing teacher candidates drawn from this subset with information about the nature of the challenges and the amplified stress they will encounter as the primary teacher may increase their persistence. Equipping them with skills to manage such stress in self-reflective ways may support their longevity (Farrell, 2016).

Paraprofessionals' career lattices would benefit from additional alternative pathway development for teacher preparation and induction (Chambers, 2002; DeMoss & Yun, 2020; Farrell, 2016; Kelchtermans, 2017). SCTs require ample opportunities to practice theory in field experiences with trained teacher mentors, often the most stunted aspect of the increasingly common alternative certification programs (Crosswell & Beutel, 2017). Advocating strong partnerships between teacher education providers and school districts could allow ESS to integrate classwork and fieldwork, offering best practices for effective SCT formation (DeMoss & Yun, 2020). Gaining additional knowledge about this subset of SCTs' perceptions and experiences will be advantageous for those considering differentiation in teacher preparation and induction supports (Marinell & Johnson, 2013).

Recommendations

Although this study addressed a significant gap in the literature regarding the persistence experiences of second-career teachers with education support staff backgrounds, more research is needed. The reality of ongoing teacher shortages suggests the importance of training and retaining potential candidates via research-backed practices (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). Many educational stakeholders are counting on this subset of new SCT teachers to make a difference in the current teacher shortage crisis and beyond (Garcia, 2020).

Understanding their persistence is of paramount importance as sharing available research with districts and schools may help them identify ways to improve overall SCT experience, a vital component of teacher retention (Reagan et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2007). Losing even one good teacher affects many individuals; a lack of qualified teachers threatens school stability and students' abilities to learn (Kelchtermans, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016). Therefore, it is my profound hope that educational researchers and district leaders will continue to research and survey the unique strengths and assets of this teacher subset to design substructures of support that will sustain them during the inevitable challenges to come.

Concluding Thoughts

As a researcher, I was genuinely intrigued by each teacher-participant who shared their story with me; I was honored to have a window into their professional lives. I recognize how the process of hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me up close, relational, "personal interactions" that, while not infallible against deception, offered strong supports for truth sharing (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115). The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. I leave this research with a hundred more questions about the nature and the experiences of second-career teachers and their future impact on the field. Hearing these storied lives left me pondering at times as I sought

to fully encapsulate each idea that was emerging, for while "we have an implicit, felt understanding...it is difficult sometimes to put that understanding into words" (van Manen, 2007, p. 21). Leaning into the scholarly research process has enriched my understanding of how educators grapple with motivation, ethics, and practical applications in daily life; and has provided a fresh perspective on my own teacher persistence during a difficult season. In the end, I remain eager to continue the conversation, explore stories, and share insights from the wise educators who serve families every day.

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Appendix A

Why Stay? Google Research Participant Application Form

Thank you for your interest in my research. This study focuses on the unique journey of former educational support staff as second-career teachers continuing in the teaching profession. I am specifically interested in your experiences of persistence in a job where so many quit.

Please fill out this Google Form with your information.

1. General Demographics: name, gender, age, race, and contact information
2. Current school position, building, and district
3. How many years have you taught? Where? When?
4. What is the likelihood that you will leave teaching in the next two years?
(Very Unlikely, Somewhat Unlikely, Somewhat Likely, Very Likely)
5. Tell me a little about your former educational support staff role before becoming a teacher? For example, Educational Assistant, Instructional Assistant, English Language translator, Library Aide, School Secretary, Bus Driver, Coach, or other.
6. Tell me a little about why you decided to become a teacher and why you stay?
(approximately 250 words)
7. Which teacher preparation/education program did you participate in to become certified?

Appendix B

Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers

Principal Researcher: Christine Bullock cbullock19@georgefox.edu

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Karen Buchanan kbuchana@georgefox.edu

Thank you for your interest in my dissertation research on the persistence experiences of former education support staff who have become second-career teachers. As a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University, I am conducting this research as part of my program requirements. Dr. Karen Buchanan, my dissertation chair, will be supervising the study.

For the purposes of this research, you are invited to participate in two virtual interviews and one follow-up regarding your experiences as a second-career teacher and any factors you recognize affecting your continued persistence in the profession. Each interview is anticipated to be approximately 50 minutes long. The interview questions are open-ended and relate to your prior work and professional experiences as an educator. I hope the findings of my interviews will shine light on the growing subset of second-career teachers you represent. It is my goal to contribute themes arising from participants' experiences to the limited pool of existing research for possible future benefit to other teachers, educational researchers, and stakeholders.

The risks associated with this research study are minimal. The interview questions are not personal and will relate to your background and experiences. However, it is possible that questions asked during an interview may result in unpleasant memories. Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary, and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion. The results of this study will only be used for research purposes.

Personal interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will be audio recorded and later transcribed by me. Information will be analyzed and presented in a confidential manner, and you will never be personally identified. Once you give your consent, you will be given a pseudonym that will be used over the course of the study to ensure that your responses will remain confidential. I will obscure geographic and other identifying details, as well as use composite stories to guarantee participant anonymity.

All research materials (e.g., 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 recordings.

If you have any questions about this study or your involvement, please feel free to ask me before signing this form.

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

Participant Signature _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Interview One

- Describe what made you decide to pursue teaching and your journey to get there.
- What was teacher education/preparation like for you?
- Can you tell me an example of when you first began teaching?
- What connections did you make between your prior work and teaching?
- How did the experience of teaching affect you? What feelings were generated by your experiences?

Interview Two

- Tell me about sparkling moments or high points of your career. What about the opposite?
- When you reflect on your life/career, what defining moments come to mind where *change* happened, or you *changed* your perspective?
- Tell me about a challenge you overcame that was particularly meaningful.
- How would you describe your persistence as a teacher?
- What/who has most influenced your persistence?

Appendix D

Onboarding Information

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in this study! During our time together, I am going to ask you questions about your life and career. The big questions driving our research are: What is it like for you as a continuing second-career teacher who previously worked in schools? Why did you stay in teaching? How did your prior experience play a role in that decision?

To get us started, I have a couple of activities that will help us have rich discussions. First, I would like you to create a timeline of the key events leading up to your current position. You can make this a chart, a bullet point list, a drawing of ups and downs, or whatever artistic visual you want. Simple is good. Please add some dates and a short descriptor marking key points to highlight for our discussions. I hope that this will start you thinking about our topic. Plan to share this with me when we meet for our first official interview. Afterward, please email me with the document or a picture of what you created.

During our second meeting, we will be discussing what ideas or themes you noticed about your persistence from our previous discussion. I would like you to write a reflection about what you noticed about influences that affected your journey and why you continue to teach. Please plan to share those with me before our second interview so I have a chance to read and ponder them to be ready for our discussion.

For our final interview, I will bring the information I have collected, and I invite you to help me with a "member checking" activity to ensure I am on the right track understanding and explaining your experience. You can point out corrections or additional information I missed or that you think is important during this time. Once again, thank you! You represent a growing group of incoming teachers who will benefit from your willingness to share.

Appendix E

Hexagonal Thematic Profiles of Participants

