WHY SOME STAY WHEN SO MANY LEAVE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
ON WHY TEACHERS REMAIN IN LOW-INCOME, HIGH-MINORITY SCHOOLS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Charlotte

2021

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ABSTRACT

MICHAEL CHAD HOVIS. Why Some Stay When So Many Leave: A
Phenomenological Study on Why Teachers Remain in Low-Income, High-Minority
Schools. (Under the direction of DR. CLAUDIA FLOWERS and DR. JIMMY
WATSON)

Tens of thousands of teachers in the United States leave their schools to work in

other occupations or other schools each year. This has earned the teaching profession the

reputation of being a "revolving door," with a large number of qualified teachers leaving

the profession prior to retirement. A wealth of literature has been devoted to

understanding factors that lead to teacher attrition; however, little attention has been

given to understanding the factors affecting why teachers remain in low-income, high-

minority schools.

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to determine the

lived experiences that keep six elementary school teachers teaching in low-income, high-

minority schools when so many of their peers chose to leave. This study attempted to

look through the lens of elementary-level school teachers who have stayed in low-

income, high-minority schools for 5 years or more. This study was guided by four

research questions: What do teachers who stay in predominantly low-income, high-

minority public elementary schools identify as obstacles to their longevity? What specific

practices and strategies do teachers who work in low-income, high-minority public

elementary schools utilize to support their longevity in these schools? How do the

teachers' overall experiences and understanding of predominantly low-income, high-

minority public elementary schools affect their decisions to stay? and How do teachers'

experiences working in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary

schools transform their opinions of perceived obstacles to their longevity and their ability to adapt to address the perceived obstacles?

The findings of this study suggest that the participants' lived experiences within their own personal educational experience or their professional teaching experience transformed their desire to stay in a low-income, high-minority school setting. Furthermore, the findings suggest that when a participant had a good experience within their professional teaching experience due to working conditions or administrative support, that would in turn give the participant's students a good educational experience that would support academic growth and potentially a desire to go into the educational field. Low-income, high-minority schools present their own set of challenges and unique transitional stressors that are different from more low-poverty, low-minority schools. Teachers who work in these schools tend to leave more frequently and often than their peers who teach at schools that are more affluent. This study attempted to provide a deeper understanding in the hope to fill the gap in scholarly knowledge, while attempting to halt the "revolving door."

DEDICATION

This research is a reflection of 8 years of academic focus and a lifetime of personal commitment. As a son of an educator, I have spent the majority of my life immersed in the world of education. I have experienced a bird's-eye view of the intercut workings of the academic world as a student, the child of an educator, and an employee. However, none of this would have been possible without a tremendous amount of prayer and support from my family and friends.

My commitment and devotion to this doctoral journey would not be possible without the grace and mercy of my God, who allows me to do all things through Him. The support from my beautiful wife, Audrey, and the encouragement from my wonderful son, Caleb, helped me make it through the long hours and late nights. Seeing them each day provided me with the motivation needed to continue down this ever so winding road. My mom and dad instilled in me the concept of hard work. I would be remiss if I did not mention the prayers, phone calls, and words of inspiration provided to me by my Iron Sharpens Iron men's group, who listened to me talk about the challenges and hurdles that I had to overcome. These men, who are led by Brother Rick, cheered me on and helped me realize I could do this. My brother Keith, who would not allow me to give up, and my brother Jeff, who would always refer to me as Doctor Hovis, were instrumental in keeping me on the right path. My work friends, such as Cassie, helped me along the way. These individuals are an inspiration to me, and I will forever be grateful for their support and dedication as I traveled this road.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many biblical scholars refer to Jeremiah 29:11, which says, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" This scripture is quoted when they discuss individuals who have been placed in your life for purpose and who are there to help you along the way. I believe this to be true because of the individuals who were placed in my life to serve on my dissertation committee. Each one of the individuals played a vital role in this process, supporting me along the way. I would like to thank Dr. Tracey Benson, who began this journey with me, helping me uncover a topic that I would be passionate about. I would like to thank Dr. Drew Polly for agreeing to be on my committee and for his willingness to help me shape my questions, both research and interview. I want to thank Dr. Walter Hart for stepping and becoming a major contributor to this process. I feel it is also important to acknowledge Dr. Cathy Howell for her ongoing encouragement and steadfast determination that would not let me give up on the process.

Finally, I would like to say a special thank-you to two individuals who saw something in me that I may have not seen in myself. First, I would like to thank Dr. Claudia Flowers for stepping into the chairperson's role and supporting me through the entire process. Her guidance propelled me through the final steps of this dissertation phase. Second, I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Jim Watson, who encouraged me to embark upon this journey. Dr. Watson has been a teacher, mentor, and devoted member of my team. Words cannot express how much each person mentioned means to me, and I am eternally grateful for the chance to have worked with them.

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GLOSSARY

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students (Grissom, 2011; National Student Clearinghouse, 2019).

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lunch (Grissom, 2011; National Student Clearinghouse, 2019) and typically

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al., 2008).

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year (Grissom, 2011). For this study, the baseline year is 5 years or more.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

For decades, one of the largest concerns surrounding education has been the overwhelming shortage of teachers in the United States (Harrell et al., 2004). Teachers represent 4% of the entire civilian workforce, which is 5 times more than lawyers and 2 times more than registered nurses, meaning that a significant number of individuals are needed to lead classrooms across the country (Ingersoll et al., 2016). The need for such a large workforce is frustrated by a shortage of qualified teachers. This shortage has been created largely because of the overwhelming rate of teacher turnover (Boe et al., 2008; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Turnover or attrition has earned the teaching profession the reputation of being a "revolving door," with a large number of qualified teachers leaving the profession prior to retirement (Boe et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2004).

The number of teachers who leave the profession each year in the United States outpaces the number who enter the teaching ranks (Quartz et al., 2008). In the 1990–1991 school year, 190,000 teachers entered the teaching profession; only 12 months later, 180,000 teachers left the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). Since the data were taken in 1991, the teacher shortage phenomenon has continued to be a factor. By the 2015–2016 school year, teacher shortages were determined to be at the crisis level across the United States (Ramos & Hughes, 2020). Teacher attrition rates have went from 5.1% in 1992 to 8.4% in 2008; factoring in the number of teachers who leave low-income, high-minority schools for more affluent schools, the turnover rate jumps to 16% (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This dynamic is especially concerning due to the change of demographics and the rise in the number of school-aged children, which has increased the demand for highly qualified teachers (Harrell et al., 2004; Ramos & Hughes, 2020). This

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teacher attrition has been a long-standing problem affecting beginning teachers, with Darling-Hammond (2003) finding that one-third of new teachers exit the profession within 5 years (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). More recent research has shown that this problem is worsening, as nearly 50% of teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

Data show that individual school factors contribute to teacher attrition. For example, schools serving low-income, high-minority student populations experience higher rates of attrition than those serving more affluent students (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Over the past 3 decades, teacher turnover rates have been especially pronounced in these low-income, high-minority schools, causing these schools to be labeled as "hard-to-staff schools" (Ingersoll & May, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015). These "hard-to-staff" schools have a large problem with teacher attrition and mobility, losing as many as 20% of their teaching faculties each year (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Dunn & Downey, 2018). This high rate of attrition is about 50% higher than the rate found in low-poverty suburban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Dunn & Downey, 2018). It has also been reported that 50% of teachers assigned to teach in low-income, high-minority schools leave within their first 3 years (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

Teacher attrition must be addressed to impact teacher shortages (Harrell et al., 2004). In the mid-1980s, there was a steady increase in student enrollment, which many believed to be the reason for the shortage of teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). However, Ingersoll found that the sizable shortage of teachers was related more to preretirement teacher turnover than to the increasing number of students. During the last 2–3 decades,

teacher attrition and teacher mobility research has revealed several factors that have contributed to teachers in the United States voluntarily leaving the teacher profession or switching to a new school (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Djonko-Moore organized these factors into three categories: (a) teacher characteristics, (b) school setting characteristics, and (c) school climate (Djonko-Moore, 2015).

Background of the Problem

The shortage of teachers has been largely created by the overwhelming rate of teacher turnover (Boe et al., 2008; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). These shortages have negatively impacted student achievement in all schools, with hard-to-staff urban schools suffering the most (Benson & MacDonald, 2018). The achievement scores 8.2%–10.2% of a standard deviation below those teachers who had more experience or more years in the classroom (Benson & MacDonald, 2018).

Research has shown that nearly 50% of teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years and that 50% of teachers who are assigned to teach in low-income, high-minority schools leave within their first 3 years (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). Ingersoll (2002) used the metaphor of pouring water into a bucket with a hole in it to describe this dynamic: If we never fix the hole, the bucket will never fill up (Harrell et al., 2004).

Teacher attrition has earned the teaching profession the reputation of being a "revolving door" (Boe et al., 2008). Ingersoll (2004) found the shortage of new teachers entering the profession is not the reason for school staffing problems. Rather, the shortage is related more to the large number of qualified teachers who leave the profession prior to retirement (Ingersoll, 2004). These preretirement departures are illuminated as schools require the hiring of 700,000 new teachers each year (Benson & MacDonald, 2018).

This revolving door of teachers is more detrimental to low-performing minority students as compared to their nonminority peers (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Black, Latino, and poor students attend schools with double their share of low-income students compared to White or Asian students (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Teachers who leave take away a considerable amount of knowledge, experiences, and skills that are desperately needed in low-income, high-minority schools (Buchanan, 2012). Teacher attrition forces schools to divert valuable resources from the classroom, further widening achievement disparities between lower income and wealthy students (Grissom, 2011; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of teacher attrition runs deeper than losing teachers and not having the bodies to fill classrooms. Poverty continues to be a problem in the United States as well as in North Carolina, and the purest are our youngest ones (Nichol, 2018). Poverty creates daily obstacles for those who fall into this category (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Recent information taken from the U.S. Census Bureau revealed one in five students under the age of 18 years lives below the poverty line, 38% of these students are Black, and 34% are Latino (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Black, Latino, and poor students attend school with double their share of low-income students compared to White or Asian students (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Research evidence suggested that low-income, high-minority students have poorer accessibility to highly qualified teachers than those students who attend more affluent schools and nonminority students (Opfer, 2011). In the literature surrounding teacher attrition, several key findings help frame the discussion (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Two of these factors are teacher quality and the distribution of teacher quality (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

One major problem in contemporary education today is ensuring our nation's classrooms are staffed with qualified staff, especially schools considered disadvantaged (Ingersoll, 2004). Teacher quality continues to be an important factor when it comes to school reform (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Recently, scholars have focused their efforts on identifying and retaining highly qualified teachers due to how essential this is to school improvement and academic achievement (Opfer, 2011). Being taught by a highly qualified teacher in comparison to a less-than-qualified teacher can translate into a full year's worth of grade-level achievement (Borman & Dowling, 2008). An example of this is research that has showed that only 19% of teachers who teach in low-income, high-minority schools have National Board–certified teachers (Petty et al., 2012).

The difference between low-income, high-minority students and their more affluent peers is stark (Sass et al., 2012). Teacher stability is very important for minority students from low-income families because research has suggested that they depend more on their teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teacher attrition has an effect on the quality of education minority students from low-income schools receive. High levels of teacher attrition contribute to chronic low academic performance (Grissom, 2011). Students who attend schools with a high rate of free and reduced-price lunch participation (a commonly used measure of poverty) score lower on standardized tests than their peers who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch at more affluent schools (Sass et al., 2012). Students taught by a new teacher had achievement scores 8.2%–10.2% of a standard deviation below those taught by teachers with more experience (Benson & MacDonald, 2018). Low-income minority students suffer the most because they typically lag far behind their more affluent peers in both math and reading (Nichol, 2018). For example,

60% of students from low-poverty, low-minority schools scored proficient on standardized tests in mathematics, whereas only 17% of students from low-income, high-minority schools were proficient (Sass et al., 2012).

Various research has found a disproportionate distribution of less qualified teachers being placed in low-income, high-minority schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teacher attrition forces low-income, high-minority schools to hire a disproportionate number of novice teacher (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Students who attend these schools are routinely being taught by inexperienced, ineffective teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Research found that minority students in North Carolina are much more likely than their nonminority peers to be taught by beginning teachers (Grissom, 2011). Urban schools often have a common practice of recruiting teachers who have limited training, have no teaching experience, and are underqualified (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006).

Most low-income, high-minority schools employ a large number of first-year teachers (Grissom, 2011). Research has shown teachers experience a steep learning curve in their first 3 years of teaching (Benson & MacDonald, 2018). This places schools with a large population of students from disadvantaged backgrounds at high risk from the start, because teacher turnover is prevalent in schools (Benson & MacDonald, 2018). Schools with high teacher turnover tend to reconfigure the teaching assignments each year, which causes a disruption in the continuity of the instructional programs, resulting in a direct effect on the students learning (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Students who attend low-income, high-minority schools see new, underprepared teachers year after year, despite the fact that these students are in the most need of highly qualified teachers (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006). When students are continually taught by new teachers, the quality of

instruction they receive pays a very hefty price (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Studies have

shown beginning teachers are substantially less effective than their more experienced

peers (Grissom, 2011). This denies students from low-income, high-minority schools the

chance to have high-quality, committed teachers who are in the profession for the long

haul (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006). Schools with high turnover tend to reconfigure the

teaching assignments each year, which causes a disruption in the continuity of the

instructional programs, resulting in a direct effect on students' ability to learn (Simon &

Johnson, 2015).

Schools are the place where low-income minority students can learn they have a

choice to advance out of poverty (Payne, 2019). Teacher attrition makes it hard to create

the continuity needed to develop positive relationships with staff, students, and families

(Simon & Johnson, 2015). For example, Jessica Holmes, a North Carolina lawyer and

Wake County commissioner, grew up in poverty and attributes her escape from poverty

to her teachers (Nichol, 2018). Positive relationships develop over time and are critical in

establishing a sense of community, unified with the same mission and vision (Simon &

Johnson, 2015). This makes teacher stability even more important because the teacher

becomes a positive role model to the students, which has been found to be much more

important than first recognized (Payne, 2019). Finally, teacher attrition directly affects

the school's social capital that strong relationships create (Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Subjectivity Statement

Subjectivity is present in qualitative research even if the researcher is not

conscious of the phenomenon (Peshkin, 1988). It can be argued that subjectivity guides

almost every aspect of the research, from topic choice to methodology (Ratner, 2002).

Subjectivity is like a part of someone's clothing that cannot be removed (Peshkin, 1988).

It is present in research and plays an important role in assisting the researcher in understanding the topic of study (Drapeau, 2002). Subjectivity pulls from the researcher's experience (Drapeau, 2002), encouraging them to reflect upon their own values and objectivity as they conduct the research (Ratner, 2002).

Embracing subjectivity helps the researcher bring themselves closer to the subject, taking away the possibility of losing sight of the research at hand (Drapeau, 2002). Subjectivity helps the researcher become more aware of their bias (Peshkin, 1988), which enhances the research because the researcher consciously knows what may affect their ability to report the subject matter objectively, in a clear and concise way. Although subjectivity may not need to be a central part of all research, it can assist in helping the researcher understand the objective of the study, and it can provide some understanding of how personal relationships influence the data (Drapeau, 2002).

Education has been a constant in my life for as long as I can remember. Being the son of an educator, I spent the majority of time in school, either as a student or as the child of a teacher assistant. These formative experiences guided my decision to become an educator. I began my career as an exceptional children teacher in fall 1998, and I became a building-level administrator in 2008.

I am currently serving as principal of a large elementary school that serves 600 students. Prior to my current assignment, I was a principal at a smaller elementary school in the same district. Both of these schools were considered low performing when I was assigned to these principalships, the organizational climate at both schools was negative, and teacher morale was low. During my tenure at these schools, morale improved, academic performance increased by an entire letter grade on the state's A–F school rating

program, and students met academic growth standards in all tested areas. Although many factors contribute to academic success, my experiences have reinforced the positive impact of teacher morale, as improving teacher morale was a significant focus of my efforts.

Although many factors contribute to academic success, my experience has shown that happy teachers in turn make happy students. As I examine this philosophy, I realize that my passion for obtaining highly qualified teachers and how this affects academic performance may not be shared by other instructional leaders. Through the process of reflection, I have been able to determine my own biases. Borrowing from the concept of Peshkin (1988), who developed *I*'s to represent his bias, I will describe a few of my *I*'s.

My first *I* is titled "Everyone Is the Same." Teacher retention is a major part of Standard IV of the North Carolina Principal's Evaluation System, but how building-level administrators view it may vary. My research has led me to believe this factor plays a major role in academic achievement. Other instructional practitioners may view teacher retention as more of a managerial factor, focusing on making sure teachers are in place in order to make sure the day-to-day activities run smoothly.

My second *I* is titled "People Versus Programs." The inability to keep and hire highly qualified teachers affects academic performance. People are the factor that influences the increase or decrease in academic performance. The program determines how the academic performance either increases or decreases. Some instructional leaders feel the program itself is the reason for positive academic performance. I must keep in mind that some leaders feel academic growth is not based on how the people in the equation perform but on how the program is run with fidelity.

My third *I* is titled "Inside; Outside." As an educator, the discussion of teacher attrition and retention, along with academic performance, is common. I would be considered inside, because I work in the field of education and my job is to increase students' academic performance. An outsider is someone who is not knowledgeable of the educational field, either because they never worked as an educator or, when they were a student, the classroom looked very different than it does today. This is a factor that must be considered when interacting with and providing information to those who do not work in the field of education. These individuals may not know the acronyms used in educational genre. Using these terms around those who are unfamiliar may lead to confusion and frustration.

It was important for me to consciously consider these *I*'s as I began my research. My perspective is not always the same perspective as others have. I was cognitive of this and did not allow my perspective to override the perspectives of others while conducting research.

Purpose

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the phenomenon of why elementary teachers in low-income, high-minority schools in North Carolina voluntarily remain in their schools when so many other teachers leave these same types of schools. In this study, the researcher examined four research questions:

1. What do teachers who stay in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools identify as obstacles to their longevity?

2. What specific practices and strategies do teachers who work in low-income, high-minority public elementary schools utilize to support their longevity in these schools?

3. How do the teachers' overall experiences and understanding of predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools affect their decisions to stay?

4. How do teachers' experiences working in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools transform their opinions of perceived obstacles to their longevity and their ability to adapt to address the perceived obstacles?

These questions generated viable information that will help school administrators and policy makers determine salient factors that encourage teachers to remain in low-income, high-minority schools.

Definition of Terms

Several recurring terms that are prevalent throughout the literature and this study, along with their definitions, follow:

high-minority schools. Schools having 40% or higher Black students and Hispanic students (Grissom, 2011; National Student Clearinghouse, 2019).

low-income schools. Schools having 50% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (Grissom, 2011; National Student Clearinghouse, 2019) and typically coming from low-income families (Petty et al., 2012).

movers. Teachers who are still teaching but move to another school (Grissom, 2011).

phenomenological study. Designed to set aside biases and presumed assumptions on people's experiences, feelings, and their responses to particular situations (Giorgi, 2012).

phenomenology. A qualitative research design defined as a direct investigation and description of phenomena that people experience from living those experiences (Giorgi, 2012).

revolving door. In this dissertation, when a large number of qualified teachers leave the teaching profession prior to retirement (Ingersoll, 2004).

schools. In this dissertation, schools that have at least 70% of the student population receiving free or reduced-price lunch (Djonko-Moore, 2015).

teacher attrition. A major change in the teacher's assignment from year to year (Boe et al., 2008).

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teachers who leave. Teachers who leave the teaching profession altogether (Grissom, 2011).

teachers who stay. Teachers who have remained in the same school since the baseline year (Grissom, 2011). For this study, the baseline year is 5 years or more.

Grissom (2011) defined another category of teacher: teachers who are movers. Movers are the teachers who are still teaching but have moved to another school (Grissom, 2011). This study did not focus on the difference between teachers who leave the profession and teachers who move to another school that is not considered a low-income, high-minority school.

Assumptions

The primary assumption associated with this study was that the data collected from the interviews would show that the teachers stay in teaching because of one or more of the themes discussed in Chapter 2. I also assumed that one of the main motivators for inspiring teachers to stay in low-income, high-minority schools is the desire to work with young people (Harrell et al., 2004).

Limitations and Delimitations

Like all research, when conducting a phenomenological study, a few areas are considered to limit the research (Dukes, 1984). One limitation of a phenomenological study is that the participants may not be able to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences surrounding the phenomena (Giorgi, 2012). This may be due to language barriers, age, cognition, and their feeling of embarrassment about the area of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012).

Phenomenology research requires researcher interpretation, reducing biases, assumptions, and predetermined ideas about a phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015;

Giorgi, 2012). The researcher's bias may be difficult to determine or even detect, which may add questions to the study (Dukes, 1984; Giorgi, 2012). It is extremely important for the researcher to have a sense of flexibility, to have ingenuity, and to practice continual checks and balances to ensure integrity (Dukes, 1984; Giorgi, 2012).

A phenomenological study may seem to be less creditable to policy makers due to the subjective data collected during the study (Giorgi, 2012). It also makes it difficult to generalize results across large populations due to the traditionally small sample size used during phenomenological studies (Tuapawa, 2017).

In this study, the researcher used a purposeful sample by selecting elementary school teachers who were teaching, at the time, in low-income, high-minority schools for 5 years or more. The experiences of these participants may be different because of their demographic area.

Summary

A relatively large body of research has been dedicated to understanding factors affecting teacher attrition (Grissom, 2011). Each year, more teachers are leaving the profession than are coming in (Quartz et al., 2008). Tens of thousands of teachers in the United States leave their schools to work in other occupations or other schools each year (Kelly, 2004). This phenomenon has given the teaching profession the reputation of being a "revolving door" (Ingersoll, 2004).

Teacher attrition is particularly harmful to low-income, high-minority schools (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Useem & Neild, 2005). Data show that school-to-school differences impact teacher attrition, with low-income, high-minority schools suffering higher rates of attrition than more affluent schools (Ingersoll, 2001). For decades, schools with low-income, high-minority student populations have experienced a large problem

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with teacher attrition and mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Ingersoll, 2001; Simon & Johnson, 2015), with teacher attrition being 50% higher in schools serving lower income students of color (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

Research about teacher attrition over the last 2–3 decades has revealed several factors that contribute to teachers leaving the profession or switching to a new school (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Quartz, 2003). There are many assumptions about why teachers leave schools with high needs. The literature surrounding teacher attrition will be examined more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will investigate the factors presented in scholarly literature that surround teacher attrition, especially in low-income, high-minority public schools. Tens of thousands of teachers in the United States leave their schools to work in other occupations or other schools each year (Kelly, 2004). A wealth of literature has been devoted to understanding factors that lead to teacher attrition (Boe et al., 2008; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Grissom, 2011; Kelchtermans, 2017; Kelly, 2004; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018); however, little attention has been given to understanding the factors affecting why teachers remain in low-income, high-minority schools (Hunter-Quartz, 2003).

Each year in the United States more teachers are leaving the profession than those who are coming into it (Quartz et al., 2008). One-third of new teachers leave the profession within 5 years (Kaden et al., 2016). In the United States, teacher mobility and attrition are exceptionally high in schools with high populations of low-income and minority students (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Djonko-Moore, 2015; Grissom, 2011; Jacob, 2007; Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teacher attrition within the first year has also become a long-standing problem (Darling-Hammond, 2003) and evidence regarding new teacher attrition indicates that teachers who begin their careers in low-income, high-minority schools experience higher rates of attrition (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011).

The problem of teacher shortages has been created largely because of the overwhelming rate of teacher turnover (Boe et al., 2008). A number of researchers have suggested that in order to impact teacher shortages, teacher attrition must first be addressed (Boe et al., 2008; Djonko-Moore, 2015; Harrell et al., 2004). Teacher turnover

or attrition has earned the teaching profession the reputation of being a "revolving door" (Boe et al., 2008). In fact, a 2007 study conducted by Brian Jacob revealed that schools serving low-income and high-minority students have an annual teacher turnover rate of 22%, compared to a 15% turnover rate at nonminority, low-poverty schools (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Dunn & Downey, 2018). In some cases, teacher attrition is 50% higher at high-poverty schools in comparison to low-poverty schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Dunn & Downey, 2018).

High rates of teacher turnover is especially concerning due to the rise in the number of school-age children, which in turn increases the demand for highly qualified teachers (Harrell et al., 2004). Ronfeldt et al. (2013) conducted a study to examine the effects teacher turnover has on student achievement as well as how the type of school effects teacher turnover. In the study, Ronfeldt et al. found that there is a strong correlation between the number of years a teacher has taught and student achievement. Students who were taught by a new teacher experienced achievement scores that were 8.2% to 10.2% of a standard deviation below those of their peers who were taught by teachers who had more experience (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). In addition to impacting student achievement, teacher attrition affects school improvement efforts because the school improvement process requires teacher stability (Useem & Neild, 2005).

Low-Income and High-Minority Schools

In order to gather a clear understanding of the research it is important that clear definitions are given for both low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools and teacher attrition. It is essential to know the proper definitions to decrease misconceptions and/or misunderstandings in regards to discussion using these terms. Due to the various

demographics, socioeconomic and other diversities within public schools, it is also

important to expand upon the meanings of the terms low-income and high-minority

Schools with a high concentration of low-income, high-minority students have

been referred to as disadvantaged schools (Grissom, 2011; Kelly, 2004), high-need

schools (Petty et al., 2012), hard-to-staff schools, urban schools and rural schools (Jacob,

2007). More than once, these labels have been inaccurately used and have been mistaken

as interchangeable due to the high rates of use with regard to each label (Grissom, 2011).

Disadvantaged schools are defined as having the highest quartile of black

students, Hispanic students and students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch

(Grissom, 2011) a with a high concentration of poverty (Kelly, 2004). High-poverty

schools are defined as schools that have at least 70% of the student population receiving

free or reduced lunch (Djonko-Moore, 2015). High-need schools are defined as schools

where 80% or more of their students come from low-income families and are eligible for

federal Title I funds (Petty et al., 2012).

Current literature tends to assume that hard-to-staff schools have certain

characteristics that contribute to or alleviate the way they are defined (Opfer, 2011).

Allen (2000) describes hard-to-staff schools as those typically found in inner-cities with

high percentages of students in poverty. Opfer (2011) found that there are a significant

number of hard-to-staff rural schools as well, because they are located in economically

depressed or isolated areas that offer low salaries or lack the amenities that more

cosmopolitan or prosperous regions have to offer. Hard-to-staff schools tends have fewer

students performing on grade level, high percentages of students who qualify for free and

reduced-price lunch, and have a high percentage of ethnic minority students (Opfer, 2011).

Urban schools by definition are schools located in a large city and are often categorized as having high rates of poverty (Jacob, 2007). While urban schools are often categorized as having high rates of poverty, in reality, poverty is not unique to urban schools and can be found in rural areas (Jacob, 2007). In addition, urban and rural schools both educate a large number of students with English as their second language (Jacob, 2007). Finally, urban and rural schools suffer from high rates of student mobility which forces teacher to adjust to an ever changing set of students (Jacob, 2007).

Teacher Attrition

Teacher turnover or teacher attrition is defined as a major change in the teacher's school assignment from year to year (Boe et al., 2008). In Grissom's (2011) study, teachers were broken down into three categories: stayers, movers, and leavers. Grissom defined these categories as follows:

- Stayers are the teachers who have remained in the same school since the baseline year.

- Movers are the teachers who are still teaching, but have moved to another school.

- Leavers are the teachers who have left the teaching profession altogether.

Some researchers divide teacher turnover or attrition into three components, attrition (leaving the teaching profession), migration (moving to a different school) and transferring (moving to another position such as administration or moving from one area of teaching to another; Boe et al., 2008).

Themes from Literature

There were numerous themes apparent in the review of the literature that predicted teachers' decisions to stay or go. The themes most abundant in the literature are finance, teacher working conditions, administrator effectiveness, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher programs. Each one of these themes have specific subgroups that will be explained.

Finance

As related to teacher attrition, the area of finance includes two primary components: the salary and benefits paid to teachers and the cost to schools and districts stemming from teacher attrition (Harrell et al., 2004). Numerous studies have found that salary and benefits (health care and pensions) are important when it comes to retaining teachers in high needs schools (Harrell et al., 2004; Jacob, 2007; Petty et al., 2012). Teachers who leave the profession or move from low-income, high-minority schools indicated salaries and not having necessary materials to teach as major factors in why they exit high-poverty schools (Opfer, 2011). In his book *School Teacher*, Dan Lortie described teachers' salaries as a relatively flat pay schedule compared to other professions (Kelly, 2004). According to the Federal Schools and Staffing Survey, the best paid teachers in low-poverty, low-minority schools make 35% more annually than those who teach at low-income, high-minority schools (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics found that teachers who were paid higher salaries demonstrated an increase in professional commitment (Quartz et al., 2008) and their wages influenced their decisions to stay (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

Salaries and Benefits

Historically, teachers who make the lowest salaries tend to leave first (Harrell et al., 2004; Grissom, 2011) while teachers who are paid a high salary or a comparable wage are more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Grissom, 2011; Jacob, 2007). Harrell et al. (2004) found that the most common reason for individuals leaving the teaching profession was income. Evidence regarding salaries suggests salary levels have a greater impact on new teacher's decision to leave the teaching profession than their decision to change schools (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). Kelly (2004) also found that teachers who had high salaries were less likely to leave, but only slightly. To combat this attrition, North Carolina provides their accomplished teachers a 12% raise to teach at low-income, high-minority schools, while South Carolina pays their accomplished teachers a one-time bonus of $7,500 (Petty et al., 2012).

District Costs

Teacher attrition and mobility is harmful to low-income, high-minority schools in many ways. The U.S. Department of Labor reports attrition accounts for 30% of the leaving teacher's salary; thus, replacing teachers takes much needed funding away other areas (Grissom, 2011). It is very costly for school districts to use limited resources to replace teachers (Djonko-Moore, 2015). In 2008 the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) found those schools in the United States that typically served low-income, high-minority schools spent around $70,000 annually because of teacher mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015). The AEE also reported that urban school districts spent $8,750 replacing teachers that moved or were resigned (Callahan, 2016; Djonko-Moore, 2015). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimated that districts in the United States spend $7.34 billion dollars on replacing teachers each year (Simon &

Johnson, 2015). They also found urban schools spend $70,000 a year on teacher attrition, which is $37,000 more than nonurban schools (Simon & Johnson, 2015). A Philadelphia school district spent around $11,000 in recruiting in efforts to replace teachers who left the district (Useem & Neild, 2005). Macdonald (1999) defines these costs of teacher attrition as a "wastage" of valuable resources.

School Leadership/Effective Administration

The literature suggests that effective school leadership is a strong factor to consider when examining teacher retention and attrition. Incorporating a positive school climate and culture is also a characteristic of an effective school administration as it impacts teacher attrition.

With regard to administrator effectiveness, many researchers argue that the problem of retaining teachers in high-need schools is impacted by school leadership and working conditions (Petty et al., 2012). Principal support has been found to be the strongest factor related to job satisfaction, affecting the commitments of teachers and staff, with this commitment affecting teacher attrition (Harrell et al., 2004). Nearly one-third of teachers who leave the profession blame the lack of support from the school principal as key reason for their departure (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Buchanan, 2012).

A supportive administrator has a large effect on how attractive the job is to the teacher (Milanowski et al., 2009). In a study conducted by House (1981), four specific administrator behaviors were identified that positively impacted teachers' perceptions of their jobs: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support (Cancio et al., 2013). These specific behaviors provided teachers with the feeling they were supported, a sense of autonomy, and a sense of belonging. The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders surveyed 776 teachers and determined that the key

factor to teachers staying in the teaching profession was administrator support (Cancio et al., 2013).

Administrator support and professional development have been shown to be essential to teacher retention (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Studies have found principal behavior is an important factor in retaining teachers in low-income, high-minority schools (Petty et al., 2012). Teacher perception of school administrators is very impactful on their decision to stay or go from high-need schools (Petty et al., 2012). The lack of administrative support, which has been defined as the leader being unavailable or inattentive to teacher's needs, contributes to higher turnover rates (Cancio et al., 2013). By contrast, positive support from school administrators has been proven to offset negative effects of burdensome workloads (Cancio et al., 2013).

Additional studies have supported the relationship between principal behaviors and teacher turnover. Ingersoll found that administrative support and low student discipline problems result in low teacher turnover rates (Opfer, 2011). Grissom (2011) found that when principals positively impact climate and lower teacher turnover when they mentor teachers, adequately equip their classrooms with instructional supplies, and maintain safe and clean facilities. Several studies found that teachers who felt they were supported by administration and had a positive working relationship with their peers were more likely to stay in low-income, high-minority schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

While teacher attrition and mobility is greatly reduced when the teachers have supportive school leadership and effective school administration, poor school leadership and ineffective school administration leads to increased rates of teacher attrition and mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015). This dynamic is particularly true with new teachers as

they often cited little or no administrative support, being assigned to the most difficult

students being inundated with extracurricular duties, feeling isolated from peers, and

being assigned to teach out of their field as reasons why they leave the teaching

profession (Harrell et al., 2004).

Effective administrative support and working conditions within schools may be

more important to teachers than higher pay (Milanowski et al., 2009). Good principals in

disadvantaged schools promote teacher retention by recognizing teacher

accomplishments and their hard work. In addition, it is suggested that providing the

teachers with a clear vision and sense of purpose entices teachers with a reason to stay

because they want to see the outcome of their work (Grissom, 2011).

School Culture and Climate

In the area of teacher attrition, school climate has become a central focus area for

researchers (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Schools with a strong climate have teachers who are

better motivated to teach and participate within the school (MacNeil et al., 2009). By

contrast, a negative school climate is associated with teacher attrition, with this attrition

contributing to a lack of trust among teachers and administrators (Djonko-Moore, 2015).

Educational sociologists have long believed a positive sense of climate, described

as an affirming sense of community and cohesion among teachers, students, and families,

is a central tenet of a successful school and a significant factor affecting teacher retention

(Ingersoll, 2001). When teachers are able to collaborate with colleagues and have shared

responsibilities for meeting school goals it greatly decreases teacher attrition and mobility

(Djonko-Moore, 2015). In addition, teachers are particularly attracted to schools with a

clear mission and vision, another key facet of school climate and culture (Djonko-Moore,

2015; Ingersoll, 2001; Milanowski et al., 2009).

Ingersoll (2001) suggested that the socioeconomic status of a school often predicted the climate of the school. Specifically, low-income, high-minority schools were less likely to be characterized as tight-knit communities, characterized by highly cohesive, and positive staff morale. In other words, they were more likely to be perceived to have a negative climate than their counterpart schools serving middle and upper-income families. This dynamic is related to higher rates of teacher attrition in low-income, high-minority schools (Ingersoll, 2001).

Working Conditions

Research has shown that overall workplace conditions affect the attachment employees have with their organization (Ingersoll, 2001). In terms of influence, teachers working conditions has been shown to be a greater predictor of teacher attrition than salary (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Poor teacher working conditions have been significantly linked to increased stress, which can lead to the teachers leaving the profession and in some cases developing a physical illness (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Weiss found teachers' perceptions of working conditions to be the most significant predictor of what makes them stay at low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools (Opfer, 2011).

Hanushek et al. (2004) interpreted the trend of teacher attrition in low-income, high-minority schools to mean teachers favor students who are high achievers, nonminority and of not of low-income, however there is a substantial amount of literature that point to the poor working conditions, not the students themselves, as underlying reason for teachers exiting the profession (Simon & Johnson, 2015).Working conditions, including facilities, lack of textbooks, space and class sizes, are strong predictors of teacher retention (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Murnane & Steele, 2007) and

continues to be cited as a pivotal factor in teachers decisions to stay or go (Dunn & Downey, 2018). Workplace conditions consist of manageable class sizes, appropriate workload, safe working conditions, adequate resources, and desirable teaching assignments/schedules (Harrell et al., 2004). Research found that many teachers who were leaving low-income, high-minority schools frequently suggest reducing class size would help with their decision to stay (Ingersoll, 2004). If the working conditions are poor, it makes teaching more difficult because low-income, high-poverty students often have access to fewer resources (Harrell et al., 2004).

Student behavior can be categorized as both a characteristic of the student as well as contributors to the working conditions in schools. If the students' behavior is not appropriate, this could lead to poor working conditions for the teacher. Student discipline problems are also a main categorical factor that adds to the teacher's decision to leave low-income, high-minority schools (Ingersoll, 2004). Teachers reported during semistructured interviews that students' behavior disrupted learning, which lead to their perception on the value of teaching (Buchanan, 2012). Reducing the discipline problems is a positive way to keep teachers from leaving (Ingersoll, 2004). The odds of a teacher departing the profession is low in schools with few student discipline problems (Ingersoll, 2001).

Teachers' perceptions about resources, teachers' input in the decision making process, and administrative support strongly influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Research suggests that teachers prefer schools with competent administrators, reasonably well-behaved students, and high-functioning schools with dedicated staff (Jacob, 2007). Schools with high levels of autonomy

influence teacher attrition (Opfer, 2011), with schools with high levels of teacher autonomy experiencing lower levels of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). When teachers in North Carolina were asked if they were satisfied with working conditions, those in low-income, high-minority schools reported they were significantly less satisfied with resources, leadership, personal, facilities, professional development and autonomy (Opfer, 2011).

Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) found more than a few notable differences when comparing teacher working conditions against the characteristics of the school. First, teachers in low-income, high-minority schools were dissatisfied with facilities and resources at a higher rate than those teachers who taught at low-poverty, low-minority, high-performing schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Second, teachers who worked in schools with high numbers of Hispanic students were much more dissatisfied than the teachers who taught in schools with a low Hispanic population (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). They also found teachers who taught in high-performing schools were much more satisfied with overall working conditions than their peers who taught at low performing schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018).

Researchers Mawhinney and Rinke (2018) took a close look at the lives and experiences of teachers who worked in low-income, high-minority schools. In this study, teachers explained what it was like teaching in urban, low-income schools through journaling, stories and life histories (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). One teacher described walking into his/her classroom for the first time and seeing an empty room with a hole in the wall that allowed the teacher to see through to the outside, while some teachers reported having no textbooks, experiencing poor student behavior, and having little

support from the district level (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). Other teachers discussed how the paint was chipped, the temperature was 40 degrees in the classroom (Buchanan, 2009) and mice ran rampant throughout the school (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). Teachers who work in schools with positive working conditions typically have greater job satisfaction, which predicts they will be less likely to depart from teaching (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011).

Teacher Characteristics

Individual teacher characteristics and traits plays a role in the decision to stay or leave low-income, high-minority schools (Ingersoll, 2001). The teacher's age, gender, and teaching experience are factors involved in determining if a teacher will stay or go (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Younger teachers (less than 30 years of age) tend to depart from the profession more often than those who chose teaching as a mid-life career (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001). A number of studies have shown female teachers are more like to leave than male teachers (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). Teacher experience contributed to teacher attrition and mobility with new teachers being more likely to leave teaching or to move to a school that was not considered to be a low-income, high-poverty, high-minority school (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Individual teacher differences such as values, personal history, personality, and family background also play a strong role in determining the teacher's attrition (Milanowski et al., 2009). Many teachers prefer to teach in schools close to their own community, with their perception of qualifications playing a factor in where they teach (Milanowski et al., 2009). Also, many educators see themselves as "social justice educators" and seek to be change agents outside of the classroom (Quartz et al., 2008). Teachers tend to stay because of a sense of emotional belonging based on shared beliefs,

goals and norms within their school (Kelchtermans, 2017). In fact, some teachers express

a desire to teach at low-income, high-minority schools. Around 6% of the nation's

teachers want to work in low-income, high-minority schools (Hunter-Quartz, 2003).

Teaching, unlike many other professions, has a variety of intrinsic rewards, like

being attached to the subject matter as well as ancillary rewards like having holidays and

summers off (Kelly, 2004). Teachers also gather satisfaction in positive collaboration

with their colleagues among departments and across grade levels (Byrd-Blake et al.,

2010). Some research points out happiness or well-being is a key factor to teachers

staying in teaching (De Stercke et al., 2015). In the study by Byrd-Blake et al. (2010),

teachers indicated that they gain great satisfaction in witnessing students achieve

academically and making a difference in the lives of their students. The National

Education Association reports that one of the main motivators for inspiring teachers is the

desire to work with young people (Harrell et al., 2004).

The intrinsic disposition of caring for others appears to be highly motivating to

teachers who remain in low-income, high-poverty schools. De Stercke et al. (2015)

suggested that teachers have a "Mindfulness" to stay in teaching. When describing "this

notion of mindfulness," they suggest a sort of love, kindness, and compassion that acts as

a catalyst for teachers. This caring disposition was reported to be the most important

characteristic for success in high needs schools (Petty et al., 2012).

Caring in this aspect is not defined as just being "warm and fuzzy;" caring implies

a continuous search for competence (Petty et al., 2012). When teachers care they want to

do the very best for whom they care for (Petty et al., 2012). It is important to note that the

teachers who chose care as their most important characteristic also chose that this is why

they would stay in high-need schools (Petty et al., 2012). Due to the personal nature of teaching, the profession involves constant personal interaction, with the center of the personal interaction is emotion (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). It has been argued that emotional teachers make the best teachers (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

Hargreaves describes good teachers as well-oiled machines that are passionate, emotional individuals. They connect with their students, filling their classrooms with joy, creativity and challenges (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). The role which teachers play in schools, particularly inner-city schools, is critical due to the lack of support at home (Jacob, 2007). Some teachers are deeply committed to social justice and stay to help improve the existing conditions of the school (Quartz, 2003). Many educators who work in low-income, high-minority schools see themselves as "social justice educators" and seek to be change agents outside of the classroom (Quartz et al., 2008). In a study by Mawhinney and Rinke (2018) teachers shared their experiences with why they stay or leave low-income, high-minority schools. Through journaling, teachers revealed it was their mission to make a difference in low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

Djonko-Moore (2015) found race to play a role in teacher attrition and mobility in high-minority schools. An overwhelming number of teachers who teach at low-income, high-minority schools are middle class, White teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015). White teachers tend to quit more often and have less job satisfaction than Black teachers when assigned to high-minority schools (Djonko-Moore, 2015). It was found that White teachers felt more comfortable and were committed more when they taught at a school that was predominantly White, where Black teachers showed no difference in satisfaction

regardless of their placement (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Teachers of color are more likely to stay in low-income, high-minority schools (Quartz, 2003). White teachers are reported to leave the teaching profession sooner than Black teachers (Kelly, 2004).

It has also been found that the gender and age of the teacher is a factor when it comes to teacher attrition. A number of studies have shown female teachers are more likely to leave than male teachers (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Kelly, 2004). A teacher's age also plays an important role in the teacher's decision to stay or go (Ingersoll, 2001). Younger teachers (less than 30 years) tend to depart from the profession more often than those who chose teaching as a mid-life career (Ingersoll, 2001). For instance teachers less than 30 years are 171% more likely to depart the profession compared to middle aged teachers (Ingersoll, 2001). Teachers that stay tend to "settle-in" and attrition begins to decline until retirement age (Ingersoll, 2001). Research has determined that those who leave the teaching profession prior to retirement are young, White teachers (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011).

Teaching experience and academic qualifications contributed to teacher attrition and mobility with new teachers being more likely to leave teaching or to move to a school that was not considered to be a low-income, high-minority school (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Teachers who scored high on their state certification exam were more likely to leave low-income, high-minority schools (Jacob, 2007). Teachers who hold a graduate degree seem to stay longer than other teachers (Kelly, 2004).

It has been found that new teachers' perceptions of their qualifications and ethnicity play a factor in the jobs in which the teacher may apply (Milanowski et al., 2009). Some teachers feel as if they are not qualified to teach at more affluent schools,

while others feel students should have teachers in the school that looks like them. Cha and Cohen-Vogel (2011) found that teachers who left, either to switch to another school or leave the profession, had less experience than those who stayed.

Student Characteristics

Traditional studies have used student demographic characteristics to predict teachers' choices to stay in or leave the profession (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Student characteristics can be examined across three general categories: socioeconomic status, student achievement, and the school's racial/ethnic composition (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Schools with high or above average student achievement were less likely to experience teacher attritions compared to schools with low or below average student achievement (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Low-income and high-minority schools seem to be traditionally difficult to staff, and they are more vulnerable to a higher rate of teacher attrition and mobility then schools who serve middle class, low-minority student (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Schools that are identified as hard to staff are those schools, both urban and rural, that have a high population of poverty (Opfer, 2011).

The demographics of a school's student population has been the focus of research in numerous studies on attrition (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Social and socioeconomic conditions underpin the teacher's decision to leave the profession (Macdonald, 1999). It is no secret that research has found poverty and racial segregation of students of color in schools is associated with high rates of attrition and mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015).

Researchers conducted a study within the Chicago Public Schools system, their findings revealed schools with high numbers of low-income, high-poverty, high-minority students lost 30% of their staff each year (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Social and

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socioeconomic conditions underpin the teacher's decision to leave the profession (Djonko-Moore, 2015; Macdonald, 1999). Multiple areas of research have shown that teachers are more likely to leave schools that have a large number of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and the odds were greater for teacher attrition in schools with high numbers of Black and Hispanic students (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Some research suggested that the odds were three times greater in schools with high numbers of minority students (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Negative student characteristics have an impact on the decision of teachers to leave the classroom (Harrell et al., 2004). The most cited student variables that lead to teachers leaving are tardiness, safety concerns, apathy and student behavior (Harrell et al., 2004). Research has found many students from low-income, high-minority schools are disenchanted, disengaged, have bad attitudes and just did not want to be in school (Dunn & Downey, 2018). These variables increase when the teachers work in urban, low-income settings as additional factors come into play (Harrell et al., 2004). Students' lack of respect toward teachers is a significant issue which may lead to a teacher leaving (Buchanan, 2009).

Students with discipline problems and lack of motivation (Quartz, 2003; Simon & Johnson, 2015) as well as lack of family support lead to teacher dissatisfaction, which in turn leads to teachers leaving low-income, high-minority schools (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Teachers who teach in low-income, high-minority schools leave due to the lack of student discipline, which impairs upon their ability to teach (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teachers tend to leave positions where the students' living conditions are extremely poor or they do not feel comfortable with the ethnicity of the students from low-income, high-

poverty, high-minority schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Macdonald, 1999). Research states a high number of students who are from low-income, high-minority homes typically have less support at home (Jacob, 2007). Furthermore, research indicates that the majority of students within these demographics tend to have adverse living conditions, poor health, and negative family attitudes that attribute to teacher attrition (Macdonald, 1999; Payne, 2019). Teacher relationships with families also contribute to the teacher's decision to stay or go (Simon & Johnson, 2015). These challenges heighten turnover as many teachers who enter the field are not emotionally prepared to deal with the lack of parent involvement, racial tension, parent drug or alcohol abuse, and the number of students who are unprepared to learn (Harrell et al., 2004).

On average students from low-income, high-minority schools score lower on standardized test than students who attend high-income, low-poverty, low-minority schools (Jacob, 2007). With all these factors playing a deciding factor in teachers' decision to leave, the most daunting factors are poor health, poor nutrition and high poverty (Harrell et al., 2004). Harrell et al. found the second most common reason for teachers leaving the profession was discipline problems with students (see also Buchanan, 2009).

<center>**Teacher Programs**</center>

Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs typically pair new or beginning teachers with experienced, veteran teachers (Jacob, 2007). Part of the factors that make mentoring successful includes effective modeling and support (Hallam et al., 2012). Many districts in New York, Cincinnati, Columbus and Toledo have reduced attrition rates by more than one-third by providing beginning teachers with experienced mentors (Adamson & Darling-

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Hammond, 2012). Many states, like North Carolina and Connecticut requires districts to assign quality mentors to beginning teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). These districts also provided coaching time for beginning teachers and their mentors (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Mentoring programs that have rendered the greatest success is those that are tied to high-quality teacher preparation programs (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

The current literature suggested benefits of mentoring include job satisfaction and teacher retention (Hallam et al., 2012). Many studies support the initial preparation by incorporating strong mentoring programs for first-year teachers (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Research has shown the importance of mentor programs in improving teacher retention (Hallam et al., 2012) and reducing attrition in low-income, high-minority schools (Jacob, 2007).

Buchanan (2012) conducted a series of semistructured interviews with teachers who had left the profession. During the interviews, Buchanan learned many teachers regretted not receiving appropriate mentoring and some suggested that more mentoring would have influenced their decision to stay. Positive mentoring provides guidance and support to new teachers (Hallam et al., 2012). A meta-analytic and narrative review was conducted by Borman and Dowling (2008) they found school-based mentoring programs, especially those related to colleague support, lowered teacher turnover among first-year teachers.

A nationwide analysis revealed teachers who had a mentor from the same subject field were more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Hallam et al., 2012). In a study

conducted by Geiger and Pivovarova (2018), teachers from low-income, high-minority

schools reported that having a mentor available to them is the reason why they stay.

Training

Teacher work experience and training are positive predictors in the retention

process (Hallam et al., 2012). The National Commission for Teaching and America's

Future suggested a key to the growing crisis of teacher retention is to support qualified

teachers in collaborating with each other during Professional Learning Communities

(Quartz et al., 2008). Studies have shown a significant relationship between teacher

professional development and teacher retention (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). The more

professional development prospective teachers receive, the likelihood of them staying is

greater (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). As participation in professional

development increased, teacher turnover decreased (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011).

White teachers often report there is a lack of training that prepares them to work

in communities that serve low-income, high-poverty, high-minority students (Simon &

Johnson, 2015). Current teacher education programs are ill-equipped to prepare teachers

for their experience in low-income, high-minority schools (Freedman & Appleman,

2009). Studies suggest that the more professional development prospective teachers

receive, the likelihood of them staying in the profession is greater (Adamson & Darling-

Hammond, 2012). This leads to teachers gaining more experience in working with

students from low-income, high-minority schools. Teachers with more experience are

less likely to leave the profession than those with less experience (Hallam et al., 2012).

Preparation Programs

There is a growing body of research that indicates teachers who lack adequate

preparation have a higher probability of attrition (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

For the past two decades, educational researchers and policymakers have recommended reforming teacher preparation programs and enhancing professional development in attempt to reduce teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008). In a study conducted by Quartz et al. (2008) specialized preparation and introduction programs were cited as playing a major role in teacher professionalism, which leads to teacher retention. A nationwide analysis revealed teachers who participated in a beginning teacher program were more likely to stay in the teaching profession (Hallam et al., 2012). According to a report released by the National Center for Education Statistics 29% of new teachers who did not participate in student teaching left the profession within the first 5 years (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

The literature suggests there is a lack of knowledge in the area of preparing teachers for careers teaching in low-income, high-minority schools (Quartz, 2003). Instead of filling student teachers minds with theory, Petty et al. (2012) suggest that they should be provided with greater access to practicums within the high-need classroom. In 1992 UCLA created Center X, an approach to teaching that may bridge the racial, political and economic gap (Quartz, 2003). By the middle of the 1990s, Center X became the research-based approach in preparing teachers to teach in an urban setting (Quartz, 2003).

Center X's Teacher Education Program is an intensive 2-year program that leads to teaching certification as well as a master's degree (Quartz, 2003). Center X programs train paraprofessionals and teachers of color to teach at low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools (Quartz, 2003). Upon program completion, urban teachers continue to receive professional development through the Urban Educator Network (Quartz, 2003). It

has been argued that Center X's Teacher Education Program participants learn as much, if not more than those in traditional programs (Quartz, 2003). Statistics show Center X graduates continue teaching at low-income, high-minority schools at a rate higher than the national average (Quartz, 2003). In fact, after 5 years, 70% of Center X graduates remained in low-income, high-minority schools as compared to 61% of teachers at the national level (Quartz, 2003).

The Teacher Education for the Advancement of Multicultural Society or TEAMS created a Teaching Fellowship Program that prepares teachers, teacher assistants, counselors, and other staff members to work in urban, low-income, high-minority schools (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006). TEAMS focuses on four specific methods to prepare teachers to work in low-income, high-minority schools: (1) Enrolment in the program, (2) Serve as a teacher or counselor, (3) Attend pedagogical professional development, and (4) Complete a service-learning project (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006). Many participants in TEAMS started the program were provided with professional support and the seminars provided them with the skills needed to teach the students in low-income, high-minority (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006). Participants also shared how the program gave them lifelong professional resources and a network of individuals that made the job more manageable (Nunez & Fernandez, 2006).

Alternative Licensing Programs

For more than a decade, federal policymakers have encouraged the creation of alternative certification and an expansion of these programs to attract teachers to areas where there is a shortage (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). School district CEO Paul Vallas arrived in Philadelphia to the major problem of new teacher retention (Useem & Neild, 2005). Less than half the new teachers were staying in the district and one-third

of them were leaving their original assignments (Useem & Neild, 2005). One of his first initiatives was to start a recruiting campaign that focused on only hiring teachers who were qualified and wanted to stay (Useem & Neild, 2005). Vallas's recruiting initiative focused on building relationships with local colleges, aggressive marketing, tuition reimbursement, teacher awards program where they received $1,000 for bringing in new teachers and a $4,500 signing bonus (Useem & Neild, 2005). Philadelphia school district partnered with Philadelphia's Education Fund in creating a program that allowed teacher candidates to work with an experienced teacher for a year in the low-income, high-minority schools (Useem & Neild, 2005).

Research has shown pathway programs that train paraprofessionals and teachers of color to teach at low-income, high-minority schools were more likely to stay (Quartz, 2003). Many "home grown" or "grow your own" teaching programs have become a popular solution to help support low-income, high-minority schools (Petty et al., 2012). The program in Philadelphia was named the Literacy Intern Program and the teacher candidates were termed as Literary interns (Useem & Neild, 2005). Within 2 years this program provided the Philadelphia school district with 600 well-trained teachers (Useem & Neild, 2005). As a result of this program the number of applicants rose 44% and the percentage of teachers who completed their first year grew from 73% to over 90% (Useem & Neild, 2005). It did not stop there, Vallas hired 61 teacher coaches that were only responsible for assisting teachers who were teaching in their area of expertise (Useem & Neild, 2005). Each teacher coach had 20 teachers to coach with no other responsibilities (Useem & Neild, 2005). This program was modeled after mentoring programs that were documented in national studies. After getting this program up and

running, Vallas turned his focus on working conditions and resources (Useem & Neild, 2005). The evidence is clear that these strategies implemented by Vallas and the Philadelphia school district were research-based components that have been proven to increase teacher retention. Attracting and keeping teachers in high-poverty, low-income, high-minority schools is challenging, however with initiatives like this shows progress can be made.

Chapter Summary

The literature was clear in the themes or areas of concern around teacher attrition. The themes of finance, teacher working conditions, administrator effectiveness, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher programs all provided a more comprehensive look at why teachers stay or go.

Financially, the research states one of the most common areas studied within teacher attrition is that related to salaries and benefits, including the loss of valuable resources (Harrell et al., 2004). The AEE found that low-income, high-minority schools in the United States typically spent around $70,000 annually due to teachers leaving the profession (Djonko-Moore, 2015), ultimately, reducing funding resources for students. Teacher working conditions have shown to be a greater predictor of teacher attrition than salary (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Working conditions including facilities, lack of textbooks, space and class sizes (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Murnane & Steele, 2007), manageable class sizes, appropriate workload, safe working conditions, adequate resources, and desirable teaching assignments/schedules (Harrell et al., 2004). If teachers do not feel comfortable or safe in their current working conditions, they will likely leave the situation.

Administrator effectiveness and support has been cited as one of the strongest factors related to job satisfaction and commitment (Harrell et al., 2004). Almost one-third of teachers who leave the profession blame the lack of support from the school principal as a key reason for their departure (Buchanan, 2012; Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Strong principals in disadvantaged schools promote teacher retention by recognizing teacher accomplishments and their hard work and providing teachers with a clear vision which provides the teachers with a reason to stay because they want to see the outcome (Grissom, 2011).

Research suggests there is a strong correlation between teachers' individual characteristics and teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Ingersoll, 2001). The teacher's age, gender, and teaching experience are factors involved in predicting if a teacher will stay or go (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Race also plays a part in teacher attrition and mobility. White teachers tend to quit more often and have less job satisfaction than Black teachers when assigned to low-income, high-minority schools (Djonko-Moore, 2015) as well as female teachers are more likely to leave than male teachers (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Kelly, 2004). The literature also suggest young teachers, those in their first few years, tend to depart from the profession more often than those who chose teaching as a mid-life career (Glazer, 2018; Ingersoll, 2001).

The characteristics of the student many times contribute to teacher attrition. Demographics of a school's student population has been the focus of research in numerous studies (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Borman & Dowling, 2008) and student demographic characteristics have predicted teachers' choices to stay or leave the

profession (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Research has found many students from low-income, high-minority schools are disenchanted, disengaged, exhibit bad attitudes and just do not want to be in school (Dunn & Downey, 2018). These factors present challenges for teachers and may lead to them leaving the profession (Buchanan, 2009). The students living conditions play a role in teacher attrition. Teachers tend to leave positions where the students' living conditions are extremely poor or they do not feel comfortable with the ethnicity of the students from low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools (Macdonald, 1999).

Teacher programs and mentoring are important parts of preventing teachers from leaving low-income, high-minority schools (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Buchanan, 2012; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Hallam et al., 2012). Teacher training research has shown a significant relationship between teacher professional development and teacher retention (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). The more training or professional development teachers receive, the likelihood of them staying is greater (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Similarly, teacher preparation programs have provided significant support for teachers. The current literature suggests there is a lack of knowledge in the area of preparation (Quartz, 2003) and current teacher education programs are ill-equipped to prepare teachers for their experience in low-income, high-minority schools (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Petty et al., 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

For more than a decade, federal policymakers have encouraged the creation of alternative certification (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012) and pathway programs

that train paraprofessionals and teachers of color to teach at low-income, high-minority schools (Quartz, 2003). Many "home grown" or "grow your own" teaching programs have become a popular solution to help support low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools (Petty et al., 2012). Teachers who participate in these programs were more likely to stay in low-income, high-minority schools (Quartz, 2003).

Evidence from the literature concerning teacher attrition establishes it is rarely one factor that influence teachers to stay or leave the profession, but a combination of factors that cause them to stay or go (Hancock & Scherff, 2010). Each factor provides us with evidence that attrition is a growing problem and the quality of education for students who attend low-income, high-minority schools is less than par compared to students who attend more affluent schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2004; Sass et al., 2012).

Many times in research you will find an anomaly to the norm. It is true many teachers who teach in low-income, high-minority schools leave, but in some cases, teachers remain in these schools. In this study the researcher will attempt to answer the question on why these teachers chose to stay when so many others chose to leave low-income, high-minority schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Method

To develop a deep understanding of why some teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools, a phenomenological methodology research approach was chosen. This approach allowed teachers who worked in low-income, high-minority schools to share their lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of their teacher experiences. The following section provides a justification for selecting a phenomenological methodology and the alignment of the research method to the research questions.

Phenomenological approaches focus on experiences from the perspective of the individual and are based on the paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, which emphasizes the personal perspective and interpretation. Qualitative research contextualizes and reflects the meaning of the individual's own experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016), seeking to preserve the content and experience of social actions (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). The methodology is based on the epistemological quest of understanding the way individuals view, approach, and experience the world around them and how it makes meaning to their experiences of a particular phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Simply stated, the methodology searches to find concerns and issues present in everyday contexts, striving to understand what already exists in the participant's experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Smythe & Giddings, 2007). In this study, deep information about the perspectives, views, and interpretations of teachers who work in low-income, high-minority schools was gathered and analyzed.

In this study, participants' words served as the data. In qualitative research, the data are derived from the words of the participants, describing their experiences of the phenomenon, not through a numerical approach (Chesebro & Borisoff, 2007). The experiences derived from the participants' life circumstances are very unique and complex (Smythe & Giddings, 2007). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is able to probe deeper into the participants' experiences with a specific phenomenon, asking robust and meaningful questions that lead to greater understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Smythe & Giddings, 2007). A qualitative approach helped tell the participants' story and painted a vibrant picture of their lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of teaching in low-income, high-minority schools in North Carolina.

Research Design

Phenomenological research attempts to set aside biases and direct the interest of the study to the individuals' lived experiences (Giorgi, 2012; Lester, 1999; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A phenomenological approach points out the participants' own perspectives and understandings of the phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The purpose of phenomenological qualitative research is to identify and understand the phenomenon through the lens of the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), illuminating the specifics of the phenomenon (Lester, 1999).

Phenomenology contributes to a profound understanding of lived experiences by revealing taken-for-granted assumptions and is understood through embodied experiences (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The phenomenological perspective can be summed up by a quote that has been credited to Einstein: "Place your hand on a hot stove for a minute, it seems like an hour. Sit with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute."

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This statement paints a vibrant picture that expresses the difference between chronological time and embodied time (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

For this study, a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach was used. Transcendental phenomenology is adapted from Husserl, and the focus lies on the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences (Hall et al., 2016). Transcendental phenomenology suspends all predetermined notions of existing scientific explanations or theories of the mind and describes the acts as they are experienced, without speculation or explanation (Jansen, 2005). The researcher looked through the lines of the teacher to describe the teacher's own lived experience and perceptions that kept them in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers chose to leave.

Research Questions

With more teachers leaving the profession each year than are coming in (Quartz et al., 2008), an understanding of what keeps teachers in low-income, high-minority schools is more important than ever. In low-income, high-minority schools, 22% of the teachers leave each year. This is compared to only 15% in all other public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Djonko-Moore, 2015). This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do teachers who stay in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools identify as obstacles to their longevity?

2. What specific practices and strategies do teachers who work in low-income, high-minority public elementary schools utilize to support their longevity in these schools?

3. How do the teachers' overall experiences and understanding of predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools affect their decisions to stay?

4. How do teachers' experiences working in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools transform their opinions of perceived obstacles to their longevity and their ability to adapt to address the perceived obstacles?

These questions generated viable information that can help school administrators and policy makers determine key factors that may encourage teachers to remain in low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools.

Role of the Researcher

It can be argued that subjectivity guides almost every aspect of the research, from topic choice to methodology (Ratner, 2002), and my experiences were expected to influence all parts of this study. Subjectivity pulls from the researcher's experience (Drapeau, 2002), encouraging them to reflect on their own values and objectivity as they conduct the research (Ratner, 2002). Subjectivity helps the researcher become more aware of their bias (Peshkin, 1988), which enhances the research, because the researcher consciously knows what may affect their ability to report the subject matter objectively, in a clear and concise way (Drapeau, 2002).

Education has been a constant in my life for as long as I can remember. Being the son of an educator, I spent the majority of time in school, either as a student or as the child of a teacher assistant. I am a White male who serves as an elementary school principal for a Title I school in the piedmont area of North Carolina. I have had the honor of working at low-income, high-minority schools for the past 6 years. My own

experience of working in these schools may provide a perspective of relevance on this study. For the past few years, I have had the esteemed privilege of working in a school that is well over the threshold of 80% free and reduced-price lunch. The demographics of the school are 56% minority, with all students who attend the school eating breakfast and lunch at no cost to them. My encounter with teachers who have taught in this environment for years inspired me to conduct this research to find what lived experiences and phenomena inspired them to stay when so many others leave.

In this study, I took the role of principal investigator. I conducted semistructured interviews with teachers, privately, in their own classrooms. All interviews were audiotaped to ensure the information was gathered in an accurate manner. After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the information, verbatim, into written words. After transcribing the interviews, I used the coding process to develop raw words that eventually led to themes. Finally, I documented this information and these findings into narrative form, setting aside my preconceived biases from working in low-income, high-minority schools to increase the reliability and validity of this study.

Participants

Creswell (1998) suggested that the sample size for a phenomenological study be from 5 to 25. Purposeful sampling is a frequently used method in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposeful sampling means the individuals are chosen purposefully, because their experience or knowledge will help the researcher with answering the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By employing purposeful sampling, rich, detailed accounts of the participants' experiences are available (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I employed the purposeful sampling method by selecting participants who had been teaching in the same low-income, high-minority elementary schools for 5 years

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or more. The criteria I used to select participants included the following: (a) must hold a current teaching license in elementary education; (b) must be currently teaching in a low-income, high-minority school; and (c) must have taught in the same low-income, high-minority school for 5 or more school years. To adequately conduct the research, the sample was pulled from teachers who teach in low-income, high-minority schools and who volunteered to participate.

Only participants who had taught at the same low-income, high-minority school for 5 years or more were invited. Five or more years was selected as the baseline due to research that has shown that nearly 50% of teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years, and this number is even more bleak in low-income, high-minority schools, with 50% of these teachers leaving within their first 3 years (Buchanan, 2012; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2017; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). If a teacher has taught at a high-poverty, high-minority school for 5 or more years, the participant will be able to describe their experience of staying as precisely and completely as possible (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Six participants with a wide range of teaching experience at low-income, high-minority schools participated in the research study. Each participant had taught at a low-income, high-minority school for 5 years or more and had a vast array of lived experiences that contribute to this study.

The participants provided either verbal or written consent to participate in this study (Appendix A). The participants agreed to participate in one hour-long, semi-structured interview (Appendix B). Each participant also agreed to a 30-minute follow-up meeting to provide member checking during the interview coding process. Five of the six

participants have taught more than one grade at a low-income, high-minority school. Two of the six participants have advanced degrees, holding a master's in school administration, while one participant holds multiple master's degrees in both teaching and administration. Three of the six participants began their careers as teacher assistants, working their way through the system to become classroom teachers.

Participant Profiles

The following section provides a profile for each of the six participants. The teachers' gender, educational level, years of experience, grades taught, and current grade assignments are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Gender, Educational Level, Years of Experience, Grades Taught, and Current Grade Assigned

Participant	Gender	Education	Years of experience	Grades taught	Current grade
1	female	bachelor's	12	3–5	5
2	female	bachelor's	10	K, 4	K
3	female	master's, bachelor's	17	pre-K–1	1
4	female	bachelor's	9	6	6
5	female	master's, bachelor's, National Board certified	13	K–8	5
6	male	master's, bachelor's	18	K–6	4

Participant 1 was a White female between the ages 31 and 40 years. She held a degree in elementary education, was certified to teach kindergarten through sixth grade, and had 12 years of teaching experience, all in low-income, high-minority schools. At the time of the study, this participant taught fifth-grade science. She had been teaching at her

current school for 9 years and had taught 3 years in third grade, 6 years in fourth grade, and 3 years in fifth grade. During her career, Participant 1 taught in two different school districts. At the time of the study, she had been teaching at her current school for 9 years.

Participant 2 was a White female between the ages of 31 and 40 years. She held a degree in elementary education, was certified to teach kindergarten through sixth grade, and had 10 years of teaching experience; all of these years were in the same low-income, high-minority school. She began her career teaching fourth grade, but due to the school experiencing a reduction-in-force scenario, the participant was moved to kindergarten. She taught fourth grade for 2 years and kindergarten for 8 years. During her career, Participant 2 had taught in the same school district, and at the time of the study, she was teaching kindergarten.

Participant 3 was an African American female between the ages of 41 and 50 years. She held a degree in elementary education and a master's degree in teaching and learning with technology, and she was certified to teach prekindergarten through sixth grade. At the time of the study, Participant 3 taught first grade. She had been in education for 17 years, 7 of those as a teacher. She began her career as a teacher assistant, transferring into the teaching profession as a prekindergarten teacher. She taught prekindergarten for 4 years prior to moving to first grade. During her career, Participant 3 taught in two different school districts. At the time of the study, she had been teaching at her current school for 7 years.

Participant 4 was a White female between the ages of 41 and 50 years. She held a degree in elementary education, was certified to teach kindergarten through sixth grade, and had 9 years of teaching experience, all in low-income, high-minority schools. At the

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time of the study, this participant taught sixth grade. Prior to teaching, Participant 4 spent 1 year as a teacher's assistant. Teaching was a second career for this participant. She left the medical field to become a teacher. During her career, she has been teaching in the same school district and had been teaching at her current school for 9 years.

Participant 5 was a White female between the ages of 31 and 40 years. She held an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree in elementary education, and two master's degrees, one of which was in school administration. She was certified in elementary education (kindergarten to 6th grade), English as a second language (kindergarten to 12th grade), special education (kindergarten to 12th grade), and school administration. At the time of the study, this participant was National Board certified and working toward her master's plus 60 degree. This participant had 13 years of teaching experience in education, 3 years as a teacher's assistant and 10 years as a teacher. During her career, Participant 5 taught in two different school districts. This participant taught in both affluent schools and low-income, high-minority schools. At the time of the study, she had been teaching fifth grade at her current school for 6 years.

Participant 6 is a White/Pacific Islander male between the ages of 41 and 50 years. He held a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in school administration, and he was certified to teach kindergarten through sixth grade. Along with his kindergarten through sixth-grade certification, he was certified in school administration. At the time of the study, this participant taught fourth grade and had 18 years of teaching experience. During his career, Participant 6 worked with all grade levels, teaching in two different school districts. He spent time working in both affluent and low-income, high-minority schools. At the time of the study, he had been teaching at

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his current school for 12 years and worked with all grade levels through teaching and coaching.

Data Collection

The data were collected from a series of semistructured life-world interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). By choosing the semistructured approach, I used the instrument to guide the interviews and integrated specific follow-up questions to help probe deeper into the participants' experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through this kind of interviewing technique, I sought to obtain context-rich descriptions from the participant on their interpretation of the phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Semistructured life-world interviews are very similar to everyday conversations (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The semistructured interview questions served as a guide to develop and prompt the interview process. The instrument was designed to elicit responses from teachers who have taught in low-income, high-minority schools for 5 years or more. The interview questions were developed to gather detailed and honest information about the participants' attitudes, beliefs, and lived experiences of teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually. The interviews lasted no more than an hour and were audiorecorded for later transcription. The semistructured interviews were conducted on an individual basis, with no other individuals present in the room. Each participant was provided a consent form with detailed information about the study. At the beginning of each interview, the participants provided me with verbal consent.

The participants were interviewed for approximately 1 hour using 10 open-ended interview questions. I asked other open-ended questions to gather data that would lead to rich, textual descriptions of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 1998). This process

helped provide an understanding of the common experience of the participants (Creswell, 1998). The instrument also contained probing questions that would assist me in developing a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

I collected the data accurately, systemically, and thoroughly. The participant interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy of the participants' lived experiences. Once the interview process was complete, I transcribed the interviews by documenting the participants' responses.

<div align="center">Ensuring Accuracy of Data</div>

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research adheres to different standards than quantitative research to assess the validity and trustworthiness of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Quantitative research depends on internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity to establish trustworthiness (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These standards may not be adequate to measure the rigor of qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Moreover, in qualitative research, trustworthiness comes from the study's ability to meet the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, trustworthiness was achieved through the peer debriefing and member checking process.

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility refers to the ability of the researcher to account for the complexities that may arise in a study and manage the patterns that may not be easily explained (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility represents the accuracy of the research design and the research instrument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility can be established by pulling from one of the following validity strategies: (a) triangulation, (b)

participant validation, (c) thick description, (d) discounting negative cases, (e) prolonged

engagement in the field, (f) using peer debriefs, and (g) using an external auditor (Ravitch

& Carl, 2016). For this study, I employed the strategy of incorporating peer debriefs. I

shared the raw words, codes, and themes derived from the semistructured interview

process with my committee. This helped challenge the interpretation of the research

process and the data collected from the semistructured interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability allows the qualitative study to be transferable to similar situations

in a broader context, while maintaining the rich, robust specifics of the study (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is not designed to produce

true, generalized statements that can be directly applied to other settings (Ravitch & Carl,

2016). However, the research can be transferable to other settings and contexts in

qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

To achieve transferability, the researcher must provide rich, detailed, descriptive

data, which are termed *thick description* data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thick description

describes and interprets the social action or phenomenon of a particular context (Ravitch

& Carl, 2016). During this study, I provided thick description so the reader may be

presented with thick interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through thick description, the

reasons why these teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools unraveled,

revealing multiple meanings important to this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The thick

description has provided state and local leaders with valuable information on why some

teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of them leave.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the ability of the researcher's data to dependable, remaining consistent and stable over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A qualitative research study is considered dependable if the data that are collected are consistent with the research questions and are able to support the argument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Dependability helps answer the primary constructs and concepts of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure dependability in this study, I used within-methods sequencing by making sure the interview questions flowed appropriately (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was important that the questions were designed to follow each other so the data could be contextualized and appear in sequence (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview questions were developed to mirror the participants' perspectives so the conversations would be natural and authentic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability authenticates the qualitative researcher's approach to provide confirmable data within a subjective realm aiming to provide as minimal bias as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To help ensure confirmability, I used nonleading, open-ended questions that I analyzed utilizing coding and cross-case analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used the Tran scripted data to identify raw words that led to codes and codes that led to themes. I cross-case analyzed the themes gathered from each individual interview across cases, developing overall common themes. After I identified the themes, the information was peer reviewed by members of my committee. Once I received feedback, I continued to analyze the data, striving to gather a greater understanding of why teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools.

Ethics

The process for collecting the data for this study was through the semistructured interview process. The interview questions were written in plain language, which is a vital part of the ethical process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). When conducting interviews, I placed value on the ethical aspect of research, prior to scientific theory (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I followed the appropriate guidelines and received permission from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research. I gathered informed consent from each participant and explained the reason for the research in great detail, leaving no chance for confusion or misconception. The participants understood this was completely voluntary, and at no time were they unwilling to assist in the interview process. I collected the interview data through the audiorecordings and then transcribed them into written words. I will store the data in a locked cabinet and the audio on a device that only I can access.

Data Analysis

To analysis the data, I used the substantive coding process to identify main concepts or themes from the semistructured interviews (Holton, 2007). The substantive coding process incorporates open and selective coding (Holton, 2007). I concentrated on open coding to uncover raw words, codes, and themes derived from the semistructured interviews. I transcribed each semistructured interview to uncover themes and categories. Then, I analyzed the themes across case from each individual interview, developing overall common themes. After I identified the themes, I used the validity strategy peer debriefers by having the data peer reviewed by members of the committee (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). After feedback provided by peers, the researcher continued to analyze the

data in the hope of uncovering a greater understanding of why teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools.

Summary

The researcher utilized a qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach to look through the lines of the teacher to describe the teachers' own lived experiences and perceptions that keep them in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers chose to leave. Four main research questions were used as a guide to obtain data from hour-long semistructured interviews with teachers who had taught at the same low-income, high-minority school for 5 years or more. The baseline of 5 years or more was selected because nearly 50% of teachers leave the profession in their first 5 years (Buchanan, 2012; Hancock & Scherff, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2017; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

To ensure trustworthiness, the research data must meet the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

To establish credibility, I used peer debriefs as an external auditor to help challenge the interpretation of the research process and the data collected from the semistructured interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To achieve confirmability and dependability, I used nonleading, open-ended questions that I analyzed utilizing coding and cross-case analysis, through within-methods sequencing, by making sure the interview questions flowed appropriately (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Finally, I used thick description data to ensure transferability was met (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I gave much ethical consideration to protecting the participants as well as the data. I wrote the interview questions in plain language, which is a vital part of the ethical process (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). When conducting interviews, I placed value on the

ethical aspects of research, prior to scientific theory (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I

collected the interview data through audiorecordings and then transcribed them into

written words. These data will be stored in a locked cabinet and on a device only

accessible by the researcher. Confidentiality is extremely important, and during the

process, no information from the participants was shared with anyone. The participants

were aware that their participation was completely voluntary, and at no time were they

unwilling to assist in the interview process.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences that keep elementary school teachers teaching in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers chose to leave. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do teachers who stay in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools identify as obstacles to their longevity?

2. What specific practices and strategies do teachers who work in low-income, high-minority public elementary schools utilize to support their longevity in these schools?

3. How do the teachers' overall experiences and understanding of predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools affect their decisions to stay?

4. How do teachers' experiences working in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools transform their opinions of perceived obstacles to their longevity and their ability to adapt to address the perceived obstacles?

This chapter presents the major finding for each of the research questions using interpretive thematic descriptions. The chapter is organized to highlight the compelling themes that were formed from participants' interview responses.

Research Question 1

What do teachers who stay in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools identify as obstacles to their longevity?

Exploring the participants' identified obstacles and the methods that were utilized to address these perceived obstacles was the basis behind Research Question 1. These same narratives revealed the methods that the participants utilized to address these perceived obstacles. From the interview process, the themes of (a) professional work

environment, (b) school demographic information, (c) colleague collaboration and teamwork, and (d) administrative support arose.

Professional Work Environment

During the interviews, the participants shared that perceptions of the professional work environment created obstacles that were sometimes challenging to overcome. One participant described how the windows in the classroom had to be replaced every Monday because they were shot out over the weekend. She described her working conditions as "my school was in a very high-poverty area, lots of crime. They actually replaced the windows in my classroom every Monday morning because they would get shot out over the weekend."

Five out of six of the participants shared that their mental health was challenged because they had so many students who were homeless or one bad situation away from being evicted from their homes. One participant discussed how she had to overcome stereotypes in her classroom. She shared a story about how her students would tell her that they could not talk to or help police officers because they were bad. She recalled a specific incident that occurred in her classroom the first day of school. She shared,

> The first day of school one year I had a little girl look at something and I said can you tell the Officer what letter that is? She said no we do not help police officers! So I said "oh okay" so that was from home, that was what she had been taught from home.

Another participant shared a story of how she was physically assaulted by a student. She also shared how many times she questioned why she even got in her car that day. She said,

> It is very, very tough to work there because some days are like just why did I get in my car to come here? Um and [*laughter*] I had to keep telling myself this is not for you this is for the children.

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All participants shared at least one story where they felt threatened or verbally abused by a parent or a student. However, despite all these obstacles, they continued to teach in low-income, high-minority schools.

School Demographic Information

According to the participants, many of the students come from single-parent homes and live in poverty. These schools have 80%–90% free and reduced-price lunch, with a minority rate as high as 90%. All six participants shared how the students' backgrounds were an obstacle that was sometimes difficult to overcome. One participant said, "Because a lot of my students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they have a lot of underlying issues that you have to really deal with before teaching can ever start."

One participant shared situations that he had encountered along the way. He talked about how many of his students had siblings who were younger and it was his students' responsibility to take care of them. They were required to help with homework, cook, wash clothes, and prepare themselves and the siblings for the next day. It may be assumed that these students were in upper grades; however, these students were only in fourth and fifth grades. He said, "A lot of these older guys were struggling, having younger siblings to take care of, they were going through some things."

It was interesting to learn that all six participants preferred to teach in low-income, high-minority schools above more affluent schools. One participant shared a story about one of her friends who taught at an affluent school. She described how the friend's fourth-grade parents tried to buy an A for their child by offering $100. Another participant talked about the difference in parent involvement at the affluent schools compared to low-income, high-minority schools. She shared that schools that are more

affluent have more parent involvement, but it is more like parent dictatorship. She

explained that parents at the more affluent schools think they know more than the

teachers do. She said, "I think one of the big differences between more affluent schools

and low-income, high-minority schools is parent involvement. Like in your higher

income schools you have more parent involvement, but it is more like parent

dictatorship."

Others talked about how a number of their students and parents spoke English as a

second language. One participant shared that over 60% of the students in her school were

of Hispanic ethnicity. A high population of students with English as a second language

presents its own set of challenges. It is hard to determine if the student is struggling

academically due to a deficiency or the language barrier. One participant shared a story

about a student who was in fourth grade but was reading on a second-grade level. They

found that the student was not successful because they were still struggling with the

language. She said, "We could not get him to complete work; no teachers had been able

too. After building a relationship with him we learned he felt defeated, he did not even

know where to start with his work."

Another participant reiterated how much more she loved teaching in a low-

income, high-minority school. She said,

> I do not know how to say this, but parents are much easier to deal with at low-
> income, high-minority schools. We get angry parents, we get parents coming in
> on drugs, scary parents, and mad parents, but I would rather teach at a school like
> I am at.

One participant shared that she worked in low-income, high-minority schools

because that is where she could make the most difference. She talked about the

opportunity to love her students and teach them something other than reading, writing,

and arithmetic. She shared how she would have family game night with her students once a week. She explained that many times her students do not get to play games at home with their parents. She taught her students how to play board games, tacks, marbles, and tiddlywinks.

Colleague Collaboration and Teamwork

All six participants shared that having a strong team played a major role in their ability to overcome these obstacles. Teamwork is very important for these participants, as it helps them cope with the stressors and obstacles that come along with working in a low-income, high-minority school. Having a strong team of teachers and support staff helps them make it through the rough days and enjoy the good days even more. Their team brings them a sense of comfort, and this feeling of comfort helps them overcome the obstacles that may be present in low-income, high-minority schools. Each participant shared a story of how having a positive relationship with the people whom they work with helps keep them coming back year after year. One participant said, "If my team was to leave, I would have to go with them."

One participant explained that working in low-income, high-minority schools was already difficult and that not getting along with your team makes it much worse. The participants shared that in their respective schools, everyone shared the same mission and vision. One participant explained that when you work in a low-income, high-minority school, you all need to be on the same page. She explained she worked on a three-person team and they all shared the same rules and expectations for their students. She said,

> The rules are the same in my class, in Mr. Smith's class, and in Mrs. Boat class. We work together as a team. It is hard to work with a team that is just a pain that makes things worse. It makes it your day if you come to work and you already get along with your team.

Administrative Support

All six participants stated that administrative support could sometimes be an obstacle. Five out of six participants talked about administration, sharing how in some cases, they had experienced multiple new principals in only a few years. One participant shared that they had four new principals in 10 years. She said, "Unfortunately, although they have all been good, it still has been a lot of change. This is difficult on staff, especially in low-income, high-minority schools. School administrators support is very important to me." Another participant shared she had experienced three new principals in her 7 years of teaching. Each principal was different, bringing a new set of rules and expectations for them to follow. She said the most difficult situation was when an interim principal who was there for only 4 months came in and changed the school completely. It was not that she changed things; it was that she was only going to be there for a short period. The teacher said,

> We had an interim principal come into our school. I felt as if she should just come in and hold down the fort, but she came in and made a lot of changes. I do not think that was her job, knowing she was only there for a short period of time.

Three of the six participants shared how over their careers, some principals seemed to lose touch with the classroom. They shared that in their opinion, some principals attempt to run the school like a business instead of a school. With the age of accountability, these participants felt that test scores were all that was important. One participant said,

> You have two kinds or principals, either one who is very much about test scores or those who are very much about relationships. Those who are about test scores sometimes forget we are people. Those who focus on relationships first realize that the test scores will come.

These participants also felt that the principals see it as a numbers game. They feel like the well-being of the students is discredited because the principals only focus on students who can improve their test scores. Each participant shared how they were moved from grade level to grade level just because they were successful in the grade they were in. One participant shared, "Just because I was a phenomenal teacher in kindergarten does not mean I will be able to give you threes and fours in a tested grade. I am a good teacher because I love my job."

During the interview process, the participants shared how administrative support, if absent, could be an obstacle for them to overcome while teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. However, the participants shared how administrative support could also help them overcome the obstacles that can sometimes be present when working in a low-income, high-minority school. One participant shared how their principal allowed them to love the child first and look beyond the subject matter to provide the student with a real learning experience, not only in the area of academics, but also how to function as a member of society. One participant stated, "Our principal has been doing a lot to support our school." She went on to say that her school participated in a book study on how to teach with poverty in mind. She shared how they participated in simulation activities that allowed them to take a brief glimpse into the lives of their students. She said that in the simulations, "we were a parent and we had doctor's visits, we had jobs, we were put in those real-life situations, so it makes you as a teacher see things differently."

One participant described that her administrator was fair and how that was important to her. She shared how the principal worked hard to build relationships with staff, community, parents, and students. One participant shared a memory of one of her

former principals, talking about how the principal was compassionate and was willing to develop that relationship with the staff, students, and parents. She said, "This principal made a lot of changes to help our students grow academically and as people. She was willing to form those relationships and still see the whole picture."

One participant shared that working in a low-income, high-minority school was like a ministry for them. They talked about how they were able to give back to the community and show the same love they had been given in their past. One of the participants, who became an educator as a second career, stated, "When I was younger, I had a prophetic word spoken over me. It was said that I would teach in the halls of the schools."

Summary of Question 1

The participants' personal experiences helped identify perceived obstacles that each participant must overcome to continue teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Participants identified the challenging environment in which many of the schools are located, including crime, vandalism, homelessness, mental health problems, and physical and verbal assault. Students' backgrounds and the challenging school environment often require teachers to deal with the students' problems before teachers can effectively instruct the students. Parents may not be as involved due to working multiple jobs, and many of the students were parenting younger siblings. Not having a strong collaborative team makes it almost impossible to effectively work with the students, and team members depend on each other for support. The last theme was that the lack of consistently strong school leadership provided major obstacles.

<center>**Research Question 2**</center>

What specific practices and strategies do teachers who work in low-income, high-minority public elementary schools utilize to support their longevity in these schools?

Research Question 2 was designed to understand the practices and strategies that teachers utilize to support their longevity in low-income, high-minority schools. Understanding what practices and strategies the participants relied on provided context to their lived experiences that keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. These practices and strategies fell under the themes of (a) building relationships, (b) communication, (c) value and respect students, (d) teaching the same students for multiple years, and (e) love of teaching.

Building Relationships

Throughout the interviews, the participants continued to refer to their ability to build relationships that contribute to their longevity in low-income, high-minority schools. During the interview process, all six of the participants repeatedly discussed the importance of forming positive relationships with their students, parents, and coworkers. One strategy all six of the participants shared was to build relationships first. The relationship is the cornerstone to the participants' desire to continue teaching at low-income, high-minority schools. One of the participants shared, "Relationships drive a classroom positively or negatively." If the students do not think that the teacher cares, they will not perform or may withdraw from communicating with the teacher.

Another participant shared the same sentiment on relationships. One strategy she used was developing the relationships with her students' parents. Her longevity assisted her in developing these relationships. She shared,

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I have been here for 10 years, I have taught all the siblings now, you know some of them have three, and four, siblings you can really get invested in the families and who they are and what they need.

One practice used by all six participants was their ability to be a constant in their students' lives. All six of the participants talked about how important consistency is in building those critical relationships. The participants continued to reiterate that being that consistent person in the students' lives made them want to continue teaching in their current schools. One participant shared that in their experience, many times students may not see their parents for 2 or 3 days because the parent may work at night or they have to work two jobs. One participant said, "Being a constant for the kids, being someone they know they are going to see every day. . . helps build relationships. Being consistent helps build trust, which will benefit in the long run."

Five out of the six participants talked about the importance of being there for their students. One participant shared how her team would stand in the hall and greet the students. She would meet them on their level. She said,

We all stand out in the hallway and have conversations with our students about what they like. We talk to the boys about sports, we talk to the girls about TV shows, we level the playing field by letting them know this is more than just a job.

Another participant talked about how she journaled with her students. The students would write in their journals and she would write them back. She talked about how her students would write in their journals all summer, then bring them back at the beginning of the year for her to write in. She shared how the word of her journaling got out to other kids in the school and she would find journals from students who were not in her class.

All six participants shared that in their experience, building trust with their students, families, and teammates was a strategy used to help their decision to stay in

low-income, high-minority schools. The trust factor helped them create an atmosphere that kept them teaching at their current schools. One participant said, "There needs to be a lot of trust. I believe trust is a huge thing, sometimes we are the only adult they trust."

Five out of the six participants shared how loving the student first was a strategy used to help them sustain longevity in low-income, high-minority schools. Each of these participants shared how being able to build that personal connection is fundamental. They discussed that they felt that you could not teach a child unless that child knew they loved them, especially in the school they were teaching in. To these participants, it is important to learn who your students are before they can learn. One participant shared her philosophy, stating,

> I think you have to learn about them before they can learn, so the first thing I worry about is loving those kids. Kids that are loved at home come to school to learn, but my kids that are not loved at home the majority of the time come to school to be loved first.

These participants go beyond the subject matter, teaching their students how to be productive members of society. They teach them how to work out problems on their own. They teach them how everyone is important, and they do these things by loving the students first.

Communication

All six participants discussed how important positive communication is when it comes to teaching in a low-income, high-minority school. The participants utilize the strategy of contacting parents early and often. They made it a habit to contact parents frequently, not sharing the negative situations, but to let the parents know what a good job their students are doing. By creating a positive relationship early, when it is necessary to address a negative issue, the parent is on their side. One participant shared,

> I always call the parents and let them know something good about their child. This sometimes catches them off-guard, because they are used to someone calling about bad things. Their whole attitude changes when you tell them you called to let them know something good.

The participants went on to discuss that parents were more likely to be on their side when they needed to discuss an issue. Each participant suggested positive communication with parents helps build those positive relationships needed to help their students be successful. Four out of the six participants shared how letting the parents know that they loved their children was an effective strategy. One participant talked of how she always let the parents know she cared about her students and she was going to love them no matter what they did. One participant shared a story of a student who was very dissatisfied with school. He came into school daily, hitting, crying, punching, and displaying negative behavior. This participant talked about how by showing the student love and communicating that love with his mom, the behaviors decreased. She stated,

> I took that time to get to know him and what he liked and what he didn't like and I keep those conversations open with his mom. His mom knew without a shadow of a doubt that I loved him.

Value and Respect for Students

All six participants found that being able to go beyond the subject matter and teach students more than just academics is a practice that keeps them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. One participant shared that they had family game night in her class. She explained that every Thursday afternoon, they would stop class early and play games. She believed that this helped build character, foster teamwork, and taught them how to play fair. She said this time also helped create a family atmosphere where her students felt comfortable with each other. This comfort level assisted them in overcoming the fear of making a mistake; it allowed them to try harder and not worry

about their peers making fun of them if they got it wrong. One participant shared how she

taught her students that everyone was important. She encouraged her students and let

them know they were all important. She said, "I let my students know they are all

important. The very first couple of weeks of school we have conversations about we are

all important and what we think matters. It develops those relationships and creates the

connectivity."

One participant echoed the importance of teaching the students about how

everyone is important, however, she took it a bit further. Not only did she teach them

how important they were but she taught them how important other people in the school

and community were, regardless of their position. She took time to explain to them the

role of the custodian, cafeteria workers, office staff, school resource officers, and other

positions throughout the community. She said,

> I think it should be required, it should be necessary that we teach our students the importance of others in the community. Like, these are our custodians, these are our police officers and they are all important people. What they do for us is amazing.

Teaching the Same Students Multiple Years

Five out of the six participants taught more than one grade level throughout their

careers. It is not uncommon for teachers in elementary school to be moved from one

grade to another. The knowledge from these grade levels carried over and helped them

continue practices that they had established early on. One participant talked about how

teaching more than one grade level helped her continue to fall in love with teaching all

over again. She talked about how much she loved her grade level and it was the best

grade level, but she would not have realized this unless she had taught other grade levels.

One participant shared different aspects of each grade she had taught, pointing out the

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positives and negatives of each. She talked about how in kindergarten she was the first

experience of school for many of her children and she wanted to make it a wonderful

experience. She elaborated on how teaching fourth grade, the students remember you as a

teacher. When she taught fourth grade, she incorporated journaling into her lessons. She

would read each entry, responding to each student. One participant shared how she had

taught third, fourth, and fifth grades at her current school. She shared some of those

stories and talked about the transition process from one grade level to the next. She talked

about how she really loved being able to loop with her students from third grade to fourth

grade. In education, moving up from one grade level and keeping your same students

from the year before is known as *looping*. She said, "I love looping! I looped two times in

my career and I loved it. I looped from third grade to fourth grade, it was my second year

and it was absolutely amazing."

The looping process allowed her to hit the ground running. She explained that this

allowed her to already know exactly where her students were academically. She had

developed a positive rapport with her students, parents, and guardians. Her students were

already familiar with the classroom procedures, and the parents knew what to expect. She

talked a great deal about how looping allowed her to get the extra support some of her

students needed. She shared one particular situation where she had two students who

were in need of exceptional children services, and by looping, she was able to get these

students the extra support they needed in half the time. She said,

> What I also like about looping is I had two students who I felt very strongly they
> needed EC services. By looping with them I was able to finish the process,
> because you know it never happens in one year.

Other participants shared similar stories of their experiences moving from one

grade level to the next. One participant shared how she transitioned from prekindergarten

to first grade. She explained how in pre-K, the learning process was very much different than in first grade. However, some of the strategies she used in pre-K carried over to first grade. While teaching pre-K, she learned that not all students have the same experiences. She said, "Pre-K was very different because everything was through play. I learned that I had to be very creative because all children do not have the same experiences."

This experience carried over into her first-grade classroom. She shared that knowing that all students were different helped her build the foundation of her teaching. Another participant shared his experience transitioning from high school to elementary. He discussed the differences between the grade levels and how much more he loved elementary. He described how the elementary students would share with you how their day was going and were very enthusiastic about being in school. He said,

> I just love that excitement you get from elementary kids. That is what drives me it gives me energy. I mean, you walk into school and they are excited to see you, they run up and give you hugs and stuff like that.

Love of Teaching

Four out of the six participants talked about how it was a calling for them and they would not work at any other type of school. These participants shared stories of how they knew at an early age they would be teachers. Each participant had a story to tell about how they would teach their cousins how to do their homework or how one of their family members struggled in school. One participant said, "I guess everybody says you go into education because it is a calling and that's definitely the way I felt." This calling is what each of these participants referred to when the days are long and the job becomes difficult. These participants shared how they felt they could make a difference in the lives of their students, giving them support, stability, and someone who loved them. One participant shared that she wanted the students to have the positive experience she had

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when she was a student, not a negative experience while in school. One participant said, "Some days I don't even know why I get in the car, but once I get to school and see these babies need me it is all worth it."

All six participants had someone in their lives that inspired them to pursue education—a parent, family member, teacher, or coach who influenced their lives in such a way that they were drawn to education. One participant shared the story of how her mother would take her at a young age to summer camps where they worked with less fortunate youths. One participant talked about how her brother struggled in school for many years until they figured out he needed additional support and a smaller class setting, while another participant discussed how her aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents were all in the helping field. She shared how these individuals inspired her to continue teaching. She said, "I always knew I would be in a job where I would be helping people. I grew up with it, it is just who I am, it gives me pleasure in helping others. It gives me pleasure to teach."

Two of the participants shared how a coach inspired them to enter the teaching profession. One shared how her coach put life into perspective and talked about what was important. She explained the detail and care he put into his athletes, describing how he showed them he cared outside the realm of education. The other participant shared how his coach was always supportive and helped him get into college. He also shared how the coach helped him make a hard decision in his life as he transferred from pre-med to education. He said, "I think you might be interested in education . . . I think you will have a great future there. We spoke and I ended up making the switch."

Summary of Question 2

By reviewing the narratives, the participants shared a variety of practices and strategies that they utilized to continue working in North Carolina–based, low-income, high-minority public elementary schools. The practices and strategies the participants utilized to support their longevity were supported through the building of relationships with students and parents; building strong positive communication among colleagues, students, and parents; valuing and respecting students; and teaching the same students for multiple years. The participants developed a strong base of essential elements that ranged from building positive relationships to teaching beyond the subject matter, focusing on the whole child. These essential elements were the foundation on which participants relied to stay the course and continue teaching in their current schools.

<center>**Research Question 3**</center>

How do the teachers' overall experiences and understanding of predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools affect their decisions to stay?

The participants' experiences and understandings of low-income, high-minority schools which influenced their decision to stay were the driving force behind Research Question 3. Throughout the exploration, participants divulged many factors that led them to continue their careers in their perspective schools. These factors come from both their experiences and how well they understand the dynamics that surround low-income, high-minority schools. As the interviews evolved, three major themes emerged from the narratives: (a) childhood experiences, (b) the role of change agent, and (c) students' home life perceptions. The factors embedded in each theme helped support the participants' decision to stay in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers leave.

Childhood Experiences

Three of the six participants shared that their mothers introduced them to working with students who attended low-income, high-minority schools. Either they explained that their mothers took them to camps that served students from low-income, high-minority schools or they were around students who attended low-income, high-minority schools via church or tutoring. Two participants shared that while growing up, they attended low-income, high-minority schools. One participant explained that his experience in low-income, high-minority schools helped him understand the meaning of differentiation. He explained, "I grew up in Title I schools . . . I can relate a lot to what those students are going through."

One participant shared that being a student in low-income, high-minority schools helped her relate to the students and what they might be going through. Another participant shared that being married to an immigrant, she understood the obstacles some of her families must overcome. She discussed the students' and families' struggle to understand the language and culture of a new country. She stated, "I have a different point of view from most people, so I am able to gain the trust and the confidence of those parents and families being that they are living many of the same situations."

Four participants shared how their own childhood experiences helped prepare them to work in a low-income, high-minority school. One participant shared that when she was growing up, her family did not have much, but they had what they needed. Another participant shared how she had had a hard life—her parents went through a divorce and her mother had to raise her on her own. One participant talked about growing up being raised by her dad. She explained how he had no help and he had never had any experience with girls. She said, "I was raised by my dad, my uncle was involved, but for

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the most part it was me and my dad. My dad was just not able to, you know, make my hair look nice every day."

One of these participants saw it from a different perspective. She explained how working with low-income, high-minority students was a different dynamic than her family. She explained that seeing how different the lives of these students were made her more compassionate. She said,

> Just seeing those kids, you know, I made more of an impact on them because I saw how their lives were so different than mine and it just did not seem fair. I wanted to be able to help them.

The Discovery of the Role as Change Agent

Five participants stated they believed they could make a real difference in the students' lives. One of these participants shared she was raised by her father and this helped her relate to the students in her class that came from single-parent homes. She explained that she understood what the students and parents were going through because she had lived in a similar situation. The participants' understanding of the low-income, high-minority schools helped them when dealing with certain issues that may arise. One participant stated,

> Knowing where the students are coming from is half the battle. My dad raised me by himself, and when I was in second grade, I had a teacher who would brush my hair in the morning because my dad was just not able to make my hair look nice every day. I know what these kids are going through.

One participant shared how she could relate to the students and that she felt it was important for them to see someone like her in their school. She explained that it was "kind of personal"; she had loved kids all her life and she knew what some of these students were going through. She explained she was concerned for their well-being and she was willing to be a solution to the problem. She stated, "I feel like children need

people they can relate to, I feel like children need somebody that not only teaches them educationally, but teaches them how to be an individual within society."

Student Home Life Perceptions

All six participants shared a story about assumptions and how it may not be so cut and dry when it comes to the students. One participant talked about parental support and how there may not be much at home. She explained that the lack of connection or parental support is due to the parents' situation, not that they are bad parents. She said, "It is because they are working not because they are bad parents, but you know, they have to do multiple jobs."

One participant explained that many times the parents had a negative perception of school due to their bad experiences. She explained that the parents might be withdrawn and somewhat defensive; this is because they remember what it was like for them. She explained that you have to show the parents how it is different. She said, "I find new ways to share information with parents. For instance, instead of saying your child needs a 504, I may say, I have found these resources that will help support your child."

One participant talked about how some students in low-income, high-minority schools have a lot more going on at home than just school. He talked about how some students may not have food on the table or a roof over their heads. He said, "Sometimes when they do not have food on the table, you know, the math book is not the most important thing to them."

He went on to talk about understanding where the students were coming from and that they have things they are going through that are out of their control. He discussed how some of his students were homeless, living in cars and hotels. He felt that the situations these students were going through created "baggage" that was carried along

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with them in all parts of their lives. These experiences helped him have a better grasp of what his students went through each day. He went to say, "I would not say I have a complete understanding of what these kids are going through, but I have a better grasp than most of the situations some of our kids face."

Each participant talked about how it seems students from low-income, high-minority schools have the world stacked against them. Even at an early age, students in low-income, high-minority schools learn that they do not have the name-brand items or in some cases even new items to wear to school. One participant shared how her students would watch television and see the Nike shoes, the designer clothes, or the name-brand items and think to themselves, "I will never have that." She said,

> With lower income students, it is sometimes hard to get any work from them. The world is already stacked against them. Many of them have no food on the table, no electricity, without these things work is not a major priority.

One participant shared a story of a situation that would sometimes accrue in her classroom. Elementary schools have snack time for their students during the day. These snacks come from the students' homes. She shared that many of the students in her classroom did not have snacks at home to bring into her class. Students in her school all received free breakfast each morning. She encouraged her students to get breakfast even if they did not want it. She created a table of unwanted breakfasts in her classroom. These breakfasts were able to serve as snacks for students who did not have one. She shared what one of her students said:

> I said, some of you get breakfast at home, but go ahead and get breakfast in case someone needs a snack. One of the kids spoke up and said, "Yeah, my mom is out of work and we do not have anything extra at home."

Summary of Question 3

By reviewing the narratives, the participants shared their experiences and understanding of low-income, high-minority schools. These experiences and understandings of the dynamics of North Carolina–based, low-income, high-minority public elementary schools helped with their decisions to remain in these schools. Their experiences and understandings were supported through essential elements of childhood experiences, the role of change agents, and students' home life perceptions. These elements influenced their decisions to stay and not leave North Carolina–based, low-income, high-minority public elementary schools.

By understanding what it is like to teach in a low-income, high-minority school, the teachers are not caught off-guard and know going into the situation that there may be challenges and obstacles to overcome. This takes away from the surprise factor and may lead to the reason why these participants decided to continue teaching in low-income, high-minority schools.

Research Question 4

How do teachers' experiences working in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools transform their opinions of perceived obstacles to their longevity and their ability to adapt to address the perceived obstacles?

The final area examined for this study was to gain a greater understanding of how the opinions of perceived obstacles helped the participants adapt to and address these obstacles. When examining the narratives, the participants shared the differences in teaching in a low-income, high-minority school and how these differences helped them understand where the students were coming from. Knowing the students and understanding helped them adapt to working at low-income, high-minority schools. The

participants' narratives revealed various obstacles that were present in their schools as well as how their experiences help them adapt to and address these perceived obstacles. The themes revealed through the narratives were (a) student transition to school setting, (b) beyond the subject matter—being a change agent and teacher experiences, and (c) professional collaboration for student support.

Student Transition to School Setting

Some of the obstacles the participants shared during the interviews centered around both education and beyond the subject matter. One participant talked about the large number of students who could not read at her school. She stated, "We have an astronomical amount of students that could not read." She explained that 22% of the students in her grade level were a part of the Exceptional Children's Program and had an Individual Education Plan. One participant shared that many of their students arrive in their classroom with deficiencies in both math and reading, while another participant talked about the number of students in her class who did not speak English. She said, "Many of the students who are in classrooms that don't speak English and are pulled out to learn English."

One participant shared that at her school, over 60% of the students were Hispanic and had English as a second language. Not only did the students struggle with the language, but the parents did too. One participant discussed the importance of providing parents with classes to help learn the language or on how to help their child. It was clear that the participants felt that communication provided should also be in the parents' native tongue. This provided its own set of unique challenges. If the students do not understand the language, determining the students' ability is made more difficult.

One participant discussed how teaching at a low-income, high-minority school is "all encompassing, all the time." She explained that you not only teach students academics but you also help them grow as humans. Another participant shared that the majority of her students came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and entered her classroom with underlying issues. She discussed how these issues must be dealt with before teaching can start. Another participant talked about how the families they work with do not like school, they do not like police officers, and they do not like teachers. She elaborated on it was not just the parents that did not want to deal with school but it was students as well. She talked about a bunch of her students who did not want to come to school. One participant shared a story about one of her students who did not want to come to school. The student cried, fought, and refused to do anything. Over time and through love, the student began to stop crying and fighting and began doing his work. By the end of the year, the student told his mother, "I like going to school, my teacher really loves me."

Beyond the Subject Matter: Being a Change Agent

Each participant shared a story about the different roles they played as teachers. One participant stated, "Being a teacher has so many more roles and unless you are in education you don't really get that." She went on to say that she is much more than a teacher; she is a nurse, counselor, and mother, among other roles. She shared that she is grateful for these roles, stating that those are the things she needed when she was a child. She said, "These roles give me the opportunity to give back."

One participant talked about it taking a certain type of person to teach in a low-income, high-minority school. She said, "I do not think teaching here is for everybody. I am not saying you have to be a better or worse teacher. I just think it is different."

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During the interviews, the participants shared how they transformed their

thoughts and attitudes to see things differently when working in low-income, high-

minority schools. One participant shared how her experiences have led her to understand

that not all children have the same experiences as others, so she has created a learning

environment that is safe for everyone. One of the key descriptors shared by all

participants is that you cannot go on assumptions or predetermined expectations. One

participant shared how she never looked at the student's folder until several weeks into

school. She went on to say that she did not listen to other teachers in the workroom or

other settings as they talked about children and their abilities. She explained that she did

this because she did not want to have any preconceived opinions about the child. She

wanted to gather her own opinion on the student and their abilities, not have a

preconceived notion that this student was going to act a certain way. She said,

> I want the kids to have a fair chance . . . I do not look at my folders the first month
> of school. I told my principal that I do not want to hear anything about the
> students; I want to learn for myself.

One participant shared that they understand some students come to school for

other reasons besides academics. She said, "I think you have to learn them before they

can learn." She went on to talk about how she would take the time to learn and love the

students first, then get into the area of academics. She made a powerful statement,

expressing where she stands. She said,

> I worry about loving those. . . . Kids that are loved at home come to school to
> learn, but my kids are not loved at home the majority of the time, so they come to
> school to be loved first.

The participants talked about knowing where these students come from makes

them compassionate and more understanding of their students' situation. One participant

shared that she feels she can make more of an impact on the students in low-income,

high-minority schools; this is why she continues to teach at her school. One participant talked about the importance of building those relationships with those students, which helped him understand where they are coming from. He explained by building those relationships the students feel they can share their situation, which leads to his ability to help them or find them the resources they need.

All six participants talked about how seeing students grow and be successful helped change their opinions on obstacles in low-income, high-minority schools. The participants shared stories of students sending them emails to let them know they were doing fine or receiving surprise visits, or even bouquets of flowers, from students they did not give up on. One participant shared how she had two students who had never passed a math end-of-grade test (EOG) before. The students believed they were failures, but at the end of the year, they passed the EOG.

Teacher Experiences

Each participant shared a story of how their experience as a teacher transformed their opinion of students who attend low-income, high-minority schools. One teacher shared the story of how one of her students was labeled as "that Kid," the slow kid who everyone made fun of. His father and grandfather were known in the community as being slow. She began to tutor the student after school and during lunch. He began to make progress and by the end of year was on grade level. She said, "I started tutoring him . . . slowly but surely he started building up confidence, started improving and he eventually was on grade level."

One participant shared how one day she had a knock on her classroom door. It was a former student who came to see her, bringing her a gift. The student thanked the teacher for believing in him, not giving up, and helping him be successful. One

participant shared how she provided classes for her parents on how to help their students at home. These classes actually inspired some of her parents to go back to school themselves. Another participant shared how one of her students started the year crying, not wanting to come to school. The participant met with the parent and explained the way her classroom worked. She said she did not give up on the student and within a couple of weeks, he stopped crying. She stated that by the end of the year the student did not want to go, running up to her and telling her how much he would miss her.

All six participants talked about how their experiences as a student helped their opinions of the perceived obstacles and how they were able to adapt to these obstacles. One participant shared her experience as a student who grew up in low-income, high-minority schools. She talked about how her teachers made a big difference in her life, both positive and negative. She talked about her fourth-grade teacher, explaining that this teacher made her feel small, unworthy, and not enough. She described the teacher as having a continuous scowl on her face, not very pleasant, and never friendly. She explained how this teacher showed favoritism and only liked the wealthy kids and the pretty kids who attended her school. She said, "In fourth grade I had a very horrible teacher, she only liked the wealthy kids, the pretty kids. I always felt like that was towards me, like I was not good enough for her."

This participant went on to explain that she always had good grades and passed all the tests but still could never measure up in the eyes of her teacher. She shared that her father was barely making it, and because she did not look like those pretty kids or the wealthy kids, it was hard.

Professional Collaboration for Student Support

All six participants talked about the variety of obstacles and struggles their students face each day. This led them to have a greater understanding of what is important. One participant talked about what was going on behind the scenes with her students that really helped her adapt to the obstacles that are present in many of our low-income, high-minority schools. She explained that it is important to see where the students are coming from. She said, "Johnny may be taking care of younger siblings; Johnny is only eight himself, so there are a lot of things behind the scenes."

This perception allowed her to find other ways to meet the needs of her students. She realized homework may not be at the top of the students' list and it was her responsibility not to punish the child but find alternative ways for the student to complete their assignments. She explained, "I give the students a sheet at the beginning of the week, but if they do not complete it they are not punished. . . . You just provide them other opportunities to complete the task you want them to do."

The area of supportive colleagues and school administration continued to be present in the narratives. One participant shared that she was able to adapt and address the perceived obstacles due to her level of comfort. She explained that her current team had been together for many years, making her extremely comfortable with teaching in a low-income, high-minority school. She said, "When you have been somewhere that long you are comfortable. We have been through our ups and downs, comfort is one, I am comfortable."

Another participant talked about how the faculty worked together to do what was best for their students. She explained that if a child had a teacher with whom they really developed a strong relationship, the school would use that as an advantage. If the student

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was having a bad day or refused to do any work, sometimes they would call on that student's former teacher to help. She said, "There were many times this year I would get called to the former student's classroom because they would work for me. They knew they could either work for me in my classroom or work in their classroom."

Summary of Question 4

The participants' experiences working in a low-income, high-minority, North Carolina–based public elementary school have transformed their opinions of perceived obstacles within these schools. Through their teaching experiences, they have developed the ability to adapt to and address the perceived obstacles. The participants lived experiences were found in four major themes, professional working environment, professional demographic information, intrinsic motivators, and extrinsic motivators, which helped them adapt to these perceived obstacles. Their ability to adapt to these obstacles has been a major factor in keeping them teaching in their current low-income, high-minority schools.

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Summary

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Through semistructured, real-world interviews, six participants shared their experiences of teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. The interview process allowed me to catch a glimpse of the lived experiences that encouraged the participants to continue teaching in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers leave. Each narrative provided a greater understanding of how the participants perceived life experiences assisted them in their decisions to stay in their low-income, high-minority schools.

The exploration of the participants' lived experiences identified obstacles and methods they utilized to address these perceived obstacles, addressing the root of

Research Question 1. The responses from the narratives uncovered the obstacles that the participants perceived to be challenging. These same narratives laid the groundwork for the discovery of the methods that the participants utilized to address these perceived obstacles. The themes of (a) professional work environment, (b) school demographic information, (c) colleague collaboration and teamwork, and (d) administrative support emerged, shedding light on why some teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools.

Research Question 2 was designed to understand the practices and strategies that teachers utilize to support their longevity in low-income, high-minority schools. The narratives revealed (a) building relationships, (b) communication, (c) value and respect students, (d) teaching the same students for multiple years, and (e) love of teaching.

The participants built relationships with their parents, students, community members, colleagues, and administrators to help support their longevity in low-income, high-minority schools. They relied on effective communication with parents to help them prevent problems before they could occur. Their respect for and how they valued students were significant in their decisions to stay, while their love for teaching made firm their place in teaching, providing them with what they needed to stay when so many of their peers go.

The participants' ability to understand low-income, high-minority schools influenced their decisions to stay and not leave, which was the catalyst behind Research Question 3. Throughout the exploration, participants shared many factors that led them to continue their careers in their current schools. These factors come from both their ability to understand the dynamics that surround low-income, high-minority schools and their

experiences working in these schools. As the interviews evolved, (a) childhood experiences, (b) the role of change agent, and (c) students' home life perceptions emerged as three major themes. The factors helped support the participants' decisions to stay in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers leave.

The final research question, Research Question 4, examined the understandings of perceived obstacles, helping the participants adapt to these obstacles as well as their ability to address these obstacles. The participants' narratives introduced various obstacles that were present in their schools as well as how their experiences helped them adapt to and address these perceived obstacles. The themes revealed through the narratives were (a) student transition to school setting, (b) beyond the subject matter: being a change agent and teacher experiences, and (c) professional collaboration for student support. These themes helped the participants adapt to and understand what it is like to teach in low-income, high-minority schools.

In the next chapter, I summarize and discuss the results as they relate to the literature in the area of teacher attrition. The implications of the study, recommendations for future studies, and limitations are also discussed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to determine the lived experiences that keep elementary school teachers teaching in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers chose to leave. This transcendental phenomenological study attempted to look through the lens of elementary-level schoolteachers who have stayed in low-income, high-minority schools for 5 years or more. This final chapter provides a summary of the findings, discussing the implications as they relate to the literature and theory in the literature review. In this chapter, the reader will also find the limitations of the study along with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study was designed with the hope of capturing the true lived experiences of the participants that keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Through semistructured, real-world interviews, the participants shared their rich, authentic, real-world experiences that influenced their decisions to stay teaching when many of their peers decided to leave after a few short years. This approach allowed me to glimpse the teachers' own lived experiences and perceptions that keep them in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers chose to leave. The following section presents a summary of the major thematic findings through inductive analysis of the participants' lived experience working in low-income, high-minority public elementary schools.

Research Question 1, *What do teachers who stay in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools identify as obstacles to their longevity?*, was

designed to help identify obstacles and the methods the participants utilized to address these perceived obstacles. During the interview process, the participants shared that their perceptions of their professional work environment may have created obstacles that were sometimes challenging to overcome. The participants recalled events at some of their schools where the facilities were in constant jeopardy due to the school's surroundings. They shared times in their careers when they had been physically assaulted, threatened, or just did not feel safe. Others shared how overcoming prejudice in their classrooms was a struggle and that at times it was hard to combat the stereotypes the students perceived to be facts. All six participants agreed that school administration could sometimes pose as an obstacle. Each participant talked about both positive and negative experiences with school administration. Many of the participants described how their mental health was challenged due to the large number of students who were homeless or lived in subpar conditions.

Despite these obstacles, all six participants shared different methods that helped them overcome these perceived obstacles and keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Among those methods were relying on a strong team and positive administrative support. Each participant shared their perception on how teaching was a "calling" and they felt they were called to work in low-income, high-minority schools. Many of the participants shared how individuals in their lives, such as a coach, teacher, parent, or family member, inspired them to pursue education. Their memories of these individuals and events help them find comfort in why they are teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. No matter how hard, frustrating, or challenging the day may be, these intrinsic motivators keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools.

Research Question 2 asked, *What specific practices and strategies do teachers who work in low-income, high-minority public elementary schools utilize to support their longevity in these schools?* Semistructured real-world interviews allowed each participant to share their rich, lived experiences that kept them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Throughout the interviews, the participants reflected upon five major themes: (a) building relationships, (b) communication, (c) value and respect students, (d) teaching the same students for multiple years, and (e) love of teaching.

Each participant shared stories of how the relationships built through the years helped convince them to continue their teaching career. The participants talked candidly about how building those positive relationships first was the cornerstone of the strategies they used to keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Five of the participants found going beyond the subject matter was a preferred strategy to assist them with their decisions to stay in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers decide to leave. In their interviews, they described going beyond the subject matter as teaching the whole child, not just academics. Many shared stories of family game nights, where they taught their students how to follow rules and understand the importance of fairness. Others shared how taking the time to teach students about family, teamwork, and the importance of everyone made staying in low-income, high-minority schools necessary.

Positive communication was a popular strategy all six participants used to help keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. The participants discussed how communicating early and often was imperative in helping them build relationships with their students, parents, and colleagues. Many of the participants shared stories of

how they would work to contact their parents to share positive affirmation. The participants talked about how important it was to share with the parents the positives about their children. This strategy proved to be effective especially when the parent contact was to discuss a problem. All participants agreed that if they had been in contact with the parents in regard to the positive situations, when a negative situation would arise, the parents would be more likely to talk with them.

Research Question 3, *How do the teachers' overall experiences and understanding of predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools affect their decisions to stay?*, focused on how the participants' experiences and understandings of low-income, high-minority schools impacted their decisions to stay when so many of their peers leave. During the interviews, the participants shared that their (a) childhood experiences, (b) the role of change agent, and (c) students' home life perceptions helped support their decisions to stay in low-income, high-minority schools.

These participants talked of situations in their past where they worked with students from low-income, high-minority schools or they were around students who attended low-income, high-minority schools via church or tutoring. They explained these experiences in low-income, high-minority schools helped them understand the meaning of differentiation and the impact they had on students' lives. Others explained growing up in low-income, high-minority schools helped them understand and relate to the students they currently served.

These real-life experiences helped the participants understand what students in low-income, high-minority schools were going through. It helped them know how to handle certain situations. One participant stated, "Knowing where the students are

coming from is half the battle." All six participants shared a story about how their assumptions may not be so cut and dry when it comes to students. This in-depth understanding of what it is like to teach in a low-income, high-minority school takes away the surprise factor and may lead to one of the reasons why these participants decided to continue teaching in low-income, high-minority schools.

Research Question 4, *How do teachers' experiences working in predominantly low-income, high-minority public elementary schools transform their opinions of perceived obstacles to their longevity and their ability to adapt to address the perceived obstacles?*, was designed to see how the opinions of perceived obstacles help the participants adapt to these obstacles and how they are able to address these obstacles.

During the interview process, the narratives revealed (a) professional work environment, (b) school demographic information, (c) colleague collaboration and teamwork, (d) administrative support, and (e) the love of teaching were key in how these differences helped them understand where the students were coming from in low-income, high-minority schools. Understanding these differences helps the participants adapt to working at low-income, high-minority schools. Some of the obstacles that were shared during the interviews centered around education and beyond the subject matter. These obstacles ranged from academic deficiencies to parent involvement. In some low-income, high-minority schools, over 60% of the students speak English as their second language. In these situations, not only do the students struggle with the language but the parents do too. The participants discussed how teaching in low-income, high-minority schools is "all encompassing, all the time." These participants not only teach students academics but also help them grow as humans, teaching them how to be productive members of society.

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Each participant shared a story about the different roles they played as teachers. They are teachers, counselors, nurses, fill-in parents, and the list could go on.

During the interviews, the participants shared how these obstacles transformed their thoughts and attitudes to see things differently when working in low-income, high-minority schools. These experiences led them to understand that not all children have the same experiences as others, so it is their job to create a learning environment that is safe for everyone. One of the key descriptors all participants shared is that you cannot go on assumptions or predetermined expectations. These participants know where these students come from, and this makes them compassionate and more understanding of their students' situation. The participants feel they can make more of an impact on the students in low-income, high-minority schools; this is why they continue to teach at their schools.

Findings in the Context of Empirical Literature

For decades, teacher turnover or attrition (Benson & MacDonald, 2018; Boe et al., 2008) coupled with the national crisis of teacher shortages has placed major concern on policy makers and educators alike (Benson & MacDonald, 2018; Harrell et al., 2004). Recently, a large number of studies have been devoted to understanding factors that lead to teacher attrition (Boe et al., 2008; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Grissom, 2011; Kelchtermans, 2017; Kelly, 2004; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018); however, little attention has been given to understanding the factors of why some teachers decide to stay in low-income, high-minority schools (Hunter-Quartz, 2003).

During the review of the literature, six themes were most abundant: finance, teacher working conditions, administrator effectiveness, teacher characteristics, student characteristics, and teacher programs. Within these themes, specific subgroups emerged and were explained in detail in Chapter 2. From this study, several of these same themes

were present. Five out of the six major themes discussed in Chapter 2 were revealed during the interview process.

Administrator's Effectiveness

The literature suggested that effective school leadership is a strong factor to consider when examining teacher retention and attrition. The support of school administrators has been found to be the strongest factor on job satisfaction in how it influences the teacher's commitment, which leads to teacher attrition (Harrell et al., 2004). Nearly one-third of teachers who leave the profession blame a lack of support from the school principal as a key reason for their departure (Buchanan, 2012; Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011). Several studies revealed teachers who felt they were supported by administration were more likely to stay in low-income, high-minority schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Studies have found that principals' behavior and perceptions of school administrators have an impact on retaining teachers in low-income, high-minority schools (Petty et al., 2012).

During the data analysis, I found the effectiveness of the school administrator was present. All six participants referenced how school administration played a positive role in why they chose to stay. The participants discussed the support they received from their school administrator helped them overcome the obstacles that can sometimes be present when working in a low-income, high-minority school.

The participants shared how administrative support could also help them overcome the obstacles that can sometimes be present when working in a low-income, high-minority school. One participant shared how their principal allowed them to love the child first and look beyond the subject matter to provide the student with a real learning

experience, not only in the area of academics, but also how to function as a member of society.

One participant stated, "Our principal has been doing a lot to support our school." She went on to say her school participated in a book study on how to teach with poverty in mind. She shared how they participated in simulation activities that allowed them to take a brief glimpse into the lives of their students. She said in the simulations, "We were a parent and we had doctor's visits, we had jobs, we were put in those real-life situations, so it makes you as a teacher see things differently."

One participant described that her administrator was fair and how that was important to her. She shared how the principal worked hard to build relationships with staff, community, parents, and students. One participant shared a memory of one of her former principals, talking about how the principal was compassionate and was willing to develop that relationship with the staff, students, and parents. She said, "This principal made a lot of changes to help our students grow academically and as people. She was willing to form those relationships and still see the whole picture."

Teacher attrition and mobility are greatly reduced when the teachers have supportive school leadership and effective school administration (Djonko-Moore, 2015). However, poor school leadership and ineffective school administration lead to increased rates of teacher attrition and mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Some of the participants shared that they had multiple principals throughout their careers. They discussed how some principals would come in trying to change things, even if they were only in the position on an interim basis. One participant shared how she had five new principals in her 9 years of teaching. She shared that each principal was different; some were very hard

to work with and made the days even harder. She went on to say the principals who are fair, supportive, and put relationships first are the ones that inspired her the most to want to stay at her current school.

Teacher Working Conditions

Working conditions, including facilities, lack of textbooks, space, and class sizes, are strong predictors of teacher retention (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Murnane & Steele, 2007) and continue to be cited as a pivotal factor in teachers' decisions to stay or go (Dunn & Downey, 2018). Poor teacher working conditions have been significantly linked to increased stress, which can lead to the teachers leaving the profession and, in some cases, developing a physical illness (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). According to the participants in this study, working conditions play a major part in why some teachers leave low-income, high-minority schools. During the interview process, the participants shared stories of when they first started teaching, describing their classrooms and the working conditions of the school. One participant in particular shared about her first school, describing it as being in a high-crime neighborhood in the middle of a large city. This participant stated, "They actually replaced the windows in my classroom every Monday morning because they would get shot out over the weekend. It was crazy (Chuckle), but I loved it." This statement is much like situations that were shared in the literature. In some studies, teachers describe walking into the classroom for the first time and seeing an empty room with a hole in the wall that allowed the teacher to see through to the outside (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018). Other teachers discussed how the paint was chipped; the temperature was 40 degrees in the classroom (Buchanan, 2009). In other studies, teachers reported mice ran rampant throughout the school (Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018).

Teacher attrition leads to a climate of lack of trust, community, and collegiality among teachers (Djonko-Moore, 2015). When teachers are able to collaborate with colleagues and have shared responsibilities for meeting school goals, it greatly decreases teacher attrition and mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015). All six participants talked about how getting along with their teammates or grade level was extremely important. The participants stated that if the teams did not get along, it created a stressful environment. One participant shared a story about a grade level at her school that did not get along. She discussed how the parents had noticed the animosity and would come to her grade level saying "I cannot wait until we get to your grade level—those teachers just don't get along."

Increased teacher stress can lead to the teachers leaving the profession and in some cases developing a physical illness (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). During the interviews, the participants shared the importance of teamwork. They shared that it is very important in helping them cope with the stressors and obstacles that come along with working in a low-income, high-minority school. Having a strong team of teachers and support staff helps them make it through the rough days and enjoy the good days even more. Each participant talked about a positive relationship with the people with whom they work and how it helps keep them coming back year after year. One participant said, "If my team was to leave I would have to go with them." The participants stressed the fact that working in low-income, high-minority schools was already difficult, and not getting along with your team makes it much worse.

The literature revealed that teachers are particularly attracted to schools with a clear mission and vision (Milanowski et al., 2009). These participants shared that in their

perspective schools, everyone shared the same mission and vision. They discussed the importance of everyone being of the same accord while working in low-income, high-minority schools. The school climate made a difference in the participants' decisions to stay in low-income, high-minority schools. Five out of six participants talked about how important the climate of the schools was. Teachers who work in schools with positive working conditions typically have greater job satisfaction, which predicts they will be less likely to depart from teaching (Cha & Cohen-Vogel, 2011).

Teacher Characteristics

The teacher's character traits or characteristics can be contributing factors in a teacher's decision to stay or leave low-income, high-minority schools. The teacher's individual differences, such as values, personal history, personality, and family background, play a strong role in determining the teacher's attrition (Milanowski et al., 2009). In this study, the teachers' past experiences, both as student and teacher, shaped their decisions to continue teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Two of the participants shared that while growing up, they attended low-income, high-minority schools. These participants explained that their experiences in low-income, high-minority schools helped them understand the meaning of differentiation. One participant stated, "I grew up in Title I schools . . . I can relate a lot to what those students are going through." The participants shared their experiences attending low-income, high-minority schools to help provide them with a greater understanding of their students' situation. The teacher's real-life experiences from their role as a teacher supported their decision to stay in low-income, high-minority schools. Each participant shared a story of how receiving letters, cards, gifts, and positive emails reinforced the teacher's decision to stay. The participants shared success stories on how students grew not only academically but also as a whole

child. One participant shared how the students in her class grew 27% in one year; however, her favorite part of the story was how two students who had never passed an EOG were successful in passing the test. Other participants shared how they were able to watch their students grow as individuals. One participant shared that when the school year started, some of her students would not interact with the school resource officer (SRO) because they were taught that they were bad. However, by the end of the school year, the students were reading, talking, and celebrating with the SRO.

Teachers tend to stay because of a sense of emotional belonging based on shared beliefs, goals, and norms within their schools (Kelchtermans, 2017). All six of the participants believed it was their calling to work in low-income, high-minority schools. One participant said, "I guess everybody says you go into education because it is a call and that's definitely the way I felt." These participants believed they could make a difference in the lives of their students, giving them support, stability, and someone who loved them. The participants wanted the students to have a positive experience, not a negative experience, as some of them experienced while in school. Many of the participants had days they did not even want to get out of the car, but once they arrived at school, it was all worth it. Many of the participants shared that working in a low-income, high-minority school was like a ministry for them, a way to give back to their community and show the same love that had been given to them. They talked about how they were able to give back to the community and show the same love they had been given in their past.

De Stercke et al. (2015) believed teachers have a "Mindfulness" to stay in teaching. *Mindfulness* meaning that these individuals pay attention to a particular way,

associated with love, kindness, and compassion. Caring teachers were reported to be the most important factor for success in high-needs schools (Petty et al., 2012). Caring in this aspect is not defined as just being "warm and fuzzy"; rather, caring implies a continuous search for competence (Petty et al., 2012). When teachers care, they want to do the very best for whom they care for (Petty et al., 2012). During the interview process, the participants continued to talk about building those relationships, loving their students, and making their students feel safe. The participants shared that in their past experiences, if the students do not think that the teacher cares, they will not perform or in some cases will withdraw and stop communicating with the teacher. Their "Mindfulness" or mind-set was to be that consistent person in the students' lives. In fact, many of the participants shared that they tried not to be absent from school because their students needed them there because they may not have a constant person at home. The participants felt that being that consistent person in the students' lives made them want to continue teaching in their respective schools. These participants loved the children first and looked beyond the subject matter to provide the student with a real learning experience, not only in the area of academics but in how to function as a member of society.

The participants shared the stories of success of how their students learned to read, began enjoying coming to school, and grew academically. They shared stories of positive letters, surprise visits from students, and parents being grateful for the job they had done with their child. These real-life experiences contribute to the longevity of these teachers and helped shape their decisions to continue teaching in low-income, high-minority schools.

Student Characteristics

Demographics of a school's student population has been the focus of research in numerous studies (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Borman & Dowling, 2008).

Research has found many students from low-income, high-minority schools are disenchanted, disengaged, have bad attitudes, and just do not want to be in school (Dunn & Downey, 2018). During this study the participants shared experiences they had with students who were disenchanted, were disengaged, had bad attitudes, and just did not want to be in school. One participant talked about how one of their students felt defeated because he was not able to complete the work. Other participants shared how their students had never passed an EOG test or could not read. One participant shared how some of their students would be both verbally and physically aggressive, assaulting them during school hours. Another participant shared a story about a child who did not want to come to school. She explained that the student would cry, fight, curse, and have major issues with attending school.

Some research found that a high number of students who are from low-income, high-minority homes typically have less support at home (Jacob, 2007). This statement was true during this particular study. Each participant shared a story about students who were homeless, did not have food on the table, had parents who were out of work, and other target events the students had to endure. One participant shared that some of her students do not see their parents for several days because of work schedules or having to stay with relatives because of homelessness situations. These participants took pride in their ability to be a constant in their students' lives.

Teacher relationships with families also contribute to the teacher's decision to stay or go (Simon & Johnson, 2015). During this study, all six participants discussed how

important positive communication is when it comes to parents. Each participant talked about contacting parents early and often, making it a habit to contact parents frequently. This communication was not of a negative nature but to share how well their students were doing in class. This action helped build early positive relationships with parents, getting the parents on their side.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several notable limitations. First, the participant sample is largely made up of individuals that identify as female. Only one out of the six participants identified as male. The number of male teachers in public schools continues to decrease and is even more dire at the elementary level. Due to the research and the participant sampling, this limitation may prevent additional insights within teacher attrition in low-income, high-minority schools. Common barriers that may contribute to the lack of males in elementary education are gender differences, societal expectations, and the perception that teacher training often ignores obstacles that male teachers may face, leaving them unprepared for the career (Medford et al., 2013). This factor may shape the participants' perceived perceptions of the experiences that keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools.

Second, my professional role as a building-level administrator may have had an unintended impact, either negatively or positively, on the participants in this study. None of the participants were under my direct supervision or worked on the same campus as me, however, their respect for the position may have superseded how they answered the interview questions. While my approach to the studies volunteers was not that as a fellow educator, but that as a researcher, I acknowledge that my position as a building-level administrator was evident during the interview process. Therefore some participants may

have refrained from sharing their lived experiences that would reflect a more negative aspect of their low-income, high-minority schools.

Finally, it is important to mention the challenges and limitations the COVID-19 pandemic presented for this study. Nothing in recent history has affected the United States or the world like the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the data collection process of the study, the COVID-19 pandemic had closed schools, restaurants, stores, college campuses, churches, movie theaters, and entertainment venues and sporting events. Due to government executive orders, most of the country and the world was on quarantine, expected to stay home. This made in-person, face-to-face interviews impossible. Therefore, for the safety of all participants involved, all interviews were conducted virtually, via a virtual live conferencing platform. The virtual interview process was very appropriate for this study, allowing rich, robust lived experiences to be shared. Using the virtual platform, participants were comfortable in the setting of their choosing. The ability to choose their setting helped promote their responses to be authentic and honest (Raworth et al., 2012).

However, the ability to choose the setting also led to minor challenges, such as brief interruptions, including dogs barking, individuals walking by the camera, and background noises. These brief interruptions can also occur during face-to face interviews; however, with the virtual platform, these interruptions may be enhanced. Due to the rapid transition the world and the education system underwent, the teachers began to work from their homes beginning March 2020. Much of the education system had a massive transition to online learning, remote learning, and working from home or remote locations, all while attempting to teach students and address their basic needs. That being

said, the virtual platform data collection setting and timing of this data collection may have led to the additional limitation of the season of the data collection. Much of the data collection occurred in the summer, during which many teachers do not work. In combination with the aforementioned limitations, this may have decreased the participant sampling pool and accessibility to increase participant involvement and knowledge of this study.

Implications for Professional Practice

This transcendental phenomenological study was intended to gather a greater understanding of the phenomenon of why elementary teachers in low-income, high-minority schools in North Carolina voluntarily remain in their schools when so many other teachers leave these same types of schools. A large portion of literature has been devoted to understanding factors that lead to teacher attrition (Boe et al., 2008; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Grissom, 2011; Kelchtermans, 2017; Kelly, 2004; Mawhinney & Rinke, 2018); however, little attention has been given to understanding the factors affecting why teachers remain in low-income, high-minority schools (Hunter, 2003).

In my findings and summary, the data analysis has shown that the intrinsic motivators, including the love of teachers in low-income, high-minority schools, display correlations to the importance of administrative distribution of extrinsic motivators, including administrative support and the professional work environment.

Effective school administrators in low-income, high-minority schools promote teacher retention by recognizing teacher accomplishments and their hard work, providing the teachers with a clear vision, which provides the teachers with a reason to stay because they want to see the outcome (Grissom, 2011). Additional studies have linked administrative support to teacher retention (Cancio et al., 2013). Throughout the

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narratives, each participant shared a story of how their administrator was supportive and effective in their current school. When interviewed, the participants shared that there are two types of administrators: one who very much worries about test scores and one who very much worries about relationships. It may be advantageous for district-level administrators to review their principals' educational philosophies before placing them in low-income, high-minority schools. Districts may also explore strategies that ensure principals have the skills needed to create a positive work environment (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). With the correct leadership in place in low-income, high-minority schools, teachers may stay longer because of their happiness or well-being, which may foster the love of teaching.

Teacher characteristics were recognized as a theme that keeps teachers in low-income, high-minority schools. All six of the participants interviewed empathetically exclaimed that they loved teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. Each participant shared that they would much rather teach in low-income, high-minority schools in comparison to more affluent schools. If district- and building-level administrators could predetermine applicants' desire to teach in low-income, high-minority schools, it may increase teachers' willingness to remain in low-income, high-minority schools.

Through the narratives, the echo of supportive colleagues rang loud and clear. Teachers who felt they had a positive working relationship with their peers (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018) and were able to collaborate with colleagues to share responsibilities for meeting school goals saw greatly decreased teacher attrition and mobility (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Four of the six participants described how important it was to work with a

strong team that shared the same views and teaching philosophy. The participants

repeatedly explained that having really good colleagues who shared the same vision and

had good attitudes is a key factor that keeps them teaching in low-income, high-minority

schools. It may be beneficial for district- and building-level administrators to incorporate

opportunities for colleagues to build those positive relationships, collaborate with one

another, and create a school culture that emphasizes teamwork along with an atmosphere

that begets support.

Some factors that have been discussed may provide policy makers, school

districts, and school administrators with a road map to help navigate this ever-winding

road of teacher attrition, specifically in low-income, high-minority schools. Professional

development and a more intensified vetting process may debunk teaching's reputation of

being a "revolving door" (Boe et al., 2008).

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Recommendations for Future Research

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A large body of research has been dedicated to understanding the factors of

teacher attrition. The most consistent finding from these studies is that teachers are more

likely to leave schools that have a large population of low-income, high-minority students

(Grissom, 2011). However, there has been little attention given to understanding the

factors of why teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools (Hunter-Quartz,

2003). Schools that experience the greatest staffing challenges are those with the largest

number of low-income, high-minority students (Benson & MacDonald, 2018; Grissom,

2011). Additional research would help uncover valuable factors and/or strategies teachers

who stay use to combat the hurdles they may face working in low-income, high-minority

schools.

For this study, six participants from low-income, high-minority schools shared their lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of their teacher experiences that keep them teaching in low-income, high-minority schools. As discussed as a limitation, the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic may have limited participants' desire to engage in this study. Even though Creswell (1998) suggested that the sample size for a phenomenological study be from 5 to 25 participants, studies with a larger number of participants may add additional support to the findings of this study.

Future research may include studying participants based on different location specifications. One area could involve the specifications of rural, urban, and suburban low-income, high-minority schools to help examine potential commonalities or differentiations pertaining to the teachers' willingness to stay in low-income, high-minority schools. This study was conducted in the southeastern United States, whereas future studies could include other regions of the United States. Another specification for future study could include the distinction and comparison of unionized versus nonunionized locations in the focus on reasons that support teacher retention within low-income, high-minority schools in those districts.

Summary

This phenomenological study sought to understand the lived experiences of six teachers who have spent 5 years or more teaching in the same low-income, high-minority schools. The scholarly literature added valuable insight to reasons why teachers leave low-income, high-minority schools, with very little examining the reasons why some stay. This study focused on the reasons why some teachers stay in low-income, high-minority schools when so many of their peers choose to leave. The literature helped add insight to the discussions of the research findings. The outcomes of this investigation

provided implications for professional practice, specifically for policy makers, district administrators, and school administrators. Directly related to the reasons that keep teachers in low-income, high-minority schools, the rich lived experiences of these six participants helped paint a picture of the obstacles they must overcome every day working in low-income, high-minority schools. The narratives provided a deeper understanding of how teachers in low-income, high-minority schools view their students and how these views help shape their perceptions of these students. The strategies and processes these teachers use to help them overcome obstacles helped provide valuable information on why they have decided to remain in low-income, high-minority schools.

Due to the paucity of research on this topic, the field may benefit from additional research in the area of retention in low-income, high-minority schools. Studies involving a larger number of participants may provide further support to the findings generated during this study. Additional research could involve specifications of rural, urban, and suburban low-income, high-minority schools, examining potential commonalities or differences pertaining to the teachers' willingness to stay in low-income, high-minority schools. Last, future studies could include other regions of the United States, including the distinction between and comparison of unionized versus nonunionized locations in the focus on reasons for teacher retention within low-income, high-minority schools in those districts.

Concluding Remarks

The findings of this study suggest that the participants' lived experiences within their own personal educational experience or their professional teaching experience transformed their desire to stay in a low-income, high-minority school setting. Furthermore, the findings suggest that when the participant had a good experience within

their professional teaching experience due to working conditions or administrative support, that would in turn give the participant's students a good educational experience, which would support academic growth and potentially a desire to go into the educational field. Low-income, high-minority schools present their own set of challenges and unique transitional stressors that are different from more low-poverty, low-minority schools. Teachers who work in these schools tend to leave more frequently and often than their peers who teach at more affluent schools. This study attempted to provide a deeper understanding with the hope of filling the gap in scholarly knowledge, while attempting to halt the "revolving door."

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of the Project: Why Some Stay When So Many Leave: A Phenomenological Study

on Why Teachers Remain in Low-Income, High-Minority Schools

Principal Investigator: Michael Chad Hovis, Doctoral Student, University of North

Carolina at Charlotte

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Tracey Benson, Educational Leadership, University of North

Carolina at Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Important Information You Need to Know

- The purpose of this study is to examine why some elementary teachers who teach in low-income, high-minority schools, in North Carolina decided to stay when so many others leave.

- We are asking teachers who meet the following criteria: (a) must hold a current teaching license in elementary education, (b) must be currently teaching in a low-income, high-minority school, and (c) must have taught in the same low-income, high-minority school for five or more years.

- Some of the interview questions we'll ask you are personal. For example, we'll ask you about factors that have keep you teaching in your current school. These questions are personal and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer. You will not personally benefit from taking part in this research but our study results may help us better understand why some teachers continue to teach in low-income, high-minority schools.

- The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Your name will not be included in the recording.

- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?
The purpose of this study is to better understand the why some teachers continue to teach in low-income, high-minority schools, when many of their peers decide to leave.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because you have been teaching in a low-income, high-minority school for five years or more.

What will happen if I take part in this study?
If you choose to participate you will take part in a one-hour-long interview and a 30 minute follow-up interview. The interviews will take place as a virtual, face-to-face meeting at a time of your choosing. You may be asked to review your interview responses to check for accuracy.

What benefits might I experience?
You will not benefit directly from being in this study. The information collected in this study will assist school administrators and policy makers in understanding key factors that encourage teachers to remain teaching in predominantly low-income, high-poverty, high-minority schools.

What risks might I experience?
In this particular study some interview questions are personal and you might experience some mild emotional discomfort. You may choose to skip a question you do not want to answer.

How will my information be protected?
You are asked to provide your email address as part of this study. We will use your email address to schedule an appointment and provide you with this consent form. To protect your privacy (identity), your name will not be used in the study. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. While the study is active, all data will be stored in a password-protected data base that can be can be accessed by the primary researcher. Only the research team will have routine access to the study data. Other people with approval from the Investigator, may need to see the information we collect about you. Including people who work for UNC Charlotte and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study is over?
After this study is complete, study data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies without asking for your consent again or as may be needed as part of publishing our results. The data we share will NOT include information that could identify you.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?
You will receive $10 Starbucks gift card. After you complete the interview you will receive an e-gift card.

What other choices do I have if I don't take part in this study?

Your choice to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to opt out of participating at any time. This study is not tied to or affiliated with any organization and is only for research purposes.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?
For questions about this research, you may contact [contact information removed].

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 704–687–1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Consent to Participate

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

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____
Name (PRINT)

_____
Signature   Date

_____
Name & Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your experience in teaching.

    a. What grade level do you teach?

    b. How long have you taught in the grade?

    c. What other grade levels have you taught?

    d. Please tell me more about . . .

Information-Seeking Questions

2. Please tell me why you decided to start teaching.

    a. Please tell me more about . . .

3. What is it about your particular grade level that you enjoy the most?

    a. Please tell me more about . . .

    b. What do you enjoy about . . . ?

    c. Is that something you feel motivates you to continue teaching in this grade level?

4. What is it about this school that keeps you in teaching?

    a. Please tell me more about . . .

5. In your own words, tell me what one factor keeps you teaching. How does [insert

    factor] keep you motivated to keep you teaching?

    a. Please tell me more about . . .

Demographics

What age range do you fall in? (Options: 20–30/31–40/41–50/51–60/61+)

What race do you most identify with?

What gender do you identify with?

How many years have you been in education?

    a. Have you always been teacher?

What are the different grade levels you have taught in the past?