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Factors Associated to Teacher Longevity in a Title I Elementary School

A Qualitative Narrative Inquiry Study

by

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A DISSERTATION

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Factors Associated to Teacher Longevity in a Title I Elementary School

A Qualitative Narrative Inquiry Study

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University of Nebraska, 2017

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The potential of our nation is hinged upon the strength of our educational system across all 50 states. Public education is the backbone of our country and continues to be a spotlight of focus for many. In 1983, President Ronald Regan shared the “Nation at Risk” report, based on the findings from the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report claimed a level of mediocrity permeated the public education system and children were lagging behind compared to children in other first world countries. This landmark report put a level of accountability on school officials to create higher performing students in every classroom. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Goals 2000 Act, which began to create standards of educational reform. As the presidential office turned over, the focus on education in America did not lessen. President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind act in 2002, which continued a string of accountability factors, including requirements for staffing practices.

Even with increased government policies and reform efforts related to teacher staffing, research continues to reveal challenges related to teacher recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining quality teachers across the country. “Over a decade ago we estimated that between 40 to 50% of those who enter teaching leave teaching within

5 years. This figure has been widely reported since, but it was only a rough estimate using cross-sectional national data. Recently, using national longitudinal data, Perda (2013, in Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014, p. 24) was able to more accurately document rates of cumulative beginning attrition. He found that more than 41% of new teachers leave teaching within 5 years of entry. Moreover, we have also found that these already high levels have been going up since the late 1980's" (Ingersoll et. al., 2014 p. 24).

This narrative inquiry qualitative study explores the topic of teacher longevity by conducting in-depth interviews of four teachers who defied the national statistics by teaching in the same Title I elementary school for 30 or more years. This study will capture the stories of each teacher and their rationale for staying in the same school for 30 years or more.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The importance of a high quality teacher is invaluable. Teaching and learning are considered by many as blend of art and science; therefore, every classroom demands a quality teacher as the deliverer of instruction, builder of hope, and source of optimism. Researchers have quantified the impact of having an effective versus ineffective teacher.

But research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most. When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership (Rand Education, 2012, p. 1).

While we understand the level of impact teachers have in the classroom, many states are seeing an epidemic in terms of teacher turnover. “Nationally, about 30% of new teachers leave the profession after 5 years, and the turnover rate is 50% higher in high-poverty schools as compared to more affluent ones” (Ronfeldt, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). The trend line has been a concern and continues to be a concern. Approximately 6,000 first year teachers left the career in 1987-88. More than four times as many teachers left the career in 2007-18. Overall, the percent of teachers leaving the career after the first year rose 34% from 1988 to 2008 (Ingersoll et al., 2014, p. 25). There are many factors that attribute to teachers leaving the profession and the numbers are staggering enough to warrant a closer look at the topic.

The overall cost associated with teacher turnover is worthy of investigation with school budgets being a topic of scrutiny across the nation. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) conducted a study revealing the actual costs to a district. Data for the study was gathered from five school districts across the nation;

Chicago Public Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, Granville County Schools, Jemez Valley Public Schools and Santa Rosa Public Schools. The key findings were pronounced. The actual costs varied from \$4,366 per teacher leaving in Jemez Valley, New Mexico to \$17,872 per teacher leaving in Chicago Public Schools. This equates to over \$86 million spent on teachers leaving in one district. “In a 2005 policy brief on turnover costs, the Alliance for Excellent Education tapped a U.S. Department of Labor estimate that attrition costs an employer 30% of the leaving employee’s salary. The Alliance estimated national teacher turnover costs at \$4.9 billion” (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, n.d.).

School districts across the nation put a high value on teacher recruitment and professional development by allocating a significant portion of the school budget to such endeavors. Investing in teachers is an essential element with the growing demands associated with standards based accountability. While it is difficult to estimate the actual costs associated with professional development, school districts are allocating thousands of dollars per teacher. In 2015, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) published a report entitled, “The Mirage.” Researchers studied three large diverse school districts and one charter network to find relationships between professional development and teacher quality. Researchers interviewed more than 10,500 teachers and over 500 school leaders. The report estimates districts were spending an average of \$18,000 per teacher each year on costs associated to professional development (Hasiotis et al., 2015). Many districts simply lose out on this investment with high rates of teacher turnover. With a high

demand put on school districts to be fiscally responsible with limited resources, this reality can put a school district in a quandary.

In addition to analyzing the costs of teacher turnover associated with school budgets, researchers have also considered the impact teacher turnover has on student achievement. Student achievement is influenced by many variables that have a direct or indirect impact on progress, which makes it difficult to pinpoint exact causes. It does warrant a closer look at the impact teacher turnover has on student learning.

Guin (2004) studied 66 elementary schools in a large urban district to look at relationships between school-level turnover and the proportion of students meeting standards on statewide assessments in reading and math. Pearson correlations were significant and negative, demonstrating that schools with higher turnover also had lower achievement. However, the findings are clearly not causal as low achievement may cause teacher to leave, teachers leaving may cause low achievement, or a third factor (e.g., poverty, crime, or poor school leadership) may simultaneously cause both low achievement and high turnover (Ronfeldt et al., 2011).

Although the level of impact teacher turnover has on student achievement is difficult to quantify, high rates of teacher turnover is proven to have a direct correlation to low student achievement scores.

Given the statistics across the nation, it is evident that teacher turnover is a problem. This investigation continues with developing an understanding as to the reasons associated with teacher attrition. While there are many factors associated with attrition, there have been studies undertaken to understand the phenomenon more thoroughly. Certain elements associated to personal reasons, such as retirements, child rearing, health problems, family moves make up a relatively small percentage of teachers.

Forty-two percent of all departures report as reasons job dissatisfaction or the desire to pursue a better job, another career, or to improve career opportunities in

or out of education. Dissatisfaction underlying migration is most often listed as being due to low salaries, lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, and lack of teacher influence over decision making (Ingersoll, 2001).

The topic of teacher turnover is worthy of further review due to the impact associated with student achievement and school budgets. There are many variables that impact the learning process. Stabilizing teacher turnover rates may have a strong influence on student achievement in addition to maximizing school budgets.

Purpose of the Research

The structure of this dissertation research is to analyze four teachers with 30 plus years of teaching in the same Title I elementary school in various urban and rural communities in Nebraska. The research will be a qualitative research study. I will be using a narrative inquiry approach as the research method. The interview data will be designed in such a way that allows the researcher to gain insight as to why the teachers have remained consistently teaching in the same Title I school for 30 years. Overall, the purpose of this research will be to better understand the problem of teacher turnover by analyzing four teachers who have defied the national statistics.

Research Questions

People make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them. Stories are constantly being restructured in the light of new events because stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 2).

With the research method being narrative inquiry, the selection of research questions will be carefully considered based on the fact that the participant will be telling stories of his/her long career in teaching. While there are many factors that influence a teacher's

decision to transfer or stay, this study will specifically analyze themes related to four experiences of teaching in a Title I school for 30 years. The following grand tour research question is considered for this study:

1. Based on four teachers' experiences and perspectives of teaching in a Title I elementary school, what factors have contributed to these teachers having a long career in the same Title I school?

While this grand tour question will direct the focus and purpose of this study, additional secondary questions are also considered for this research.

- A. Research has indicated that teachers who have a higher propensity to leave are more likely to work in isolation.

Although Lortie's (1975) classic depiction of the school as an 'egg-crate,' where teachers work in isolation and prize their classroom privacy, remains apt in many schools today, subsequent survey research shows that teachers' preferences about collaboration have changed in the last half-century (Johnson & Simon, 2013).

Throughout 30 years of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues.

- B. Studies have shown teachers who leave their positions spend less time outside of school on school related activities.

The results imply that the more time that a teacher spends outside of school hours on student related activities, or even non-student related activities, the less likely that teacher is to leave the profession. This suggests that those teachers who are investing more into their job are those who are unlikely to leave the profession (Crandell & Howell, 2009, p. 22).

Describe the experiences outside of the school setting that you have participated in during your teaching career.

C. Studies have also shown schools that foster a poor working culture have higher rates of teacher turnover.

But one of the largest studies that used data from the National Center for Educational Statistics revealed that school-climate-related factors- such as inadequate support from school administrators, student discipline problems, and limited faculty input into school decision making-contributed to higher rates of turnover after controlling for the characteristics of both teachers and schools (Ingersoll, 2001).

How would you describe your school culture and work environment?

The grand-tour question along with the sub-questions will be explored through a narrative inquiry method of qualitative research by studying four teachers who have taught in a Title I school for 30 years.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study will be guided by a narrative inquiry qualitative research design. Two prominent researchers in the field of narrative inquiry are Canadian researchers, Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin. Connelly and Clandinin first used narrative inquiry to describe an approach through storytelling. “Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). “Narrative inquiry is set in human stories of experience. It provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 1). Narrative inquiry is a relatively new research design that has gained credibility amongst researchers over the last two decades across various research fields. “However, the value of narrative is not only restricted to research on teaching and

learning – it can be valuable to research in a wide range of other areas, such as medicine, science, economics, politics and law” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 15). The basic premise of narrative inquiry values the lived experience as represented in linguistic terms. The ‘told story’ has value and meaning that is difficult to extract from other research designs.

Stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience; the past with the present, the fictional with the ‘real’, the official with the unofficial, personal with the professional, the canonical with the different and unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the future for our students and ourselves so that it will be richer or better than the past (Dyson & Genishi, 1994, p. 242).

Telling and listening to stories are a daily occurrence. In fact, storytelling is an element that brings people together. “Narrative is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning” (Webster & Martova, 2007, p. 1).

Schools as organizations are complex institutions that embody the essence of society. One of the leading researchers in the field of teacher shortage and turnover is Dr. Richard Ingersoll, Professor of Education and Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. His perspective on teacher turnover is to better understand the causes and consequences of teacher attrition through the lens of organizational theory and sociology. “The theoretical perspective I have adopted in this research is drawn from organizational theory and the sociology of organizations, occupations, and work” (Ingersoll, 2004). This research will mirror Dr. Ingersoll’s organizational theory and sociology of organizations, occupations, and work model.

The factors related to teacher turnover are multifaceted and challenging to extract from the lived experience. A qualitative narrative inquiry design puts value on human experiences and stories that are difficult for a quantitative approach to extract. According to Webster and Mertova (2007),

quantitative methods can, in many instances, be rather ineffective with regard to certain important aspects of subjects or phenomena under study. We find that they frequently tend to overlook complex issues which are, for instance, considered significant by the participants in the research (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3).

The narrative inquiry research framework is designed to closely analyze the factors associated with the experiences of teaching within a Title I elementary school for 30 years. This framework was chosen to further understand the phenomenon of teacher attrition and the experience of various teachers who have defied the turnover statistics.

This research will set out to better explain the experiences that contribute to four teachers having a long career in a Title I elementary school. Storytelling is a prominent method of qualitative research where communication is the key element that unfolds the research,

through the use of well timed questions, participants in a research project re-tell their understanding of events that have occurred in their professional (and possibly private) lives and, perhaps, have changed their perspective on their current and future professional practice (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 103).

The framework for this study will follow the critical event methodology for narrative inquiry as designed by Connelly and Clandinine and further referenced by researchers Leonard Webster and Patricie Mertova. The critical event methodology as a research design can be somewhat complex given the human element of storytelling. A visual representation to compliment the narrative explanation is included in figure 1.

The layout of this research design is driven by key elements that encompass the participant's life experiences (see Figure 1). "The methodology contains four constituent parts: research processes, negotiations that occur, risks that may arise, and preparation and auditing results" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 104).

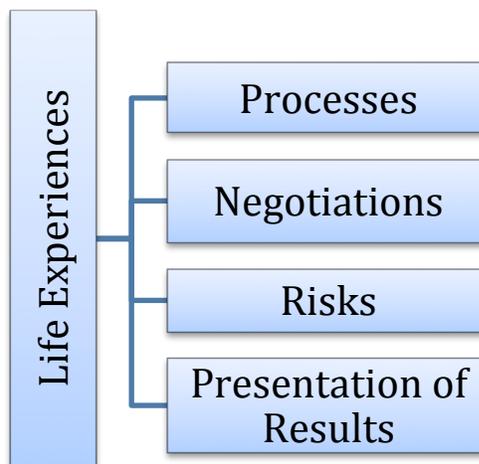


Figure 1. Key elements.

Process pertains to the tools, criteria, and structure of the data collection process. The second category is referred to as negotiation, which involves establishing caring and empowering relationships with the participant. "This understanding of the negotiation of entry highlights the way narrative inquiry occurs within relationships among researchers and practitioners, constructed as a caring community" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). The third component encompasses the risks associated with the research and ensuring integrity throughout. The last section of the framework are the results and describing them in a way that allows the reader to form an understanding associated with

the participant's longevity in teaching. Connelly and Clandinin's core element of a narrative design is to recognize the notion of narrative and life goes together in relevant and meaningful ways (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10).

Definition of Terms

In order to create an element of consistency and common understanding within this research study, it is important to create a clear definition of terms that will be relied on throughout the research study. To better understand a teacher's lived experiences as it relates to teaching in a Title I school, it is helpful to have commonality with key terms.

Attrition—The term attrition is a primary cornerstone of this research and while it seems straight forward, it is imperative to have a definition that frames the entire research.

Teacher attrition is complicated because it may be defined as a teacher moving to a different school (transfer attrition), leaving the teaching profession for an alternate occupation (exit attrition), or leaving the labor force completely (retirement). Each type of attrition poses unique challenges for schools and student outcomes (Crandell & Howell, 2009, p. 1).

A careful analysis of attrition will also include transfer attrition between schools and retirement attrition (Crandell & Howell, 2009, p. 2).

Title I School—Selected schools with a Title I designation are those schools that receive additional funding through the federal government to support disadvantaged students due to poverty. Title I is a part of the Elementary and Secondary Act first passed in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson.

Title I Teachers—With a focus of creating consistency among teachers who teaches in a Title I school, the common definition of Title I teachers includes any teacher

that teaches in a designated Title I school. Teachers in other Title I designated positions (targeted Title I, Pull-Out Title I, Self-Contained Title I) will not be included in this study.

Longevity—The heart of this research is focused on teacher longevity in a Title I school. For the purpose of this research, longevity is understood to be the duration of 30 plus years of teaching in the same Title I elementary school.

Propensity to Leave—Propensity to leave is understood to be the behavioral tendencies that influence the decision to leave.

Nebraska Public School System—The subjects within this research will be certificated public school teachers within the state of Nebraska. Nebraska is made up of 245 rural and urban school districts that support 1,000 public Pre-K thru Secondary schools. The Nebraska public school system serves approximately 315,500 students. School districts across the state are categorized depending on the number of inhabitants within the district. Table 1 is a summary of the number of class size districts in the state of Nebraska.

Table 1

Number of Class Size Districts in Nebraska

Class Category	Number of Inhabitants	Number of Districts
Class 2	Fewer than 1,000	18
Class 3	Between 1,001 and 99,999	225
Class 4	Between 100,000 and 199,999	1
Class 5	More than 200,000	1

Assumptions

The primary assumption made prior to the research is that the participant is open, reflective, and honest in his/her accounts of retelling his/her stories. The narrative inquiry approach is dependent upon the participant's ability to openly share his/her experiences related to teaching in a Title I school. In order to ensure authentic and open storytelling from the participant, the researcher will work to establish a trusting and genuine relationship with the participant so he/she feels valued throughout the study.

Delimitations

There are delimitations within the study that define the parameters of the research. The research design will be a narrative inquiry qualitative approach, which will include choosing a participant that fits the criteria of teaching in a Title I school for 30 plus years. Identifying this participant is essential to the research and will set out to better understand his/her story as a teacher with longevity. Data collection will take place during the 2016-17 school year on a series of dates and locations that are agreeable to the participant.

Limitations

The main limitation within this study is a feature of qualitative research in that the findings are not tested to discover whether they are statistically significant or due to chance. Interview data will be collected, transcribed, and coded into themes that align with the primary research question.

Based on four teachers' experiences and perspectives of teaching in a Title I elementary school, what factors have contributed to him/her having a long career in the same school?

The data sample will be small in size with a series of three to four interview sessions. The interview sessions will take place during the 2016-17 school year and will create a small snapshot of one teacher's story associated with teacher longevity.

Teachers will be randomly selected based on years of service in a Title I elementary school. A list of teachers will be obtained through the Nebraska Department of Education. Teachers will be contacted via email based on location and size of district. An attempt will be made to select teachers across the state of Nebraska representing the different district class sizes. In order to avoid bias, participants within the district the researcher works will not be contacted.

Significance of the Study

Teacher turnover is a significant concern across the nation. While some school districts have a track record of retaining a high number of teachers from one year to the next, this would not be the case for the vast majority of school districts across the nation. In fact, most school districts consider teacher turnover a significant problem. Data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (Crandell & Howell, 2009, p. 1) estimates one third of teachers leave the profession within three years. Upwards of 40% of teachers leave within their first 5 years of teaching and the percentage increases to 50% of teachers who teach in urban school districts (Crandell & Howell, 2009, p. 1). School districts that consistently experience high turnover rates deal with a multitude of issues that ultimately have an impact on student learning while costing the district millions of dollars. "High rates of turnover make it difficult for schools to attract and develop effective teachers and, as a result, low-income and minority student who attend

so-called ‘hard-to-staff schools’ are routinely taught by the least experienced, least effective teachers” (Johnson & Simon, 2013, p. 2). Teacher turnover is considered by many to be an epidemic across the nation, especially in large urban districts.

School officials operate in an era of high transparency and accountability with managing budgets. School districts are spending millions of dollars recruiting, hiring, and training teachers, only to have them leave after a few years in the classroom. While the costs associated with teacher turnover can be difficult to determine, studies have reported large urban school districts spending millions of dollars. “Most studies of teacher turnover costs have produced estimates that are quite large, ranging from 20% to 200% of the leaving teacher’s salary” (Barnes et al. n.d. p. 9). Costs associated with chronic teacher turnover can put a strain on school budgets year after year. With limited resources and scarce funding, school districts need to figure out how to retain quality teachers in the classroom.

Measuring student achievement is complex given the number of variables that have a direct and indirect impact on learning. Researchers are beginning to analyze the impact teacher turnover has on student achievement. “Results demonstrate that teacher turnover has a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA” (Ronfeldt et al., 2011, p. 17). The report provides further evidence to show students who suffer the most are African American males in high poverty schools. With such high rates of teacher turnover and schools struggling to retain quality teachers, students are left to suffer the consequences.

With the state of education consisting of high accountability standards paired with limited resources, the topic of turnover is worthy of an in-depth analysis. Many districts are trapped in a chronic cycle of recruiting, hiring, training, and replacing teachers. Studying teachers who have defied the statistics by teaching for 30 plus years in a Title I school is a critical step in understanding the realities associated with teaching in a Title I school. If school officials can begin to understand factors associated with teacher turnover through the lens of teachers who have demonstrated longevity, they are more likely to build systems of support to reduce turnover rates, which will positively impact school budgets, recruitment, and ultimately student learning.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The benefit of a high quality educational system in America is paramount to the success of our nation locally, nationally, and globally. We are a country that is dependent upon an educational system that produces well-educated individuals who bring value to society. The value of a good teacher is no secret. School personnel continue to seek out the best teachers available with the belief that their students' success depends on it (Center for Public Education, 2005).

Teachers have impact, and quality teachers have a higher degree of impact on students academically, socially, and emotionally. Multiple studies have been conducted to quantify the value of a highly effective teacher. While the methods of measuring impact can be difficult, the results are consistently clear. The state of Tennessee created a Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) to quantify the value of teacher effectiveness through a data-tracking system to measure annual gains in test scores. The study shows positive effects linked with being taught by a highly effective teacher, had a stronger positive impact for poor and minority students than for white and affluent students (Center for Public Education, 2005). Additional findings in this study suggest the impact accumulates over multiple years. Students who were taught by effective teachers for successive years demonstrated larger gains compared to students who had minimally effective teachers one after another. For example, a fifth-grade student who had 3 consecutive highly effective teachers scored between 52 and 54 percentile points ahead of students who had three consecutive teachers who were minimally effective

considering they had the same achievement prior to entering the second grade (Center for Public Education, 2005). Research also suggests that teacher experience has a positive effect on student achievement as well. According to Kini and Podolsky (2016), “teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout a teacher’s career. The gains from experience are highest in teachers’ initial years, but continue for teachers in a second and often third decades of their careers” (p. 15).

With such a high value on teacher effectiveness, a major topic arises in regard to teacher quality and retention. Our nation continues to struggle with topics involving teacher quality and retention, especially in the most impoverished communities. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) designed the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) in conjunction with the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) in order to gather staffing data across the nation in a consistent and systematic manner. The survey data is one of the most relied upon in the field as it provides the most comprehensive view of staffing statistics across the nation. “Among public school teachers with 1-3 years of experience, 80% stayed in their base-year school, 13% moved to another school, and 7% left teaching in 2012-13” (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). The results become more pronounced to show upwards of 40 – 50% of teachers leave the profession all together after 5 years.

Upon review of various studies, which will be further analyzed within this chapter, it is additionally concerning to discover this epidemic is not a current one. Formal research from as far back as the 1960’s reveal similar statistics within our nation. The literature suggests there is a level of fluidity within the profession. Various factors,

many of which are specific to certain policies that govern people or national events that take place across the nation.

Given the formidable statistics of teacher turnover, the purpose of this literature review is to critically analyze existing literature in a temporal structure that gives a chronological understanding of teacher turnover as researched in 1940's, 1960's, 1980's, early 2000's and of current. Issues related to teacher turnover have been thoroughly analyzed; therefore, an approach was utilized that referenced literature across various decades.

The review of literature was conducted in a manner that included an in-depth key word search through Google Scholar. Key descriptors were teacher attrition, teacher turnover, and teacher longevity. The search was then paired down to key articles that showed similarities in regard to an in-depth research associated with teacher turnover while analyzing the attributes to such an epidemic across the various decades. The review of literature includes a synthesis of comparing and contrasting research findings to gain a thorough understanding of the issues associated with teacher turnover over the course of time.

The landscape of the United States changed drastically following WWII. The baby boom era began shortly after the return of veterans and the United States experienced a significant increase in population. In 1944 Congress passed the GI Bill, which provided subsidies for returning veterans to attend colleges. Veterans took advantage of this opportunity and higher education systems experienced larger enrollment numbers. With an increased number of young children in schools, the

demand for teachers grew. As a result, many states lowered teacher certification standards to acquire enough teachers to accommodate the surplus of students.

By the 1950's, the United States was in the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union while facing racial tension in a number of communities across the nation. In 1957, the Soviet Union launched an artificial satellite into outer space. This event put the United States on edge and many feared the Soviets having an advantage globally. As a result, politicians blamed the American school system for not challenging students in math and science and more attention was placed in these content areas. The federal government allocated millions of dollars into educational reform (Gelbrich, 1999). In addition to facing the Cold War nationally, the United States had internal civil rights issues to address across the nation. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled on the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case in Topeka, Kansas. This landmark case ruled that it was illegal to deny entry to a facility based on race (Gelbrich, 1999). As a result, strong opposition arose with division in schools across the nation. While the integration movement slowly emerged, teacher mobility started to become a topic of concern.

Today, as never before, the United States is facing the critical issue of supplying an adequate number of well trained, spirited and dedicated teachers for our nation's schools. Not only is the supply of trained teachers inadequate, but the drop-out rate among public school teachers is far too high (Despain, 1964, p. 1).

These are the opening comments in Dr. Merland Fryer Despain's dissertation in 1964. This marks the beginning of a comprehensively researched topic dating back to the 1960's. His research cites a number of challenges related to hiring, training, and assimilating teachers into the profession.

The purpose of Dr. Despain's research was to determine if it was possible to identify factors that would predict the length of time a teacher would remain in the district. Despain (1964, p. 7) identified three school districts in California that shared similar statistics and demographics. The sample of teachers in the study began teaching in District A between September 1950 to June 1959. They were classified by gender and then studied across 15 factors in terms of longevity. In a comparative sample, Despain then identified 2 similar districts during the years of 1950-51 and 1953-54. The findings of his research reveal characteristics associated with the era of education in 1960's, which still exist in current field of education.

An analysis of his research reveals a number of noteworthy findings. Schools in the United States faced a shortage of 135,000 teachers in 1960-61 (Despain, 1964, p. 23). Not only was teacher shortage an issue, but retention was of concern as well.

Among the teachers hired by District A during the school years of 1950-51 through 1958-59, 73 percent of the women and 56 percent of the men had left the district by 1962. Among those who terminated their positions in District A, 88 percent of the women teachers and 91 percent of the men did so by the end of the fourth year of teaching (Despain, 1964, p. 163).

Despain (1964) found statistically significant correlations among teacher characteristics and their likelihood to stay in the profession.

- “Both men and women teachers who were married at the time of employment remained longer in their district positions than did teachers who were single” (Despain, 1964, p. 165).
- “Women teachers between the ages of 20 and 29 years are more likely to leave the district, and women teachers who are between the ages of 35 and 39

are more likely to remain in the district than are women in other age groups” (Despain, 1964, p. 165).

- “Women teachers who had three or more years of experience before being employed in Districts A, B, and C tended to remain longer in the employment of the districts than did women with less prior teaching experience” (Despain, 1964, p. 169).

Overall, the review of Despain’s (1964) research indicates a problem associated with teacher shortage and retention dating back to the 1950’s and 1960’s. In a process of synthesizing the topic further, Engin M. Konanc is referenced. Konanc looked at teacher attrition from 1980-1996 in the state of North Carolina and set out to explore a variety of questions associated with turnover and retention in North Carolina from 1989-90 through 1995-96. A number of factors were revealed that compare and contrast with Despain’s research in 1964.

“Over 81,000 new teachers were hired in this period. Overall, the loss by the end of the second teaching year is 15-18%” (Konanc, 1996, p. 1). “By the end of the fifth year, a third of the teachers are leaving teaching activities” (Konanc, 1996, p. 5). Konanc continues to further analyze the population of those leaving the profession by drawing correlations between National Teacher Examination (NTE) scores, college affiliation, and by subject area.

Overall, the NTE scores of teachers remaining in the profession are on average lower as compared to those leaving the profession. In general, Konanc’s research indicates teachers with higher NTE test scores are more likely to leave compared to

teachers with lower NTE scores. “The average score differences of those leavers and stayers may indicate a failure to retain better-qualified teachers in the system” (Konanc, 1996, p. 18). As in Despain’s (1964) research, retention of quality teachers remains to be a concern in education. Konanc (1996) was able to quantify quality teachers as associated with NTE test scores of teachers whereas Despain’s research in 1964 could not define quality teachers. “Yet, in spite of universal recognition of the importance of the teacher, relatively little progress has been made in defining ‘good teaching’ or in specifying the distinguishing characteristics of the competent teacher” (Despain, 1964). While it continues to be a challenge to define teaching quality, the research continues to bring the characteristics into focus.

Despain’s (1964) research findings in 1964 revealed 20% of teachers leaving after the first year and 50% leaving after 5 years in the state of California. Konanc’s (1996) research indicates comparable findings 20 years later in the state of North Carolina with approximately 33% leaving after 5 years. The research findings also suggest male teachers were retained at a higher rate in California during the 1950’s as compared to males in the 1980’s in the state of North Carolina with nearly 65% of male teachers leaving the profession after 15 years.

The findings associated with levels of assignment also varied between the two studies. Despain’s (1964) research indicates no statistical difference associated with levels of assignment as Konanc’s (1996) research indicates teachers in high schools are turning over at a faster rate than other levels. “High school teachers are leaving at a higher rate than the middle and elementary school teachers. At the end of 5 years, nearly

35% of the high school teachers and only 28% of the elementary teachers are gone” (Konanc, 1996, p. 5).

With Despain’s (1964) research in the 1950’s in the state of California and Konanc’s (1996) research in the 1980’s and 1990’s in the state of North Carolina, direct correlations can be made to further understand the topic of teacher turnover across the nation within various decades. Patterns are emerging that show similarities within our nation over a period of time. In an effort to further validate the comparable findings, a third review of the literature is analyzed. Carolyn McCreight (2000) conducted a similar research at the turn of the millennium in 2000. She set out to analyze the topic of teacher attrition, shortage, and strategies to retain teachers.

Before specific correlations can be made, it is important to highlight a new era of education that is beginning to emerge with an increased presence of private schools. In a comprehensive review of the literature, McCraight’s research references public school and private school in various ways. “There are 53.2 million students in public and private elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Increases in the student population will continue, resulting in 54.3 million public and private school students in 2008” (McCreight, 2000, p. 3). It is critical to consider the enrollment of students in both private and public schools when analyzing statistical results of overall enrollment of students in the United States.

During this era, the U.S. Department of Education estimated approximately 150,000 new teachers hired annually to replace teachers that have left the profession, compared to Konanc’s research data collected in the 1980’s, which referenced slightly

over 81,000 teachers hired annually. This track shows a growing concern with increased teachers hired from one generation to the next to fill vacancies related to teacher attrition. The estimated need continued to increase with growing projections. “The Nation will need 2.4 million newly hired public school teachers and 568,000 school teachers between now and 2008-09” (McCraight, 2000, p. 3).

McCraight (2000) goes on further in her research to indicate a long-standing problem of teacher retention.

Since the 1970’s and early 1980’s, teacher attrition has been a problem. During the 1970’s and 1980’s, 25% of the people certified to teach never began teaching or left teaching within a few years. Data from 1987-1988 Schools and Staffing Survey and the 1988-1989 Teacher Follow-Up Survey compiled by the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) revealed a 5.6% attrition rate for teachers in the public schools and a 12.7% attrition rate for teachers in private schools (McCraight, 2000, p. 4).

It is noteworthy to connect McCraight’s research revealed statistics indicating 25% of people certified leave the profession within a few years, while Despain’s research in 1960 shows 20% of teachers leaving after 5 years. The data trends between these two research articles indicate a problem of practice that continues to be noteworthy and concerning to educators.

Research indicates a stark reality of teacher attrition for decades across the country. Analyzing the problem further, researchers also investigated reasons that cause teachers to move or leave the profession altogether. McCraight’s (2000, p. 6) research in 2000 indicates the following reasons associated with teachers leaving the profession.

- Low salary, Unprepared for the Realities of Teaching, Rigorous Certification Exams, Lack of Career Advancement Opportunities, Low Emphasis on

Professional Development, Marital Status, Health-Related Problems, Haphazard Hiring and Retention Practices, and Retirement.

Despain's research in the 1960's cites similar issues associated with teachers leaving the profession. Dennerlein research identified climate issues related to work duties, salary, overload, facilities, social contacts, parental contacts and student achievement (Despain, 1964, p. 32).

Ingersoll (2003) published extensively on various topics associated with teacher supply, turnover, shortages, retention practices, and induction programs. Using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and the Teacher Follow Up Survey (TFS) data over four cycles data collection: 1987-88; 1990-91; 1993-94; and 1999-2000, Ingersoll found that teaching is an occupation with chronically higher turnover annually compared to other professions. The Bureau of National Affairs is one of the best sources of data associated with human resources and staffing. The data shows levels of total employee departures for a range of occupations and industries have averaged a stable 11.9% per year for the past decade across the nation. The TFS data shows an average of 14.4% of teachers turned over through 1988-2001 (Ingersoll, 2003). Ingersoll's research indicates that most of the teacher turnover has little to do with retirements. His data validates the research findings by Despain in the 1960's. Data collected by Ingersoll reveals that after 5 years, between 40 and 50% of all beginning teachers leave the profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2003).

Ingersoll, like researchers previously cited, has analyzed the reasons associated with teachers leaving. His findings suggest that retirements are the least prominent factor

associated with the high turnover rates. Staffing decisions associated with cutbacks, layoffs, terminations or school closings are more prevalent than retirements. In fact, almost half of staff that leave report the move as a dissatisfaction with the job, or a desire to pursue better jobs with improved career opportunities, in or out of education (Ingersoll, 2003). “Teachers who leave because of job dissatisfaction most often link their departure to low salaries, lack of support from administration, discipline problems, and lack of influence over decision making” (Ingersoll, 2003). Ultimately, job dissatisfaction can also be related to an unhealthy school climate. A healthy school climate fosters positive relationships and creates a sense of community. Administrators who lead a healthy school climate know how to support teachers and such support is appreciated by teachers (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009, p. 201). Administrative support is a key factor that impacts the climate of the organization.

Ingersoll is one of the most prolific researchers in the field of teacher staffing. His findings parallel certain areas of research dating back to the 1960’s. The collective research indicates a significant and long standing problem in the field of education as it relates to recruitment, hiring, and retaining quality teachers across the nation in various decades.

In addition to analyzing trends of the past, it is also equally important to consider potential developments related to teacher turnover in the future. Forecasting potential developments in preparation of what may arise will help prepare school leaders for what may come. The Center for Public Education published an article in 2005, which captured

the essence of the continuing epidemic and identified best practices related to teacher preparation, recruitment, and retention.

The issues related to teacher turnover and attrition is rather difficult to pinpoint across the nation as a whole. The overall numbers tend to mask imbalances by state, subject area, school level, socio economic status, and race/ethnicity. Barth, Dillon, Hull, and Holland-Higgins's (2016) study found an increase in the number of teacher certifications awarded in most states. However, some states have seen decreases, with Oklahoma, Washington, Minnesota, Virginia, and New York all dropping by one third to almost one half over the last four years (Barth et al., 2016). Enrollment data tracked over a five-year trend indicates fewer students entering teacher education programs, however the percentage of students completing their program has increased slightly. "Enrollments in traditional and alternative programs declined by 30% between 2010 and 2014. Over that same period, however, the number of completers fell by about half that amount, 17%, so that the total supply has not been hit as badly, at least not yet" (Barth et al., 2016). Various states across the country have provided a quick-fix solution by offering alternative teaching certificates. This allows professionals with a non-education degree to attain a teaching certificate with minimal requirements. The California Teacher Corps, which is leading the way for alternative certification, has set a goal of placing 1000,000 teachers in classrooms by 2020 (Barth et al., 2016). Teach for America is another organization that is focused on placing alternative certification teachers in low-income classrooms to help offset the shortage. This movement is becoming more present in communities across the nation.

In addition to the discrepancies across various states, there continues to be staffing gaps by subject area, school level and diversity. School officials report vacancies in science, technology, engineering, and math fields more than other areas. There continues to be a shortage of special education and bilingual teachers as well (Barth et al., 2016). Barth et al. claims there is actually a good supply of new elementary teachers, but school officials report having trouble filling these positions in middle and high schools. As our nation becomes more diverse the student population within schools is increasingly diverse. There continues to be an increasing gap related to student diversity and teacher diversity. Many public schools across the nation reflect a majority-minority student body, however statistics show four out of five teachers are white (Barth et al., 2016). The national data is clear and consistent in revealing the realities states continue to struggle with related to school staffing.

There are a number of causes that contribute to the staffing imbalances, some of which existed decades ago as referenced earlier. Researchers continue to reveal consistent themes related to competitive salaries, a perceived lack of respect for teachers, better opportunities for majors outside of teaching, all reasons noted in Despain's research in 1964. While there are contributing factors that still exist, school leaders are faced with new realities that contribute to the shortages. The national recession in 2008 impacted school budgets in different locations. In addition to school budgets being a challenge, state and local policy makers in certain states mandated class size reduction and increased graduation requirements, each of which placed an increase on teacher demand. Researchers also identified a reluctance of millennials to consider teaching

careers. According to research conducted by the Center for Talent and Innovation, 85% of millennials believe in the value of giving back to their community. However, they view teaching as a less than prestigious career and are choosing other professions with higher pay and better benefits. “Generally speaking, the teaching profession-and more specifically, its pay structures and retirement systems-have not changed in much more than 40 years” (“Education field struggles,” 2016). With the cost of college tuition on the rise, millennials are looking for careers that have tuition reimbursement programs to offer. By 2025, 75% of the workforce will be made up of millennials who are currently choosing other career fields rather than education, which continues to cause concern for the future (HR Exchange, 2016).

Varying staffing scenarios across the nation indicate pockets of positivity. While the data points are not sustainable enough to identify as positive trends, there is cause for small optimism as the future is forecasted. “Based on the data from the federal Schools and Staffing Survey, the proportion of schools having at least one teaching vacancy has been declining since 2000, from 83% in 2000 to 68% in 2012” (Barth et al., 2016). Typically hard to fill positions have also shown slight improvement as indicated in the Schools and Staffing survey. “The decline in teacher vacancies was evident across the board and in virtually every category, including traditionally hard to fill positions in math and special education. However, some schools have more vacancies than others” (Barth et al., 2016). There is also evidence that indicates a bit of optimism related to an increasing number of diverse students enrolling in teacher preparation programs, which is showing a small narrowing of the hiring gap. Between 1988 and 2008, the number of

Caucasian teachers increased by 41% while the number of minority teachers increased by 96%. The overall number of minority teachers in the teaching profession rose from 12.4% to 16.5% (Barth et al., 2016).

A thorough review of the data exposes the consistent struggles school leaders have dealt with in the past and continue to work through. Across many decades of research and tracking data, the demand for recruiting, training, and retaining high quality teachers continues to be a priority for school leaders and policy makers moving forward. While there are few data points that indicate improvement, more time will indicate if the data trends continue in a positive direction.

Chapter 3

Methodology Rationale and Research Questions

This study will follow a qualitative methods design to explore the topic of teacher turnover by studying four teachers who defied the statistics by teaching in the same Title I elementary school for 30 years. The following guiding question will serve as the focus for the entire research: Based on four teachers' experiences and perspectives of teaching in a Title I elementary school, what factors contributed to their long career in the same school? This grand tour question will be further supported by the following secondary questions: Throughout 30 years of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues. Describe the experiences outside of the school setting that you have participated in during your career. How would you describe your school culture and work environment? The grand tour question followed by the secondary questions will anchor the overall research design.

Since this research will capture the lived experiences of four teachers, the researcher will follow the narrative inquiry design within a qualitative methods approach to research. The essence of a teacher's story can be a powerful method of gaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. The use of narrative in educational research is to allow people to tell their story, individually and socially as they experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The narrative inquiry design is a method of capturing a story and making sense of it to explain a phenomenon.

Narrative inquiry is a powerful research method that has increasingly grown in value among researchers. In comparison to other forms of research, narrative inquiry is a relatively new approach.

Over the last more than two decades narrative inquiry has gained momentum in two ways – generally, as a term occurring in educational research literature, and more specifically and recently, as a nascent research methodology in its own right with a potential for use across a wide range of disciplines (from philosophy, education, theology, and psychology to economics, medicine, biology, and environmental science) (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 6).

Narrative inquiry takes a different approach than other research methodologies by putting value on the lived experiences of humans. It is through these lived experiences that we come to better understand certain complexities that we wrestle with in field of education. Narrative inquiry is an appropriate research method for studying the topic of teacher turnover through the experiences of four teachers who have modeled a career of longevity. By capturing their stories of teaching in a Title I building for over 30 years, the researcher will have a more thorough understanding of how to answer the grand tour and secondary questions above.

The advantages of using a narrative inquiry are wrapped in the essence of the lived experiences among four teachers. Narrative inquiry invites the participants in the study to openly share their professional experiences. These experiences are individualized and offer a pure and genuine account related to teaching in a Title I school. Pinar and Grumet were influential in making narrative research relevant in the 1970's. Grumet views autobiography as a way to get an analytical viewpoint on educational experiences that might otherwise be overlooked (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 9).

While there are advantages of using narrative inquiry as a research design, there are also disadvantages and cautions. “A particular danger in narrative is what we have called ‘the Hollywood plot,’ the plot where everything works out well in the end” (Connelly & Clandinine, 1990, p. 10). The power of linguistics may open the opportunity to create falsehood and deception through storytelling. It is essential that the researcher aim for a high level of verisimilitude, which encompasses truth and reality.

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

Educational research is grounded on finding fact and truth as it relates to the problems that exist within the field. As educators and researchers, inquiry permeates our work to a level of finding truth. Questions guide educational research to better explain phenomenon that exists within teaching and learning. “With regard to educational research, the key philosophical issue is the relation between ‘learning’ as a process and ‘knowledge’ based on the truth, or what is learnt” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 5). Finding truth is based on the art of interpretation, or otherwise referred to as hermeneutics. Interpretation is a careful act of making meaning. “Hermeneutics focuses on interpreting something of interest, traditionally a text or work of art, but in the larger context of qualitative inquiry, it has also come to include interpreting interviews and observed actions” (Patton, 2002, p. 497). Hermeneutics is a key element within a qualitative research design, which heightens the importance of verisimilitude.

This study will identify with the postmodern interpretive framework, which considers multiple perspectives and recognizes diversity among people. The underlying principle is that knowledge must be grounded within the elements of the current world we

live in and the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations are recognized (Creswell, 2013, p. 27). From a practical sense, modernism has made a significant contribution to educational research, but has not always been thoughtful to the various dimensions of learning. Educational research is beginning to accept certain strengths of the postmodernism approach (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 29). Having a postmodern or worldview within the field of education as it relates to teacher turnover will allow me to analyze the issue with regard to the diverse culture in which we live.

Studying the topic of teacher turnover and attrition through the lens of longevity can be individualized based on individual perspectives and realities. Collectively, these experiences contribute to certain themes and behaviors that contribute to a teacher's decision to leave a school or the profession all together. It is through the postmodern interpretation that this study will consider the perspective of four teachers while recognizing the fact that additional perspectives tell the whole story. Hermeneutics will be of importance throughout the process of interviewing, transcribing, and reporting the results. The style of writing will ensure verisimilitude by communicating the pure essence of the participant's stories.

Context of the Study

The study will be centered on participants who teach in a Title I elementary school in rural and urban communities in Nebraska. In order to address the grand tour question of capturing the experiences and perspectives of teaching in a Title I elementary school, the author will gain permission from four teachers across different class districts within Nebraska. The researcher will work with staff from the Nebraska State

Department of Education to identify teachers in the state who have taught in a Title I district for more than 30 years. The researcher will then randomly select teachers from across the state that meet the criteria of teaching in the same Title I elementary school for 30 years or more.

A series of interviews will take place at various locations that are comfortable and inviting for the participants. The location of the interviews will be in a setting conducive for recording, while being in a comfortable area where the participants feel welcome to tell stories and openly share his/her experiences.

The Role of the Researcher

Within a qualitative study, it is imperative for the researcher to disclose any issues of bias prior to the research study. Joseph Maxwell, a leading professor and author of qualitative research explains the reason for making perspective, biases, and assumptions clear to the reader by developing a deep understanding how a researcher's values and beliefs influence the outcome of the research (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

Merriam (2009) also notes the importance if qualitative researchers practicing what is known as epoche. Epoche is a Greek word that means refrain from judgment. Everyday judgments need to be set aside to ensure a thorough study can be conducted.

The researcher has a strong interest on the topic of teacher turnover since the researcher is the principal of a Title I Elementary school in Lincoln, Nebraska. Retaining quality teachers can be a challenge. As a fourth year principal, he experienced a higher rate of turnover with 30% of staff either transferring schools within the district, moving out of state, or retiring. Staff members were leaving for a variety of reasons and the fact

of the matter is that some of them were transferring due to being overwhelmed with the demands of teaching in a Title I school. For this reason, teacher retention and learning about the factors that influence a teacher's decision to leave became of primary interest.

The researcher had a second experience that shaped his understanding of teacher turnover. In 2014, the researcher was fortunate to celebrate the retirement of a teacher who spent her entire career teaching in one Title I school. The researcher was captivated by the uniqueness of her career track and began to think about teacher turnover in terms of longevity. This curiosity ignited a desire to learn the factors that contributed to her decision to stay in one school for her entire career.

As a principal who is responsible for staffing, the researcher experiences the cycle of recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining quality teachers. The author has come to better understand the importance of retaining quality staff members and have made teacher retention a professional goal. The researcher's goal is to retain 90% of certificated staff from one year to the next. Overall, the researcher has beliefs and values that shape perceptions about teacher turnover and admire teachers who invest their entire career in a Title I school. Overcoming bias will be critical as the researcher presents each participant's story. The researcher will use words that are accurate, clear, and free from judgment. It will also be essential for the researcher to honor people's preferences and to avoid labeling whenever possible. Good judgment will be used throughout the process by representing perspectives with specificity and precision.

Institutional Review Board. Permission to conduct this research will be sought from the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since this research

involves minimal risk with interviewing four teachers, the researcher will apply for exempt status by meeting the standards in Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior. Since this research is following a narrative inquiry method, the author will be interviewing four participants. Although the name of the participants will be confidential and safe guarded throughout the study, personally identifiable traits could reveal the participants. Overall, the participants are not minors and will not be asked questions to reveal sensitive information; therefore, the author will apply for exempt status through IRB.

Before agreeing to participate in the study, the researcher will review the Participant Informed Consent form, which explains the purpose of the research and the overall procedures involved in participating in the research.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection for this qualitative research will follow the narrative inquiry methodology. The essence of a narrative inquiry is to study one or few participants in a thorough manner. “The procedures for implementing this research consist of focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). The data for this research will be devoted to studying four teachers through a series of interviews. Interview protocols will guide the structure of the interviews while providing open-ended questions. For this purpose, the researcher will follow a semi-structured interview model. “Usually, specific information

is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a more structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent, and to the new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). The semi-structured interview questions will support the grand tour and sub questions, which guide the overall research. Participants will be provided with a copy of the questions prior to the interview so they can formulate their thoughts with more depth. In order to deeply understand the participant’s lived experiences as a teacher in a Title I school, the researcher will incorporate a combination of Patton’s (2002) six types of interview questions:

1. Experience and behavior questions – Questions about what a person does or had done aim to elicit behavior, experiences, actions and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present.
2. Opinion and values questions – Questions aimed at understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes of people ask about opinions, judgments, and values. Answers to these questions tell us what people think about some experience or issue.
3. Feelings questions – Feeling questions aim at eliciting emotions – feeling responses of people to their experience and thoughts. Feeling tap the affective dimension in human life.

4. Knowledge questions – Knowledge questions inquire about the respondent’s factual information – what the respondent knows.
5. Sensory questions – Sensory questions ask about what is seen, heard, touched, tasted, and smelled. Responses to these questions allow the interviewer to enter into the sensory apparatus of the respondent.
6. Background/demographic questions – Age, education, occupation and the like are standard background questions that identify characteristics of the person being interviewed. Answers to these questions help the interviewer locate the respondent in relation to other people.

The following themes will be the center of the interview, which will support the overall guiding research question and secondary questions (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interview Themes and Research Questions

Theme	Alignment to Secondary Questions
Collaboration and School Culture	Throughout 30 plus years of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues.
Experiences Outside of the School Setting	How would you describe your school culture and work environment?

The interviews will be scheduled at a time and location comfortable for the participant and conducive for videoing. Interviews will be recorded. The researcher will take brief notes throughout the interviews, while maintaining a relationship with the participants. “The last point may be the most important, and it is a reminder of how a

good interviewer is a good listener rather than a frequent speaker during an interview” (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). The interviews will be scheduled in such a manner that allows time for the interviews to be transcribed and reviewed by the interviewee. In order to achieve a level of precision, it is essential for each participant to check the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Once the interview data is gathered a careful and thorough analysis of the data will be followed. Data analysis is a process of making meaning out of the interview data as it relates to the grand tour and secondary questions. The beginning of the data analysis process will be inductive, in that the researcher will be searching for connections to create themes among the data points. This process will begin with transcribing the interviews. Once the transcriptions are made, the researcher use MAXQDA software program to ensure a thorough analysis of the data is followed. The researcher will read through the transcriptions to make brief notes and comments that are relevant to the grand tour and secondary questions. The process of making notations of information potentially relevant to answering the grand tour and secondary research questions is referred to as coding (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). The naming of the codes will emerge from the exact words used by the interview participants. The naming of codes will follow an NVivo logic (Creswell, 2013) by using the exact words used by the participants. Once the codes have been identified, the researcher will then use MAXQDA to categorize the codes into themes. “This process of grouping your open codes is sometimes called axial coding or

analytical coding” (Merriam, 2009, p. 180). The inductive process of analyzing data will begin with a phase of discovery and making connections.

Once the transcriptions have been made and the codes have emerged, the researcher will then move into a more deductive analytical process of testing and confirming the data points relevant to the grand tour and secondary questions. The researcher will follow the data analysis criteria set by Merriam (2009).

- Categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research.
- Categories should be exhaustive, that is, you should be able to place all data that you decided were important or relevant to the study in a category or subcategory.
- Categories should be mutually exclusive. A particular unit of data should fit into only one category.
- Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of the category should be as sensitive as possible to what is in the data.
- Categories should be conceptually congruent. This means that the same level of abstraction should be characterize all categories at the same level.

In order to ensure a high level criteria is maintained, the researcher will create a chart to organize the themes and data points. The grand tour and secondary questions will be written at the top of the chart to ensure alignment between the research questions, themes, categories, and data points. The use of a chart will help organize the data points to a degree of saturation. “By the time you reach a sense of saturation, that is, when nothing new is coming forth, you will be in a deductive mode” (Merriam, 2009, p. 183).

In order to ensure security of the data, the researcher will keep the transcripts in a locked cabinet in his office and will oversee the shredding of these transcripts six months after defending the dissertation. The interview recordings will also be saved on the

researcher's computer and backed up on a flash drive. The recordings will also be deleted six months after defending the dissertation.

Validation

Once data is collected and analyzed, the next step in the process will be one of validating the results to ensure accuracy. The process of validation is an important one in order to gain credibility. After a review of validation strategies and methods, it is evident that there are various definitions and methods of validating the results. "Many writers on the topic argue that qualitative research, which is based on different assumptions about reality and a different worldview, should consider validity and reliability from a perspective congruent with the philosophical assumptions underlying the paradigm" (Merriam, 2009, p. 211). For the purpose of creating consistency, the researcher has selected various strategies supported by Creswell to ensure accuracy throughout the process.

The researcher will make an effort to clarify any bias from the beginning to the end of the research. "In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). With being a principal of a Title I school that has experienced years of high teacher turnover, the researcher recognizes that his experiences may shape certain judgments and interpretations. The researcher will be diligent with expressing those biases in a way that creates openness throughout the research.

Once the transcriptions are made, the researcher will ask the participants to check for accuracy. This process is referred to as member checking. “This approach, *writ large* in most qualitative studies, involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). This will be a very critical step in the validation process.

Lastly, the researcher will be certain to write in a manner that allows the reader to transfer information to other settings. “Thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme. According to Stake, (2010), ‘A description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details’” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252).

It is important to note that a concerted effort will be made to maintain an element of verisimilitude throughout the entire study. The critical events shared by the participants will be presented with truthfulness and authenticity.

Reporting the Findings

The findings will be reported in Chapter four of the study. This section will summarize a brief overview of the findings, which will include a coding tree of specific themes that have emerged as well as specific quotes from various interviews. In doing so, the researcher will capture critical events presented by participants. “Typically, a ‘findings’ section begins with a brief overview of the findings, followed by presentation of each separate finding supported by quotes from interviews or field notes or references to documentary evidence” (Merriam, 2009, p. 248). Overall, the findings will be

presented in a manner in which they support the grand tour and secondary questions that serve as anchors for the study.

Management Plan

This study will take place during the spring of the 2016-17 school year. Once the researcher receives approval from his review committee and IRB, the researcher will then begin the interview process. The researcher will conduct a series interviews at a time and location that is conducive for the participants. Two to three weeks will be scheduled in between the interviews to allow time for a thorough transcription of the interviews and for the participant to review the transcription notes. The researcher will likely conclude with all interviews by July 2017. This timeline is a bit aggressive in nature and is somewhat dependent on schedules. In order to be efficient with time, the researcher will ensure good communication with the participants, be organized, detailed throughout the process, and be timely with transcribing the interviews. Whenever possible, the researcher will plan ahead and be well coordinated to ensure timelines are met. The researcher will create goals throughout the process so that progress can be made with a degree of efficiency and thoroughness.

Chapter 4

Participants

The four participants in this study come from a variety of career experiences as elementary teachers; however, there are some commonalities among all four. Regardless of school size, location, or demographics, each participant is beyond their 30th year of teaching in a Title I elementary school. In fact, each participant continues to teach in his or her respective school for over 30 years. All four participants were full time teachers at the time of this study. Table 3 includes detailed information regarding each participant.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

	District Category	Type of School	School Size	Years of Teaching in Title I School
Participant 1—Neva	Class 3	K-6	168	41 years
Participant 2—Kaye	Class 5	preK-6	318	33 years
Participant 3—Karen	Class 3	preK-6	200	39 years
Participant 4—Shelley	Class 3	preK-6	280	36 years

Each participant agreed to meet with me in a formal interview centered on the longevity of her teaching career in a Title I elementary school.

Neva

Neva teaches in a small community in northeast Nebraska. The school district is categorized as a Class 3 district with a total enrollment of 168 students attending Kindergarten through sixth grade. The district has minimal diversity with 89% white

students. Approximately 36% of the elementary students receive a free or reduced price lunch with 14% mobility. The average years of teaching experience within the school is 25 years. This statistic represents an average number of years of teaching among all of the teachers within the school. Neva will begin her 41st year of teaching in the same elementary school and continues to have a strong passion for children.

I met Neva in the spring of 2017 in her hometown. Within minutes of meeting her, she asked me if I would like to see her hometown and her family farm. In an effort to build a relationship with Neva and to establish a strong bond, I eagerly agreed. As we drove around the small town and to the family farm, we discussed the changing dynamics of her small rural town. Neva went on to describe how the population of the town has become more mobile over the last few years. She shared stories of students and families with various struggles related to poverty and mobility. She shared that her community is becoming more culturally diverse and seeing various forms of families. Neva shared a bit of concern about the declining population within the community and shared stories of a few businesses closing and how the decline of factory jobs are impacting the small town.

As we drove by Neva's family farm, she began to share about her family and the value of their farm. Although her husband and son work full time on the farm, she is very involved with various chores and enjoys the farming lifestyle. She went on to tell stories about her cattle and crops as we drove down a dirt road and passed her son driving the tractor. She then shared that her daughter is a high school teacher in the same community and she is working on her Master's degree. She spoke very highly of her

children is very proud of her children and their work ethic as adults. Neva spoke on the importance and value of having a strong work ethic by how she didn't take many days off when her own children were born. She continued to share examples of having a strong work ethic by referencing the number of leave days she does not use on an annual basis. Neva has a work ethic that defines her passion for the profession of teaching.

The conclusion of our tour brought us back to the elementary school where Neva teaches. School was not in session as it was an extended holiday weekend. The front entrance of the school was draped with award banners of academic achievement from the state of Nebraska. She was quick to showcase her award winning Blue Ribbon School achievements and recognized the hard work of many. We walked down the hallway a bit further into her classroom as a Title I Reading Teacher. Our conversations continued as I set up my materials for the interview. The genuine conversations and stories continued in such a manner that I felt I needed to get started because such good information was being shared. Throughout the interview, Neva displayed her light sense of humor, excitement for teaching, and passion for the profession through her 'high energy' demeanor.

At the conclusion of the interview, Neva and I walked to the parking lot together continuing to share stories. In fitting fashion, Neva looked down the parking lot a few hundred feet and noticed her daughter's car in the school parking lot as well. I found it rather interesting that the only cars in the parking lot on a day off were from two dedicated teachers, one who has spent decades devoting her career to teaching young children how to read and the other who is working on her Master's degree and following the footsteps of her mother.

Kaye

My second interview took place in the spring of 2017 as well. Kaye resides in a large urban city in eastern Nebraska and will begin her 33rd consecutive year of teaching at the same Title I elementary school. Within moments of meeting Kaye, I received a warm welcome and immediately sensed a genuine care for children by her welcoming and personal demeanor. The beginning of our time together was spent engaging in small talk and getting to know each other. We sat together in the small quiet room exchanging a few stories pertaining to our shared profession. Kaye spent time talking about growing up with her father who served in the military and how the family moved around the country. As a child whose parent was in the military, Kaye spent her formative childhood years among children who were less advantaged. This is where her passion for serving underprivileged children and families begins. “My father was in the service, so we traveled overseas. I was able to build on that. I saw the poverty that these families lived in, and understood that our parents meet their needs the best they know how.”

Kaye and I established a bond by exchanging stories pertaining to her hometown, which is the same hometown I grew up in. We reminisced over stories of growing up and the changing dynamics of the large urban city.

Kaye is a Kindergarten teacher in a neighborhood that can be described as having high rates of poverty. The elementary school serves approximately 318 students in pre-school thru 6th grade. Upwards of 95% of the students receive a free/reduced price lunch while approximately 20% of the students are mobile. The average years of teaching experience within the school is 12 years. Kaye’s school is currently undergoing

construction renovation; therefore, they are relocated at a different site and sharing space with another elementary school. Despite the challenges of being relocated and sharing a site with another elementary school, she repeatedly spoke of the valuable relationships she has with students and parents. It was evident that Kaye has a history of working with parents throughout her career as she shared stories of working with various family generations throughout her years of teaching.

Throughout the interview, Kaye continually spoke of her passion and enjoyment of working with young children and families. She shared a variety of stories related to serving the families within her school and neighborhood community. “My kids all know my family. They know my daughter. They understand that I have a family too.” Kaye truly immerses herself within the school and neighborhood community with a deep sense of genuine support and partnership.

Karen

The third interview took place in a small town located in the sandhills of northwestern Nebraska. The town of 1,200 is a rural community that is well diversified economically. The town thrives on small business, industry, farming and ranching. The community is located off of a main highway and is recognized as Nebraska’s Big Rodeo town, which was proudly advertised throughout the town. Also on display was a Blue Ribbon School recognition sign located near the main entrance of the elementary school. The school was recognized as a 2013 Blue Ribbon school for achieving high levels of academic progress and showing evidence of reducing achievement gaps in education.

The town is proud to showcase such achievements and honors the tradition of hard work and excellence.

The elementary school serves approximately 200 students in Pre-School thru 6th grade, of which are all white students. The overall enrollment within the school has steadily inclined over the past nine years. Of the 200 students, approximately 42% receive a Free/Reduced price lunch and 12% are categorized as mobile. The average years of teaching amongst the staff is 22 years, which is above the state average of 14 years. Sixty percent (60%) of the teaching staff at the elementary school has a Master's degree, which is above the state average of 52%.

Before meeting Karen, I had the pleasure of driving around town to see the main attractions and highlights within community. I was taken by the warm welcome I received by many. Whether it be from the gentleman at the gas station, the lady walking her dog, or the couple driving by, I was welcomed with a hello and a gentle wave. I met Karen in the comfort of her home and was greeted with a warmhearted welcome as well. Upon entering her home, Karen had a glass of cold water for me within minutes. We both jumped into the conversation with dialogue full of questions and stories related to life in the small town. Karen and I established a connection through the stories she shared and the genuine interest I showed with wanting to learn more about her life experiences. There was a strong sense of pride and allegiance to her town as stories unfolded one after another. "As I said, this is my hometown. I went to school here. I was in National Honor Society and the band and the choir." Other than going away to college, Karen has spent a lifetime in her hometown. She knows the tradition and history

of the town as well as anyone. “I think I am so fortunate to have not only grown up in this community, but have a job in this community. I love the people here.”

Shelley

The fourth and final participant in my study is named Shelley. Shelley is a 2nd grade teacher in an elementary school located on the main highway outside of the small town of 900 people in Dodge County. Shelley’s career at this particular school began as a first year teacher in the mid 80’s and has continued on since. Her passion for the school was evident through the stories she shared. Shelley has a good understanding of the history, traditions, and culture of the school and was happy to share her experiences with me.

Shelley’s interview began with a feeling of being rushed. The interview started later than planned due to unforeseen scheduling circumstances. While waiting for the interview to begin at Shelley’s school, I had the opportunity to meet and interact with her principal. We dialogued about school dynamics and student populations specific to our schools. It was enlightening to hear stories of celebration from a principal in rural Nebraska.

Once Shelley arrived and settled in, we had brief conversations before having more in-depth discussions about her experiences as a teacher. Shelley is a humble teacher that is quick to give credit to others. “I have just been blessed to have wonderful teachers around me, that made me look probably a lot better than I was.”

At the conclusion of the interview, Shelley gave me a tour of her school and showed me her classroom. As we toured the school, she shared a bit of history in regard

to the school consolidating with another school and the dynamics of school consolidation. The school has a warm and welcoming design with large windows and bright colors. Shelley also explained how technology is being used in her school. She is very proud of her school and was excited to share stories of success about her students and colleagues.

Shelley's school serves approximately 280 students in Kindergarten thru 5th grade. The school was consolidated with a number of other small schools and moved into a new building in the 2012 academic year. The elementary building is joined to the middle and high school, which is separated by a main hallway. The average number of years of service amongst teachers is 17.8 years, which is approximately 3.5 years higher than the state average. Approximately 60% of the teachers have a Masters Degree, compared to the state average of 52%. Of the 280 students attending the school, 35.6% of students receive a Free/Reduced price lunch and 8.7% are mobile.

Chapter 5

Results

In order to answer the primary research question, four teachers separately participated in an audio-recorded interview. After each interview, the recordings were transcribed and reviewed by each participant and then coded into themes using the MAXQDA Analytics software program. Each interviewee provided responses to the following questions and answered additional secondary questions whenever asked.

1. Throughout 30 years of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues.
2. Describe the experiences outside of the school setting that you have participated in during your teaching career.
3. How would you describe your school culture and work environment?

Each question was specifically designed based on a variety of research on the topics of teacher longevity and turnover. Johnson and Simon (2013) reference Lortie's research findings from 1975, which indicates teachers who are more likely to leave a school tend to work in environments of isolation rather than collaboration. Additionally, Crandell and Howell's (2009) research implies teachers who are involved in school related or non-school related activities outside of the typical teacher duties are less likely to leave the profession. Finally, research supports the notion that poor working environments tend to have higher rates of turnover (Ingersoll, 2001). Collectively, these three themes guided the framework of questions asked throughout each interview.

Question 1: Throughout 30 years of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues.

Each of the four participants described their experiences related to collaboration in one of two ways, collaboration amongst colleagues and collaboration with their respective principals throughout each of their careers.

Neva described collaboration in the early part of her career as isolated and segmented. “When I started teaching Title, you kinda stayed in your little nook. It was clear down where the weight room is now, and you went and got your kids, you had your 15 minutes.” Further into her description of collaboration, she used descriptive phrases associated with teamwork and partnership.

“I do some team teaching more, and I go more into the classrooms.” Kaye’s beginning experiences in regard to collaboration with colleagues was a bit different compared to Neva’s. Kaye remembered collaboration being dependent on the physical structure of the classrooms within her school. “. . . we were an open-concept school when I first started. So there were no walls between the rooms. So you collaborated a lot, and you worked with the person next to you.” Kaye then went on to underscore the value of collaboration with colleagues and how she learned different strategies to meet the varying needs of students. She provided examples of application between collaboration and professional learning.

...collaborating with my colleagues to learn new ideas and new ways to do things. Not every idea works for every child. You need to collaborate with other people to learn the people who are visual, the people who are kinesthetic, the ways that you can do these things to build upon their basic needs when they come in. You have to meet their needs.

Karen also spoke about collaboration with high regard and value in terms of acceptance.

When asked to describe her experiences with collaboration, without hesitation, she replied, “It was never like I was an outsider.” “Collaboration, I always feel I can go to somebody else and say okay, I need advice on this discipline problem. I need advice.”

Karen’s description of collaboration was similar to that of Kaye’s. Both responses referenced idea sharing and working through problem solving situations. “At the beginning, I would say our collaboration was more of pulling ideas from that, and helping out with situations that arose, that I didn’t exactly know how to handle.”

Karen also referenced the lack of tools and materials compared to what teachers have available to them today. “Of course, we didn’t have—we had the curriculum guides, but we didn’t have the standards, as such right now.” Karen went on to describe in detail how time is spent in collaboration with her colleagues.

We’ll look at scores, or at a test score, and talk about that. We do a lot of evaluating information, and seeing where there’re strengths, seeing where there’re weaknesses, so then, ‘What can we do about that?’ Everybody has that time.

In summary, Karen reflected on her final point in a manner that captures the importance of collaboration with fellow colleagues. “Through all of it, I found out that the more you have that time, that niche to sit down and talk with people, the smoother your classroom goes, the smoother everything goes.”

When each participant was asked to speak to their experiences related to collaboration, all four referenced points related to the various principals they have worked for throughout their tenure. Through analysis a commonality was revealed regardless of their individual experiences. Each participant spoke in some regard to the

influence principals have on collaboration, either favorably or unfavorably. In order to ensure an element of confidentiality, individual participants will not be referenced.

- “I think probably sometimes there’s more camaraderie between the faculty members as far as teacher than sometimes the administration.”
- “When I first started teaching, things were really, really smooth. The administration worked well, communicated well with the teachers. Then we went through a period of having another administrator that things were just a mess. It was him. It was all about him. Your views were just ignored.”
- “I am very open with my principal. He has an open-door policy.”
- “She was very determined that she was in charge, she was the boss. You never came and gave her suggestions.”
- “The collaboration depended on the person in charge. If that person had a good understanding of how important it was for teachers to be able to get together, and discuss curriculum, and to just discuss our frustrations, or our-of whatever it happened to be, or asking for help with difficult students, or just to share our successes, our joys. That was so important.”
- “We could talk. Everything was organized. You felt comfortable going in, talking to them as administrators . . .”
- “...he was a very quiet man, very patient man, and he understood the importance of listening to your teachers. He would listen.”

Throughout all four participant responses, each one spoke favorably in regard to the value and purpose of collaboration within their respective work environments. The description of how each one referenced collaboration with colleagues varied based on their individual experiences. However, they shared similar responses in regard to principals having an influence on overall collaboration within the school.

Question 2: Describe the experiences outside of the school setting that you have participated in during your teaching career.

Each of the four participants provided specific examples of their involvement outside of the school environment throughout their career. This question was not lacking in responses as all four participants value the importance of being involved beyond the typical work environment. Collectively, their experiences ranged from being involved in various community driven organizations through 4-H, faith based church organizations, scouting, etc.

Neva's response to her involvement in activities outside of school referenced band and church activities that her own children were involved in. "Well, when my kids were younger, I volunteered for band boosters."

Church is a big part here, and also down-if they needed volunteers for this-my kids in my classroom, when I had third-graders, we always worked up a little program, and we went over to the care center and did presentations like that, getting them involved that way.

In a humorous manner, Neva commented on her husband's response in regard to her involvement. "I am involved. My husband would say at one time, 'You're never home.'"

Kaye spoke of involvement in terms of events. Her involvement within the community is exciting and motivating to her. She sees the value in being visible at events and making connections with families. "I always attend any events...I attend those activities to let the kids know that I'm a part of it." Kaye also commented on taking her own children and grandchildren to school activities and events. "They know my family because we attend events around here. All after-school events, I make sure I

am at.” Kaye spoke highly of her involvement within the neighborhood community and being visible to others.

Karen’s responses were very similar. Her passion is in the area of fine arts and music. She currently teaches piano lessons after school and has led the kids praise team at her local church. “I’m one of those, like you said, volunteers after school.” “I play at church. Do worship team.” Karen also referenced being heavily involved in 4H when her own children were younger. “. . . I did 4H when the kids were little. I was a 4H leader. They were all in 4H.”

Shelley’s responses were very similar to the other participants as well. She too communicated the value of involvement in the community and being visible to families. “I think any time you can touch the communities that you work with, and you can be visible, and caring, and such, I think that that helps in a tremendous way.”

Shelley also spoke of being involved in her church outreach activities. Her church involvement has value and purpose. She too cares about outreach activities within her local church.

- “I was always involved in some way, whether it was teaching the kids, or just being a table parent and coming in, and setting in, talking at suppertime, ‘How was your day?’ ‘What’s going on,’ to cooking, to helping with rec, just all aspects of that. I did that for a lot of years. . . .”
- “A lot of people that we’ve been friends with have been at church, and have been people who are also educators.”

Regardless of demographics, years of experience, individual school settings, or even leadership influences, each participant spoke of their value, involvement, and commitment to their community. There is strong sense of ownership each one has within their local community as well as a sense of pride in their extracurricular volunteerism.

Question 3: How would you describe your school culture and work environment?

Neva's response to her contribution toward the school culture referenced her support in helping staff members feel welcome. Neva has a daughter who teaches high school and pointed out the importance of welcoming new teachers into the school. ". . . the band teacher hasn't been here long. I would take her little flowers I picked from my house and things like that, just to, "We're thinking about you." Neva has been intentional about welcoming new staff members in and sees her role and purpose in doing so. ". . . they give the teacher a boost or somebody's thinking about you."

Kaye also values the role of welcoming and supporting new staff. Kaye supports new teachers by being the mentor facilitator for her school in addition to mentoring teachers herself. Kaye also makes an impact by being on the leadership team as well. "I'm a big pro on welcoming people. I feel that the more welcome you feel, the more part of staff you feel. The more you're willing to buy in." "I am the mentor facilitator for our building and I mentor other teachers."

Karen answered this question by explaining how people in the town support work of teachers and how it impacts the culture within the school. Karen's response included two significant events that occurred in the town over the last few years; the school being recognized as a Blue Ribbon school by the state and the high school football team winning the state championship. These two celebrations tightened the fabric of the community. "When we got the blue ribbon, everyone got a special blue-ribbon T-shirt and the little plastic bands. I think we had a hamburger or a hot dog thing. Invited the community in to celebrate that." ". . . was in the playoffs last year, state football

playoffs. One of the things I had the kids do was we all made – put up posters as (the community) advanced through the rounds.”

Karen has lived in her community for the vast majority of her adult life and frequently spoke about the community support for the school system. The strong partnership between the two is very evident.

Shelley’s response was specific to her experiences within the school, especially as they related to leadership changes within her school. She spoke of how the culture within the school was impacted by principal leadership throughout her career.

...it depended on the principals, and I think that the second principal that I had was the one who understood that there needed to be a certain environment in it, so that teachers could work comfortably – and then in turn, would make – help students work and succeed, and excel. We would do a variety of team building activities. . . .

Shelley went on to speak about her ideals and values as an educator and commented on her core beliefs.

- “. . . the culture of the school, in particular – was that all students would be successful, and we’re going to do whatever we can to make them successful. That was where I got the first filling of, “All kids are successful.”
- “Traditions are important, as long-you have to keep them positive, and you have to change them, a little bit. It can’t be the same old thing. I think that’s hugely important, is to mix it up, but still do something that’s important.”

All four participants value the importance of having a positive culture within the school community and each one provided specific examples of their investment in their respective schools. Participants shared a sense of ownership in their role as a veteran teacher to influence the school culture.

Throughout the process of coding the written transcripts an unexpected theme emerged within the various responses. Each candidate spoke on a variety of topics

related to having pride in their community and school. Each shared stories related to how proud they are to be an educator, the schools they work for, and the community they live. Their sense of pride grew stronger as the interview continued. With such few words, each responded in a humble and satisfying manner.

Karen: “I love my job. I love the people I work with.”

“I’m just very proud of where I live. I’m proud of the people I work with and live with.”

Kaye: “I want to show my passion, my true love for what I wanna do, what I want for these kids.”

“I have a true passion for my position.”

Neva: “Why quit teaching? You could pay me hundreds, but something like that is worth more than all the money.”

Shelley: “I could not give up what I had here, that wonderful feeling and that sense of family, and knowing people, and I think a big thing was the support from those people towards the school.”

“You have to love it, and if you love that, then you have that commitment. I think that pulls you through about anything.”

Chapter 6

Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

Summary

This study was important to conduct as it gave insight on a critical topic that has strained school systems across the nation for decades. Teacher turnover has plagued schools for a number of years and while it is difficult to pin point specific indicators that lead to turnover; this research specifically focuses on the lived experiences of 4 teachers who have taught in the same Title I elementary school for 30 or more years. These 4 teachers represent a variety of experiences that demonstrate commitment and loyalty to each of their schools. Their long tenure is rare and unique in our society. With turnover rates continuing to have an impact on school systems, these 4 teachers have provided insight on what has influenced their long tenure track.

Based on the literature review, the topic of teacher turnover has been a concern for over five decades, with research dating as far back as 1964. Not only has this been a concern over the course of decades, but teacher turnover has also impacted states across the entire nation. The research also indicates higher turnover rates in schools with higher rates of poverty. With teacher turnover such a concern and having impact on school systems, this research will uncover the topic through a different perspective of teacher longevity in Title I elementary schools.

Discussion

Based on the interview results and themes that emerged, the findings reveal common threads that are consistent to some degree or another within each of the four

experiences. Each teacher was asked a series of questions that provided them the opportunity to share their experiences related to collaboration with colleagues, experiences outside of the school setting, and the work environment as it relates to school culture.

Throughout 30 plus years of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues. This particular prompt was based on Lortie's research in 1975 where he reference schools as an 'egg-crate,' where teachers prefer to work in privacy. Over time, collaborative structures have been strengthened within schools and further supported by research. Interestingly, the responses to this question morphed into two themes, collaboration with teaching colleagues and collaboration with administrators. Each of the four participants shared stories related to collaboration toward the beginning of their career and of current experiences with teaching colleagues as well as administrators. While each one had a range of collaborative experiences in the beginning of their career from working in relative isolation to more collaborative experiences, all of them spoke of working in higher collaborative environments in their current career stage.

I always feel I can go to somebody else and say okay, I need advice on this discipline problem. I need advice. (Karen)

Through all of it, I found out that the more you have the time, that niche to sit down and talk with people, the smoother your classroom goes, the smoother everything goes. (Shelley)

In addition to speaking about collaboration with colleagues, each participant spoke of their experiences of collaboration with administrators as well. This area generated more response than collaboration with colleagues. Regardless of their career stage, each participant related the strength of collaboration with administrators relative to

individual administrators. Based on their experiences, all four of them provided a range of stronger and weaker collaborative partnerships with administrators throughout their career. Each participant gave examples of administrators fostering collaboration within the framework of their respective schools, or in some cases not fostering collaboration.

When I first started teaching, things were really, really smooth. The administration worked well, communicated well with the teachers. Then we went through a period of having another administrator and things were just a mess. It was him. It was all about him. Your views were just ignored. (Karen)

We got told every day what good teachers we were. Every day he told us – he says, “I can’t tell you what a good teacher you are.” He was amazing. We loved him. (Neva)

I am very open with my principal. He has an open-door policy. (Kaye)

. . . honestly, the collaboration depended on the person in charge. If that person had a good understanding of how important it was for teachers to be able to get together, and discuss the curriculum, and to just discuss our frustrations, or of whatever it happened to be, our asking for help with difficult students, or just share our successes, our joys. That was so important. (Shelley)

Those in education recognize the influence administrators have on certain aspects of the school, which is supported by this portion of results. Ingersoll’s research in 2003 revealed teachers who leave the profession due to job dissatisfaction often relate their departure to administrators who lack support for teachers, along with low salary, discipline problems with students, and lack of influence over decision making. While each participant spoke of dissatisfaction toward one or more administrators they worked for throughout their career, they also spoke highly of certain administrators as well. Without a doubt, administrators have influence on the strength of collaboration within the school environment, which was supported by each participant.

Describe the experiences outside of the school setting that you have participated in during your teaching career. The basis for this topic relates to Crandell and Howell's research in 2009. Along with identifying other factors related to turnover rates, one of the more unique findings revealed that teachers who spend time outside of school hours on student or non-student related activities are less likely to leave the profession. The finding implies that teachers who are connected with colleagues, students, and families outside of the typical school day are well invested and engaged in their work.

Without hesitation, each participant spoke of their outside experiences with enthusiasm and excitement. There was no denying the fact that each teacher has invested time outside of the traditional work hours volunteering, coaching, teaching, and mentoring. The responses were coded into two themes that highlighted the specific experiences outside of the school setting as well as the overall support provided to families beyond the school setting.

I always attend any events. We have a trunk-or-treat. I attend those activities to let kids know that I'm a part of it. (Kaye)

I think any time you can touch the communities you work with, and you can be visible, and caring, and such, I think that that helps in a tremendous way. (Shelley)

I am one of those, like you said, volunteers after school. (Karen)

It was also evident that the participants spoke of serving to some degree within their local church affiliation at some point in their career.

I taught Sunday School for a number of years. (Neva)

I play the piano at church. I do worship team. (Karen)

Our church has a program for third through eighth grade students. That was something that I started probably a year before or so, but my daughter was involved, so I wanted to see how it worked out. (Shelley)

Overall, there was a strong sense of investment in families and the community outside the typical role of a teacher within the school setting. Each participant responded to this prompt with a level of energy that implies a correlation between their longevity and the types of experiences outside of the school setting.

How would you describe your school culture and work environment? There continues to be an increasing amount of research that indicates a correlation between school culture and teacher retention. “Two of the most often cited factors by Ingersoll (2001) in his research identifying reasons for leaving teaching are directly related to school climate: poor administrative support and lack of faculty influence” (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 200). While there are many factors related to school culture and the level of impact it has on those within the school environment, researchers are providing more thorough information.

The content of this question generated responses that can be described as having pride in their school and for their teaching career.

I’m just very proud of where I live. I’m proud of the people I work with and live with. (Karen)

I want to show my passion, my true love for what I wanna do, what I want for these kids. (Kaye)

You have to love it, and if you love that, then you have that commitment. I think that pulls you through about anything. (Shelley)

In describing the culture within their school, participants also shared examples of how they contributed to the overall culture of the school. Participants spoke of the value of school community and their willingness to accept ownership of it.

I'm a big pro on welcoming people. I feel that the more welcome you feel, the more part of stuff you feel, the more you're willing to buy-in. (Kaye)

Again, the culture of the school, in particular that was that all students would be successful, and we're going to do whatever we can to make them successful. That was also where I got the first feeling of "All kids are successful." (Shelley)

The band teacher hasn't been here long. I would take her little flowers I picked from my house and things like that, just to say, "We're thinking about you." (Neva)

Participants spoke of their involvement in community spirited events and celebrations both within the school and the neighborhood. There was no boundary or divide between the school, neighborhood, and community pride.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study has focused on teacher longevity in various Title I elementary schools in Nebraska. While the research in this area is plentiful, there is opportunity to study the topic to a greater degree.

1. This study was limited to four teachers in the state of Nebraska. In order to strengthen the findings it would be important to conduct a study with a larger number of participants to determine if the results are consistent.
2. Additional research would include a closer analysis of how administrative support correlates with teacher longevity. Each participant shared examples of how administrators have an impact on the culture and collaboration within

the school. This would be an area of further study that would help explain the longevity of teaching careers.

3. Participants in this study represent three rural communities that are categorized as class three school districts and one participant from a class five school district. It would be important to conduct further teacher longevity studies specific to school district categorization.
4. In review of the literature, there is an ever present fad that continues to provide quick fix solutions to fill the void of teacher shortages. Studying alternative certification programs would be worthy to determine if these programs contribute to the turnover statistics or if these teachers actually stay in the profession for a career.
5. All four participants are female teachers. Previous research indicates female teachers are more likely to turn over than their male counterparts. Studying the correlation between gender and longevity would be beneficial in future studies.
6. Participants within this study teach at the elementary level. In order to target specific levels within the system, further review of teacher turnover within middle and/or high school levels would be informative.

Conclusion

This qualitative study on teacher longevity in Title I elementary schools served a purpose of further analyzing a problem of practice related to high rates of teacher turnover across the nation. In order to understand the topic to a greater degree, this

research project begins to explain why teachers stay committed to teaching in the same Title I school for 30 plus years. While it is difficult to pinpoint specific rationale when it comes to life experiences, participants in this study spoke of administrative support, collaboration, and being involved beyond the typical school day in their tenure experiences. Each participant has pride in their community, school, and for the profession.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter



Official Approval Letter for IRB project #16923 - New Project Form

March 1, 2017

Richard Devney
Department of Educational Administration
635 S 34th St Lincoln, NE 68510

John Mackiel
Department of Educational Administration
TEAC 123, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20170316923 EX
Project ID: 16923
Project Title: Factors Associated to Teacher Longevity in a Title I Elementary School

Dear Richard:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Exemption: 03/01/2017.

o Review conducted using Exempt category 2 at 45 CFR 46.101
o Funding: N/A

1. Your stamped and approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant. Please use this document to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the document, please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB



Appendix B
Informed Consent Letter



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Participant Informed Consent Form

Project ID: 16923

Title: Factors Associated to Teacher Longevity in a Title I Elementary School

Purpose of Research:

This research project will aim to identify specific factors that are associated to the longevity of teachers in a Title I elementary school in Nebraska. I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska of Lincoln and the principal of a Title I elementary school in the Lincoln Public School District. I am conducting a qualitative study of four participants in the state of Nebraska. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a teacher that has taught in a Title I elementary school for over thirty years. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.

Procedures:

You will be asked to participate in two separate interview sessions that focus on your experiences related to the longevity of your career in a Title I elementary school. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded and transcribed. Interview sessions will be at a location conducive for interviewing. The location of these interviews may take place at your school and/or public library.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded. You are not expected to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. An approved transcriptionist that has signed a confidentiality agreement will professionally transcribe the interview recording. Your identity will be known throughout the entire project. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator and the transcriptionist during the study and for six months after the study is complete. Upon completion of the dissertation, all audio recordings will be destroyed. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Compensation:

You will receive one \$50 prepaid Visa gift card for participating in this project. The gift card will be provided at the completion of the second interview.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator at the phone numbers listed below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

**Freedom to Withdraw:**

Participation of this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Freedom to Withdraw:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Feedback Survey:

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This 14 question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous; however, you can provide your contact information if you want someone to follow-up with you. This survey should be completed after your participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at:

https://ssp.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_aVvINC0U1vse5n.

_____ Initial if you agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Rik Devney, MA, Principal Investigator

Cell: (402) 890-5715

Dr. John Mackiel, Ph.D. Secondary Investigator

Office: (402) 472-8972

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Name: _____ Date: _____
Organization: _____ Location: _____
Title: _____

Introduction:

I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will be audio recording and transcribing what we say. I will be asking you to review the transcription with some of the notes I make regarding my interpretations of what you say. It is important that I reflect what you mean in my writing. Therefore, I want you to review it to make sure I am representing your views. The transcription will be non-verbatim (elimination of um's, ah's, false starts, etc.). It is important that the transcription be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation.

What I'm interested in finding out in this study are the factors related to teacher longevity in a Title I Elementary school. You've had a chance to review the questions I am going to ask you today. I really want to know your perspective so please feel free to discuss your views. I may ask you some additional questions that you have not reviewed as we go along in order to clarify what you mean.

Throughout your career of teaching, describe your collaboration with colleagues.
(Probe: How would you describe teacher collaboration when you first began teaching and how would you describe it as of current?)

Describe the experiences outside of the school setting that you have participated in during your teaching career?
(Probe: Describe the activities, organizations, or events that you have been a part of outside of the school setting.)

How would you describe your school culture and work environment?
(Probe: How has the culture of your school and work environment
changed?)