UNDERSTANDING WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE PERSISTENCE OF TEACHERS IN

URBAN, NON-FULLY ACCREDITED SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Heather Marie Cobbs

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. The central research question of the study asked, How do elementary and/or middle school veteran teachers describe their experiences in urban, non-fully accredited public schools? The sub-questions of the research study focused on teachers' mindset, motivation, and environmental fit. The theories guiding this study were the mindset and motivation theory by Carol Dweck and the person–environment fit theory by John Holland, as these theories focus on an individual's motivation to succeed and an individual being the correct fit for the environment in which they are a part. The methodology for the research study was a transcendental phenomenological design using purposeful and criterion sampling of elementary and middle school teachers in urban school settings. The findings of the research study revealed why 10 veteran teachers have persisted in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Data collection was conducted through an environmental-fit inventory, individual interviews, online focus groups, and participants' letter writing. All data were analyzed using memoing and coding while bracketing out the researcher's biases. The research revealed the importance of having a desire to have an impact, environmental fit, type of mindset, and love for students has on the persistence of teachers in challenging educational environments. Recommendations include further research with challenging educational environments in different areas and of quantitative measures.

Keywords: veteran teachers, urban schools, non-accredited schools, phenomenology, sustainment, environmental fit, motivation

Copyright

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation journey to my two sons and my parents; the four of them never stopped loving me or supporting me, unconditionally, throughout this journey, even when at times I became so unbearable due to the stress from the overwhelming workload and the lack of sleep that the journey brought.

My sons struggled through countless days of fast-food dinners, a mother supporting them on the sidelines with a computer in her lap, and weekends stuck in the house so that I could have work sessions. The thought of them being at graduation with smiles on their faces and cheering me on got me through the numerous times I questioned this journey; I hope one day they understand I needed them more than they probably needed me during this season in our lives. My hope is that through this difficult journey I have shown them the importance in believing in themselves, that hard work is required if they want to achieve their goals, and that prayer and faith in the Lord will carry them through all moments.

My parents, as always, were cheering me on, nonstop, during this journey. I thank my dad for being a man of few words but always showing me how proud he was of me and how he is always there by my side to support all that I do. You are truly my hero and without your guidance, tough love, and support, I would have never been able to accomplish this journey. I thank my mom for the encouraging words that were always right on time and the never-ending prayers for me during this time. I have always been able to count on you! You two provided me with a strong foundation, a never wavering support system, and unconditional love, things I will never be able to repay you fully for but please know my accomplishing this journey is one way to show you how truly amazing you are as parents and how great a job you have done in raising me. I love you both, more than I will ever be able to show.

I also dedicate my dissertation to my Uncle Phil. Every time you reminded me that I would be the first doctor in our family's history, it gave me the encouragement to persevere so that I could earn that title in our family!

Acknowledgments

My dissertation journey has probably been one of the most challenging journeys of my life. Upon reflection of my journey, filled with many high and many low moments, I realized that I would not have been able to get through it without the support of numerous individuals. I am eternally thankful for these individuals and their never-ending support and guidance throughout my journey. I owe my upmost gratitude to my Heavenly Father. Throughout my life, he has loved me in an unwavering way and provided me with the strengthen and wisdom to face not only this journey in my life, but all journeys. I know he heard my endless prayers and because of him I was able to complete one of my ultimate goals in life.

I also wish to express my gratitude to all members of my committee. They provided me with countless pieces of guidance, support, and constructive criticism that pushed me to become a better student, writer, and daughter of God. A special thanks to Dr. Linda Holcomb for your continued support and push to persevere through my journey, despite all the challenge I faced. Thank you for always being available to answer my questions, provide me with scriptural guidance, and give me efficient feedback.

I would also like to thank the school district where my data were collected. I appreciate their allowing me to conduct my study using their schools and employees. I thank all of my participants for being willing to participate in my research study and being open to telling their story; without them I would have not been able to achieve my biggest educational goal.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Standards of Learning (SOL)

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The retention of teachers is a continual problem that plagues the educational system in the United States (Heineke, Mazza, & Tichnor-Wagner, 2014). The problem is that current research has focused on teacher attrition, retention, and burnout, especially for beginning teachers; however, little research has been done regarding the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, challenging environments (Alarcon, 2011; Bernhardt, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Doney, 2013; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the mindset and motivational factors along with the environmental fit that contribute to the persistence of elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. This study focused on providing a voice to teachers who have been teaching in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia for more than five years to understand what encourages them to persist in their teaching career.

This chapter provides background information related to the study and explains how the study relates to the researcher. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the problem statement, overall purpose of the research study, and the significance of the study. The research questions and sub-questions are also presented and described using recent educational literature. Pertinent terms used throughout the study are also defined at the conclusion of the chapter.

Background

A significant amount of research has focused on teacher attrition and retention of novice teachers (Aragon, Culpepper, McKee, & Perkins, 2013; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Snyder, 2012); however, minimal research has been completed to explain teacher retention of

veteran teachers, especially in challenging educational environments, such as non-fully accredited public schools and urban public schools (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). According to research, teachers leave urban schools at a rate that is 50% higher than that of rural and suburban schools (Aragon et al., 2013). Due to this high rate of teacher turnover, urban schools tend to have lower academic success, which is shown through their accreditation status (Castro, 2014). Along with higher exit rates, urban schools also have a lower entrance rate of teachers due to urban schools being less than desirable environments for prospective educators (Aragon et al., 2013). Overall, a multitude of research has been completed on novice teacher retention and attrition, but minimal research, especially qualitative research that provides a voice to the teachers, has been completed on the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools.

Historical

Over the past five years the enrollment in teacher preparation programs across the United States has drastically decreased (Westervelt, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Research has found that the number of individuals enrolling in teacher preparation programs has decreased by 35% over the past five years (Westervelt, 2016). Due to the decreasing numbers of individuals interested in entering the teaching field, almost every state in the United States is currently experiencing a troubling teacher shortage (Westervelt, 2016). These teacher shortages are leaving many classrooms without qualified and effective individuals to provide instruction to students (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). When there are not qualified individuals leading the classrooms, a negative impact can occur on student achievement (Ediger, 2004; Murphy, 2010).

An abundance of research has found that over the last 10 years, teacher attrition has continued to increase on a yearly basis (Murphy, 2010; Westervelt, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

It has been found that 8% of teachers leave the profession each year, which equals a couple of hundred thousand teachers yearly that exit schools without the intention of returning (Westervelt, 2016). Many educational researchers have attempted to find solutions to decrease the number of teachers leaving the field; however, a firm answer has not been found (Westervelt, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). A solution to this problem would lead to an increase in the supply of effective teachers. With an increased supply, schools would be able to become more selective in the individuals they hire to instruct and help develop students (Westervelt, 2016).

Since the 1990s, educational environments have been experiencing drastic changes that have impacted their ability to retain teachers (Westervelt, 2016). Teacher's salaries have decreased drastically from the 1990s to current times, causing teachers to make 20% less than other college graduates with similar levels of education (Westervelt, 2016). Also, due to the cut in funding from federal and state governments over the past 20 years, teaching conditions have become increasingly worse (Murphy, 2010; Westervelt, 2016). The decrease in funding has caused books, supplies, and technology to become outdated and unavailable to teachers (Westervelt, 2016). Along with decreasing the amount of resources available, the decrease in government has also caused increases in class sizes across all levels of public education (Westervelt, 2016). The negative changes in educational environments that have occurred over time continue to entice teachers to exit the field due to the increasing challenges and stress they experience (Murphy, 2010; Westervelt, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

Social

Research indicates that teacher attrition is high among teachers across the nation, especially in urban school districts (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Not only has high teacher attrition caused a teacher shortage across the United States, but it has also been found to be a very costly

problem for public school districts and to have a negative impact on student achievement (Buchanan, 2012; Murphy, 2010; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). In 2005, school systems in the United States spent over $4.9 billion dollars on teacher turnover; which proves that teacher attrition is also a costly problem (Murphy, 2010). Research also indicates that teacher attrition is negatively correlated with student success (Heineke et al, 2014). Due to this correlation, schools with higher teacher turnover tend to have lower academic success, as measured through standardized assessments and expressed through their accreditation status (Castro, 2014).

Also, due to the constant need for teachers, streams of inexperienced, first-year teachers enter the educational environments to replace the effective, experienced, veteran teachers who are leaving for the various reasons (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). As research suggests, teachers improve effectiveness with experience; therefore, having veteran teachers leave the educational environment and be replaced with inexperienced teachers is detrimental to student achievement (Heineke et al., 2014). As research has shown, teachers enter and exit the profession at high rates (Snyder, 2012). Due to this attrition and the negative effects it can have on the educational realm, it is important to understand what keeps teachers in the profession to ensure veteran teachers are a part of educational environments.

Environmental fit is the degree to which an individual's and environmental traits match (Holland, 1997). A person can experience a positive or negative environmental fit and both can impact an individual and his or her work environment in numerous ways (Holland, 1997). An individual's fit within the work environment can impact mental and physical well-being; therefore, individuals who have a positive environmental fit with their work environment experience increased job satisfaction, stability, involvement, quality, and productivity (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997). Due to the positive effects that a positive environmental fit

can have on an individual and his or her behavior at and attitude about work, it is imperative to understand what promotes and sustains positive environmental fit of educators to ensure veteran teachers have positive feelings and a strong willingness to be a part of their educational environments.

Theoretical Foundation

The motivation and mindset theory (Dweck, 2006) and the person–environment fit theory (Holland, 1997) are two theoretical frameworks that were appropriate for framing this research study. The motivation and mindset theory addresses the idea that personal beliefs have an impact on an individual's achievement (Dweck, 2001). When educators are able to persist through challenges and stressors, they experience a sense of achievement; therefore, this theory will be used to help explain how mindset contributes to ability to last in an environment that most people choose to leave. The person–environment fit theory states that an individual's personality type can impact the fit with his or her work environment (Holland, 1997). This study was conducted to explain how the veteran teachers fit into their challenging environments and if an appropriate fit contributes to their sustainment.

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Situation to Self

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My motivation to conduct this research study started when I began my teaching career in an urban non-fully accredited public school, which was my first experience in being part of an urban school in any form. In my first year in this environment, I saw a majority of educators who were similar to me as first-year teachers. At the conclusion of this school year, all but two of the first-year teachers left the environment, which left me questioning why so many individuals left something they had worked so hard to attain. As I continued my teaching career in urban, non-fully accredited public schools, I continued to watch this pattern repeat itself. Over

time, I began to question what ensures teachers do not leave and what impact this constant turnover has on student achievement and other educators in the building. It was through my own teaching career that I began to wonder why teachers stay and what encourages them to persist in challenging educational environments when they have the option to teach in other school settings with fewer stressors and demands.

Additional motivation to complete this research study developed as I was completing course work to obtain my master's degree and educational specialist's degree; as I was completing research for various papers and projects and completing internships in a variety of school settings, I began to see and understand that extensive differences exist for students and teachers in the various school settings: public and private, urban and rural, Title One identified and not Title One, and fully accredited and non-fully accredited. Reading research related to these differences and seeing first-hand the impacts that these differences have on student achievement and the overall school environment during internship experiences inspired me to try to find a way to overcome these differences in school environments to ensure that all students across the nation were being given the ample opportunities to experience success. Teacher retention and attrition was a common difference that I experienced first-hand and read about in educational literature. This difference existed in various school settings and due to my personal experience with it, I was encouraged to focus on it during the research study.

Due to my personal experiences and living through the phenomenon, I have seen the effects of constant teacher turnover on students and have seen that there is something that sets the teachers who can endure in the challenging environment apart from the individuals which do not persist in the environment. Therefore, these experiences have encouraged me to seek what sets these teachers apart and helps give them a voice to explain their success. As an educator

who has seen the high rate of turnover in urban, non-fully accredited schools, I have personally

seen the need for an understanding of what can keep teachers in these environments.

Along with motivation to complete this research study, as the researcher I brought

ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions to the study. As described in Creswell

(2013), the ontological assumptions are that there are multiple realities, as reality is seen through

many views; therefore, I reported multiple perspectives as told by the selected teachers. The

epistemological assumption was that I lessened the distance between myself and the participants

and relied on the participants' experience to understand the situation, instead of my personal

experiences (Creswell, 2013). As explained in Creswell (2013), the axiological assumption I

held is that research holds a value to me and that biases will be present throughout the study due

to me being familiar with the studied environment and having my personal values and thoughts.

Overall, the research paradigm that was used in this research study is social constructivism, as I

am seeking to understand the environment in which I am an active participant.

Problem Statement

Teacher attrition and retention is currently one of the most critical issues faced by public

education systems in the United States. Currently, teachers are entering and exiting the

profession at high rates, especially in urban, high-needs areas (Aragon et al, 2013; Castro, 2014;

Snyder, 2012). Approximately 30% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five

years and the turnover rate is about 50% higher in high-poverty schools (Jensen, 2009; Snyder,

2012). Schools with larger minority populations, in high poverty areas, and with a history of

lower academic success tend to experience teacher turnover rates as high as 25% on a yearly

basis (Aragon et al., 2013; Castro, 2014). A career in urban schools is generally seen as less

desirable, and high-quality teachers are not as eager to teach in these environments due to the

increased demands and challenges they present (Aragon et al., 2013; Snyder, 2012). However, it is imperative that teachers remain in the profession within these environments, as experience improves teachers' effectiveness, which is positively correlated with increased student learning and student achievement (Castro, 2014; Heineke et al., 2014; Snyder, 2012). The current research has studied teachers' retention, attrition, and burnout, especially that of novice teachers; however, minimal research on teacher's attitudes, mindset, motivation, environment fit, and career fit as related to their sustainment in educational environments has been conducted. Due to the lack of research on these topics, researchers have failed to develop an understanding of the mindset and motivational factors along with the level of environmental fit that contributes to the persistence of veteran teachers in challenging elementary and middle school environments (Aragon et al., 2013; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Snyder, 2012). This qualitative, phenomenological study worked to give a voice to teachers in urban, non-fully accredited schools in eastern Virginia who have persisted in their environment for more than five years.

The problem is that teacher experience is correlated with increased student learning and achievement, which is the ultimate goal of educational systems in the United States; however, currently the educational systems in the United States are struggling to create environments that promote and support sustainment of teachers, especially in urban schools, which is consequently negatively impacting student achievement at all academic levels. A multitude of research has been completed on novice teachers and their retention and attrition (Aragon et al., 2013; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Snyder, 2012); however, minimal research, especially qualitative research, has been completed on veteran teachers and their retention and attrition, especially in urban environments. There has also been minimal research completed on veteran teachers who have persisted in their environment and achieved a positive environmental-fit and the mindsets

that are held by teachers who have persisted in challenging environments. Environmental-fit is the degree to which an individual's and environmental characteristics match (Holland, 1997). This lack of information on how to retain teachers in urban, non-fully accredited schools has negative impacts on teacher effectiveness, school effectiveness, student learning, and student achievement; therefore, this qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to determine factors related to environmental fit, mindset, and attitudes that promote sustainment of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public elementary and middle schools in hopes of developing an understanding of what educational environments can do to support the persistence of the valuable veteran teachers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the persistence of veteran elementary and middle school teachers who persevered at urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. The persistence of teachers was generally defined as remaining at a non-fully accredited, urban public school for more than five years despite the challenges and stressors experienced by them (Milner & Hoy, 2003). One theory that guided this study is the motivation and mindset theory developed by Carol Dweck as it discusses individual's motivation to experience personal growth and persevere throughout experiences, which is what veteran teachers are doing when remaining in their educational environment for extended periods (Dweck, 2006). An additional theory that guided the study is the person–environment fit theory developed by John Holland as it discusses a person's personality and how it contributes to a proper environmental fit (Holland, 1997). The person–environment fit theory focuses on the idea that if there is a perceived match between an individual's self and environment, benefits to mental and physical well-being exist; however, if an individual

perceives a mismatch to exist between his or her self and environment, stress is heightened and physical and mental strain occur (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997). This theory related to the research study, since when veteran teachers are able to sustain in an environment, they are able to fit into their environment, which is the focus of the theory developed by John Holland (1997).

Significance of the Study

An abundance of research has been completed on novice teachers and the factors for their attrition and retention (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml, Castro, Field, & Morowski, 2016; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012); however, minimal research, especially research giving veteran teachers a voice, has been completed on veteran teacher retention. Most of the research that has been completed focuses on the facts and figures related to teacher attrition and retention. Therefore, this study holds empirical significance for educational researchers and professional educators interested in developing a deeper understanding of how to support teacher retention. It offers educators a deeper understanding by giving a voice to the veteran teachers that have persisted in a non-fully accredited, public, urban elementary or middle school for more than five years. By reading this literature, professional educators will be able to gain a first-hand perspective on what sustains educators in challenging environments. Describing the lived experiences of teachers who have persisted in these challenging environments offers a better understanding of the motivational factors and type of environmental fit that contribute to their persistence.

Along with holding an empirical significance, the described research study also offers theoretical significance for mindset theorists, industrial psychologists, and organizational psychologists. It offers theoretical significance as it extends the application of the mindset and motivation theory developed by Carol Dweck and the person–environment fit developed by John

Holland to alternate settings (Dweck, 2001, 2006; Holland, 1997). Using these theories to guide

the study may extend the theories' relevance to educational settings.

This study also offers practical significance to individuals in the educational community

in many ways. This study informs school administrators about what promotes teacher retention

in challenging environments. This information could help school administrators make informed

hiring decisions to ensure they are employing individuals who are able to persist in challenging

environments. It has the possibility to inform educational administrators on ways to promote

teacher longevity and decrease teacher turnover. This research study is also beneficial to

prospective and current educators as it provides information on qualities that are needed by

teachers to persist in the described environments. Knowing these qualities can help these

individuals make informed decisions to determine if they would be the right fit for the described

environment, which can help them with their future career choices. Along with being beneficial

for school administrators and prospective and current educators, it will also be beneficial for

teaching preparation programs. It has the possibility to be beneficial for teaching preparation

programs as it will provide them with information to provide to pre-service teachers regarding

the challenges experienced by teachers in the described environment and what personal traits can

help them be successful in the challenging environments.

Research Questions

Qualitative research is guided by questions that are developing, open-ended, and not

leading towards the creation of a hypothesis (Creswell, 2013). The questions of qualitative

research are developed by narrowing the purpose down to several questions, an overarching

central question and additional sub-questions (Creswell, 2013). The central question is the most

general question that will be answered by the research study while the sub-questions are focused

on the components of the studied lived experience (Creswell, 2013). The presented research study was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions that are closely related to the purpose of the research study. The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of veteran elementary and middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Therefore, the central research question relates directly to the purpose of the study.

Central Research Question

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers who persist, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their teaching experiences?

The central research question addressed the central focus of the qualitative research study. The goal of this study was to describe the experience of veteran teachers remaining in their challenging educational environment for five or more years to develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. There is an abundance of literature to support that teacher attrition is a current problem (Buchanan, 2012; Murphy, 2010; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), that teacher attrition is higher in urban areas (Zhang & Zeller, 2016), and that teacher attrition is problematic to educational environments (Buchanan, 2012; Murphy, 2010; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Therefore, given the lack of research on teacher retention, especially in urban areas, the question of why veteran teachers persist is an imperative question to answer.

Research Sub-Question One

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their fit in their environment and how it contributes to their persistence in their educational environment?

Research Sub-question One was grounded in Holland's (1997) theory that an individual's

personality can impact whether he or she fits properly into the work environment. Individuals who have a career that fits their personality traits often experience career well-being and job satisfaction (Holland, 1997). Research Sub-question One addressed the veteran teachers' fit in their current educational environment and how they perceive it helps them persist in their career.

Research Sub-Question Two

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their mindset and how it relates to their persistence in their educational environment?

The mindset and motivation theory by Dweck (2001) proposes that an individual's mindset can affect an individual's ability to achieve and view him/herself and surroundings in a positive manner. A person's being able to succeed or not experience success is correlated with whether the individual holds a growth or fixed mindset (Dweck, 2001). Individuals who hold a growth mindset feel that with work and effort success can be achieved (Dweck, 2006). Sub-question Two focused on the relationship between the veteran teachers' mindset and their persistence in their environment.

Research Sub-Question Three

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their motivational factors and how they relate to their persistence in their educational environment?

The theoretical framework guided the development of Research Sub-question Three. The mindset and motivation theory by Carol Dweck also discusses the motivation that an individual has and how it can encourage achievement (Dweck, 2006). If individuals are motivated to do well, they are more apt to do so; therefore, it is important that individuals have motivators

present (Dweck, 2006). Sub-question Three probed if the veteran teachers' motivational factors contribute to their sustainment in their challenging educational environments.

Definitions

1. *Burnout* – Burnout is a syndrome of bodily and mental exhaustion, in which a worker becomes negative towards those they work with and develops a negative sense of self-worth (Schaefer et al., 2012).

2. *Extrinsic motivation* – Extrinsic motivation is the external motivators, such as rewards, that drive a person's behaviors (Dweck, 2006).

3. *Fixed mindset* – Fixed mindset is the belief that an individual's traits are set and not changeable (Dweck, 2006).

4. *Growth mindset* – Growth mindset is the belief that basic qualities can be developed through dedication and hard work (Dweck, 2006).

5. *Intrinsic motivation* – Intrinsic motivation is the internal motivators, such as personal satisfaction, which causes a person to act in a certain manner (Dweck, 2006).

6. *Mindset* – Mindset is the attitudes that an individual holds and allows to impact his or her behavior (Dweck, 2001).

7. *Non-fully accredited public schools* – Non-fully accredited public schools are public schools, of all levels, that have not met the essential requirements set forth for academic excellence by the governing state (Murphy, 2010).

8. *Persistence* – Persistence is the continuance of completing a task in spite of difficulty or opposition (Milner & Hoy, 2003).

9. *Person–environment fit* – Person–environment fit is the degree to which an individual's and environmental characteristics match (Holland, 1997).

10. *Teacher attrition* – Teacher attrition refers to the teachers who leave teaching in the first five years of teaching (Schaefer et al., 2012).

11. *Teacher retention* – Teacher retention refers to the teachers who continue to be engaged in the teaching field (Kilgallon, Maloney, & Lock, 2008).

12. *Urban school* – An urban school is a school that is located in a large, central city with a population of more than 50,000 people (Castro, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). An urban school is located in an area that contains residential, commercial, and non-residential land use (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Urban schools are often characterized by high rates of poverty (Castro, 2014).

13. *Veteran teacher* – A veteran teacher is a teacher who has substantial experience in the educational field (Day & Gu, 2009).

Summary

A multitude of research has been completed on novice teachers and their attrition and retention; however, minimal research has been completed on the retention of veteran teachers in challenging educational environments, such as urban, non-fully accredited public elementary and middle schools. This research study was designed to provide a voice to veteran teachers who persisted in these challenging educational environments for more than five years. The research study was completed to understand how environmental fit, motivational factors, and mindset contribute to the sustainment of veteran teachers. This chapter provided the background for the need of this study, the purpose of the study, the significance of this study, and information related to pertinent terms used in the study. This qualitative research study was completed to improve education by providing professional educators with an understanding of how veteran teacher retention can be encouraged and supported to positively impact student achievement.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Educators in urban, non-fully accredited public schools face many stressors and challenges related to their work that can hinder their persistence in these types of educational environments. The purpose of this research study was to provide a voice to teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public elementary and middle schools who have persisted, for five or more years, in the face of these stressors and challenges. The study focused on veteran teachers' mindset, motivational factors, and environmental fit and how these aspects contribute to their persistence in these challenging environments.

This chapter provides an overview of the empirical support for the study and the related literature on relevant aspects of the described research study. Reviewed literature will first provide information related to the mindset and motivation theory by Carol Dweck (2001) and the person–environment fit theory by John Holland (1997) as these are the theories that provide the theoretical framework for the research study. Literature related to the theories' background, evolution, and application to the research study will be presented. Additional literature on the major aspects of the study will also be presented in this chapter to provide background information related to the study and identify the existing gap in the educational literature. Literature is presented on the following aspects: (a) teacher attrition and retention, (b) the causes of teacher attrition and retention, (c) impacts of teacher attrition and retention, (d) urban public schools, (e) public school accountability, and (f) school accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This chapter ends with a summary of all related literature and the identification of the existing gap in the current literature.

Theoretical Framework

An axiological assumption led to the development and choice of the study on veteran teachers who have persisted through the challenges and stresses presented in working in a non-fully accredited urban public school. As the researcher of the described study, I supported both a biblical worldview and a social constructivism mindset as related to veteran teacher retention in urban public elementary and middle schools in eastern Virginia.

This study examined the perspectives of elementary and middle school public school teachers who have persisted, for five or more years, in urban, public, non-fully accredited schools. It focused on their motivation, mindset, and environmental fit. Empirical support provides the necessary support to frame the research study (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the theoretical framework that guided this study is the motivation and mindset theory developed by Carol Dweck (2006) and the person–environment fit theory developed by John Holland (1997). The demographics, personal life history, and aspirations of the veteran teachers were explored to describe the motivational factors, mindset, and environmental fit that support the individuals in sustaining their teaching careers in challenging educational environments. Comparatively, additional research was also explored on teachers' classroom experiences and perceived fit with others in the environment and how their fit contributed to their sustainability in their teaching career beyond the initial five years of teaching in urban non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia.

Motivation and Mindset Theory

Dweck's (2001) motivation and mindset theory proposes that an individual's beliefs can affect his or her personal achievement. The motivation and mindset theory focuses on the effects of a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset on personality, personal motivation, and personal

development (Dweck, 2006). Yeager and Dweck (2012) suggested that individuals can hold one of two different mindsets; however, they can transform from one mindset to another through processes of learning and developing. According to Dweck (2006), individuals that hold a growth mindset are able to experience personal growth over time, while individuals that hold a fixed mindset are not able to grow and develop due to their belief that qualities remain constant and cannot be changed.

Dweck (2001) discovered that an individual's mindset stems from the attitudes regarding where ability comes from. An individual's mindset is conventions and opportunities that learners own about themselves and others in a societal context (Dweck, 2001). Mindset determines if individuals becomes the person they want to be and if they are able to accomplish tasks that are valued by them (Dweck, 2006). Individuals are not always aware of the type of mindset they hold; however, it can be identifiable through their daily living behavior (Dweck, 2001). Regardless of the type of mindset an individual has, it influences all aspects of a person's life (Dweck, 2006). The environment of a person can impact the type of mindset they hold; praise, encouragement, and modeling can help a person transform their mindset from fixed to growth (Dweck, 2001). In educational environments, administrators and teachers both hold positions that allow them to impact the mindsets of others; being aware of this can help improve the work and effort of all individuals within the environment.

Individuals that hold a growth mindset believe that basic qualities can be developed over time through learning, hard work, training, and persistence (Dweck, 2001). Failing is not viewed as a negative event by individuals that hold a growth mindset; instead, they see it as an opportunity to learn and grow (Dweck, 2001). Possessing a growth mindset can lead to people living a life of less stress and more success (Dweck, 2006). It has been advocated that persons

with growth mindsets accept challenges, new opportunities, and support (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). They also constantly pursue accomplishments without the need for praise and rewards (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Fixed mindset individuals believe that the qualities and traits they hold are fixed, which leads them to believe the traits, such as intelligence and ability, cannot grow and develop (Dweck, 2001; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Failure is often dreaded by people whole hold a fixed mindset because it provides them a negative statement regarding their ability and traits that they perceive to have no control over (Dweck, 2006). Individuals who hold a fixed mindset are constantly trying to prove themselves to others in hopes of having others believe they are intelligent or capable (Dweck, 2006).

Dweck (2006) has signified her research is relevant to all individuals, regardless of age, socioeconomic background, culture, gender, and race, and in all areas of an individual's life. However, Dweck and other mindset theorists often study and educate businessmen, scientists, educators, parents, students, athletes, and coaches due to their consistent experiences with challenges and need to achieve impactful outcomes (Dweck 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). These individuals are often educated on how to switch from a trapping fixed mindset to a growth mindset that will allow them to reach their fullest potential (Dweck 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). When these individuals are able to switch to a growth mindset, they are able to accomplish ultimate contentment and attainment within their field (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Dweck (2006) has signified her research is especially relevant to teaching and learning. From her own educational experiences, Dweck discovered that great teachers are individuals who are committed to lifelong learning and hold strong aspirations for all individuals within an

educational community to achieve (Dweck, 2006). Therefore, great teachers must have a mindset shift from fixed to growth to ensure the ultimate goal of student achievement occurs (Dweck, 2006). The motivational mindset theory provides not only foundational support for educators but serves as motivation to continue their career despite the stressors and challenges they face. Overall, the motivational and mindset theory provides encouragement to teachers teaching in challenging educational environments in eastern Virginia.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) have focused much of their studies on the younger population. Through their research, they have found that individuals can be taught at young ages how to shift their mindset when they are presented with conflicts, and that after being taught, they can apply the lesson to different situations (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Once younger individuals are taught how to shift their mindset, they become more eager to approach life's challenges and work to overcome them without giving up (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Additional research studies have also found that when individuals hold a growth mindset and are resilient, they are able to achieve their ultimate potential and face the obstacles of life successfully (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010).

Elementary and middle school teachers in public, urban, non-fully accredited schools face constant challenges related to their work environment, job demands, and the students they serve (Bauml et al., 2016; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013). The motivations residing behind teachers' actions and the actual actions taken by teachers profoundly affect and shape the young people with whom they are interacting (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012); therefore, it is imperative that teachers in the described environment are able to face and overcome the challenges to be effective and to promote student achievement. Consequently, teachers holding a growth mindset can rise to the challenges and be determined to overcome them to positively impact the students and other stakeholders within the educational environment.

Person–Environment Fit Theory

Holland's (1997) person–environment fit theory proposes that individuals' personality traits impact their ability to relate to their chosen environment and that everyone has a work environment with which they are most compatible. If there is a perceived match between an individual's self and environment, benefits to mental and physical well-being exist; however, if an individual perceives a mismatch to exist between his or her self and environment, stress is heightened and physical and mental strain occur (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997). Individuals experience stress when they view differences between their environment and their personal values, goals, and desires (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997). The person–environment fit theory also theorizes that when individuals with the same personality type work together, they experience a higher sense of fit with their work environment and experience a sense of satisfaction and lower levels of stress (Craik, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997; Nauta, 2010). How people act within and feel about their work environment depends tremendously on their fit within the work environment (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997).

Holland's person–environment fit theory is empirically grounded and widely applicable to many occupations and occupational environments (Craik, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nauta, 2010). The person–environment fit theory has been tested in many different environments such as with high school students, college graduates, and working adults, and it has consistently indicated that individuals choose college majors and choose to enter work environments that positively correlate with their perceived personality (Craik, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nauta, 2010). Along with discovering that individuals' perceived personality guides their occupational environment choice, when the theory has been tested it has also been

discovered that when there is congruency between a person and the work environment, the person is able to have higher job satisfaction, stability, involvement, quality, productivity, and well-being (Craik, 2000; Holland, 1997; Mischel, 1977; Nauta, 2010). Even though it has been found that an individual's perceived personality has the ability to positively impact aspects of a person's work environment, it has been found that it does not relate to a person's sociability and problem-solving ability within his or her occupational environment (Craik, 2000; Holland, 1997; Mischel, 1977; Nauta, 2010).

Holland's (1997) person–environment fit theory is developed and based on the notion that an individual's behavior is a function of personality and social environment and assumes that individual's behavior is influenced by many determinants, both situationally and personally (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Craik, 2000; Nauta, 2010). Additionally, the person–environment fit theory proposes that most people resemble a combination of the six different primary personality types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nauta, 2010). Even though individuals usually resemble a combination of the six different personality types, typically they have one type that is ranked higher than the other types (Edwards &Rothbard, 1999; Nauta, 2010). An individual is classified as one of these six personality types based on his or her distinctive interests, abilities, attitudes, values, beliefs, and interests (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Feldman, Ethington, & Smart, 2001; Nauta, 2010). Therefore, an individual's primary personality type guides the choice of occupation and choice of occupational environment that is seen as ideal (Craik, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Feldman et al., 2001; Holland, 1997; Nauta, 2010).

Work environments can also be categorized into realistic, investigative, social, enterprising, or conventional by their resemblance of and connection to the different personality

types (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Feldman et al., 2001; Nauta, 2010). Occupational

environments are categorized by analyzing the jobs done within and the individuals working

within the environments (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nauta, 2010). When individuals choose to

work in environments that are similar to their personality types, they are able to develop feelings

of satisfaction and experience more success than individuals who are working in environments

that do not correlate with their personality type (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Feldman et al.,

2001).

Holland has focused much of his studies on college students and their search for and

decision on a college major (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Feldman et al., 2001). Through his

studies and others researching his studies, it has been found that students search for and select

environments that match their distinctive personality type (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Feldman

et al., 2001). It has also been consistently found that student achievement, within these chosen

environments, is related to their congruency between their dominant personality type and their

academic environment (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Feldman et al.,

2001).

Holland's work has theorized that adults do not randomly select their work environments

but actively choose them (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Feldman et al., 2001; Schneider, Smith,

Taylor, & Fleenor, 1998). Holland (1997) found that "individuals search for environments that

exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable

problems and roles" (p. 4). Holland's studies and findings support that teachers actively choose

to be a part of their current educational environment in which they are teaching and are drawn to

it due to a believed connection. Since individuals actively choose their environments, it has also

been suggested that work environments spend time focusing on their organizational actions to

ensure they remain congruent with the people's attributes they are seeking and encouraging

(Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Feldman et al., 2001; Holland, 1997; Schneider et al., 1998).

The person–environment fit theory holds many important implications to the workplace,

regardless of the field (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Caplan, 1987). Work organizations strive to

hire individuals that can meet the demands of the job, adapt to changes within the work

environment, and remain committed to the job (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Caplan, 1987).

Individuals, like workplaces, have wants (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Caplan, 1987). Individuals

want to find organizations and work that meet their personal needs, that match with their values,

and that match with their abilities (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Caplan, 1987). If the

organization's wants align with an individual's wants, it can promote positive outcomes for the

person and organization due to the individual feeling satisfied, having an overall positive well-

being, and increased work performance (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Caplan, 1987; Feldman et

al., 2001; Holland, 1997; Schneider et al., 1998). The positive outcomes that can be experienced

by individuals in turn positively affect work environments due to higher productivity and

improved work performance which help the organizations achieve their set goals (Boon & Den

Hartog, 2011; Caplan, 1987; Schneider et al., 1998).

The constructs of the person–environment fit theory fit closely with the described

research study's sub-question regarding veteran teachers' fit with their work environment and

how it influences their persistence in their educational career. If individuals are able to fit with

their chosen environment, their well-being is positively impacted (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999;

Holland, 1997). Veteran teachers working in urban, non-fully accredited schools have a need to

fit into their work environment, which is often viewed as less than desirable and challenging to

others, to ensure they are able to remain with low levels of stress and high levels of satisfaction.

The person–environment fit theory emphasizes the effects of perceived environment fit and offers a structure in which the described research study could be built upon and the findings could be interpreted.

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Related Literature

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The literature that was reviewed for the described study focused on teacher attrition and retention for both novice and veteran teachers and the impacts it has on the educational environment. The review of literature also examined urban public schools, the accreditation of public schools in the United States, and how public-school accountability is handled in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Reflecting on the current published literature, additional research should be conducted regarding veteran teachers' persistence in urban, non-fully accredited public schools.

Teacher Attrition and Retention

A multitude of research has been completed on the movement within the teacher workforce (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The mobility of teachers in the workforce has been described as being comprised of stayers, movers, and leavers (Keigher, 2010). The stayers are the teachers who remain in the profession, the movers are the teachers who move to other educational environments, and the leavers are the one who leave the profession altogether (Keigher, 2010). The stayers add to the teacher retention statistics and knowledge while the leavers and movers add to the teacher attrition statistics and literature.

Teacher attrition refers to teachers who leave the teaching profession or who change occupational fields (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014). The

teacher attrition conflict in the United States is not due to having too few college graduates with

degrees related to education, increased student enrollment, or increased teacher retirement but

due to pre-retirement teacher turnover (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Doney, 2013; Heineke

et al., 2014; Ingersoll, 2001). Since the early 1970s, both elementary and secondary public

schools have been experiencing high rates of attrition when compared to other professions, such

as law, engineering, and architecture (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). Teacher turnover has

continued to increase, substantially, over the past three decades and it is predicted that it will

continue to increase as time goes on (Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Heineke et al., 2014;

Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012).

Presently, each year in the United States one third of the teaching force exits the field for

various reasons (Heineke et al., 2014; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). According to a study

conducted by Alliance for Excellent Education (2014), approximately half a million United

States teachers move or leave each year. High-need schools, in both urban and rural areas,

experience the highest attrition rates in the nation (Heineke et al., 2014). Educational researchers

have found that approximately 25% of first-year teachers leave the teaching profession and that

the rates of attrition continue to increase until a teacher's third year of service (Heineke et al.,

2014; Merrow, 2001). Research has found that 40 to 50% of teachers leave within the first five

years of service (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014;

Merrow, 2001; Riggs, 2013). Merrow (2001) diagnosed the problem of teacher attrition in this

way: "The pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak . . . We're

misdiagnosing the problem as recruitment when it's really retention" (p. 666). Cochran-Smith

(2004) reported that individuals enter the teaching profession for idealistic reasons, such as

providing children with opportunities to be positive, productive citizens and of making the world

a better place. Along with these idealistic reasons, individuals also enter the profession because they love learning and love children (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Even though educators have positive attitudes and reasons for entering the educational field, they do not prove to be enough to sustain them in the teaching profession (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Teacher retention refers to teachers who stay in the teaching profession (Snyder, 2012). Previously completed research has found that the individuals that tend to stay in the teaching profession the longest are males, even though a majority of the educational work force is comprised of females (Hughes, 2012; Snyder, 2012). A multitude of research has also shown that individuals that teach elementary school and have lower National Teacher Exam scores are more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Buchanan, 2012; Heineke et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Snyder, 2012). Additionally, minority teachers are more likely to remain in their profession, as White teachers are 1.36 times more likely to leave the teaching profession than that of their non-White coworkers (Hughes, 2012).

When teachers are retained, they are able to gain years of experience which helps them develop knowledge and skills that improve their effectiveness within the classroom (Buchanan, 2012; Heineke et al., 2014; Snyder, 2012). Teachers that have substantial experience, normally more than five years in the educational field, are known as veteran teachers and are often regarded as the individuals within the school who hold the most expertise and the ability to assist novice teachers as they grow and develop (Buchanan, 2012; Day & Gu, 2009). According to Chen (2017), it is estimated that the United States will have more than two million teacher job openings between 2014 and 2024; therefore, it is imperative to examine which factors will promote teacher retention,

Causes of Teacher Attrition and Retention

Multitudes of research have determined that teachers, both novice and veteran, leave their professions due to numerous and varied reasons (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Veldman, Admiraal, van Tartwijk, Mainhard, & Wubbels, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The causes of teacher attrition can be related to the school culture or related to personal issues experienced by the teacher (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Veldman et al., 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Research has found that the most prominent reasons novice teachers exit the field is due to disillusionment with the profession, isolation of support, poor working conditions, subpar administration, low salary, inadequate preparation, lack of mentoring, and cultural transitions from pre-service to in-service teaching (Bernhardt, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012; Veldman et al., 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Novice teachers often experience trouble with classroom management and student behavior; due to the lack of support in overcoming these issues, these constant troubles often push novice teachers out of the career (Bernhardt, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Veldman et al., 2016).

Often teachers, both novice and veteran, leave the profession due to emotional burnout (Alarcon, 2011; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012). Burnout is a condition individuals can experience that brings an extreme sense of exhaustion and disinterest in the work environment (Alarcon, 2011). Teacher burnout often occurs due to high demands, having little available resources, and low levels of leadership organization (Alarcon, 2011; Veldman et al., 2016). Teachers are constantly needing to recognize, meet, and support all students' needs to ensure they are effectively completing their job; this often leads teachers to become

overwhelmed which also increases the chances of teachers becoming burnt out (Downer, Stuhlman, Schweig, Martinez, & Ruzek, 2015).

The major components of effective schools are the school leaders and the teachers (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Urick, 2016). Previously completed research studies have found that the two major components of effective schools are very closely linked and that the principal's leadership or lack of leadership often is the deciding factor in a teacher's level of satisfaction with his or her job (Beteille et al., 2012; Urick, 2016). Otto and Arnold (2005) found that when teachers do not receive necessary support from school administrators, they feel stressed, overworked, and underappreciated; these negative feelings lead teachers to feeling dissatisfied with their position, which in turns encourages them to leave the profession (Beteille et al., 2012; Urick, 2016). Family issues have also been a reason for teachers, novice and veteran, to leave the educational field (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007).

The teaching profession is often described as stressful by experienced teachers due to high workload and the demands put on them by administrators, colleagues, students, and parents (Day & Gu, 2009; Veldman et al., 2016). The stress level that teachers experience is often a negative impact on their job satisfaction which then leads to burnout and the eventual exiting of the profession (Veldman et al., 2016). Veteran teachers often experience high levels of stress due to having high demands and not having the adequate resources to meet these demands (Veldman et al., 2016). Along with having minimal professional resources to complete their assigned tasks, veteran teachers also report leaving the educational field due to a lack of personal resources to be able to cope with emotional demands of working with people in need on a constant basis (Veldman et al., 2016).

Research often shows that teachers persevere in their career due to the motivation they receive from building positive relationships with their students (Bernhardt, 2012; Veldman et al., 2016). Positive student-teacher relationships can increase teachers' job satisfaction because it provides them with feelings of accomplishment and the ability to make a difference (Bernhardt, 2012; Veldman et al., 2016); when a teacher has increased job satisfaction it can encourage them to retain themselves in their environment. Research has also shown that teachers are more likely to stay in their career if they are allowed to teach according to their personal visions (Vaughn & Saul, 2013). Teacher retention can also be encouraged by an individual's career preparation program (Eckert, 2013; Snyder, 2012). Educational researchers have found that teacher preparation programs that include a spiraled curriculum, experiential learning, authentic learning, collegial support, and discourse opportunities better prepare teachers for the experiences and challenges they will face as an in-service teacher (Snyder, 2012). When teachers are adequately prepared for the real-world teaching, they have the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful which can encourage them to stay in their environment. Along with positive relationships and adequate career training, having an administrative staff that recognizes teachers' expertise can encourage educators to remain in their environment, despite any faced challenges (Dagenhart, Petty, & O'Connor, 2010). If teachers are going to be encouraged to stay in the teaching profession, teachers need school conditions that are supportive and allow them to experience success (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dagenhart et al., 2010). Providing teachers with ample opportunities to work with other educators in professional learning communities, instead of in isolation, good pay, and advancement prospects during their career can also encourage educators to persist in their profession (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dagenhart et al., 2010; Snyder, 2012).

Teacher retention and attrition are also greatly influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Rooney, 2015). The intrinsic rewards that teachers can receive are the satisfaction in contributing to students' success, the enthusiasm for the content they are teaching, the pleasure teachers receive from working with students, and the influence teachers have over the students (Rooney, 2015). These intrinsic rewards provide educators with a reassuring feeling that they are making a difference in the world, which encourages them to continue with their teaching career (Rooney, 2015).

The nation's teaching pool is going to continue to lose individuals due to the lack of research on what supports teacher retention. Multitudes of research studies have shown why teachers, especially novice teachers, leave the field (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Veldman et al., 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), while minimal educational research explains why they stay (Bernhardt, 2012; Eckert, 2013; Snyder, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013; Veldman et al., 2016). The educational research has shown that teachers often leave the field due to a mismatch between the amount they give and what they receive, poor working environments, and lack of resources (Alarcon, 2011; Veldman et al., 2016). A multitude of research has discovered that teachers who chose to remain in the field are often male, teach at the elementary level, and of minority (Hughes, 2012; Vaughn & Saul, 2013; Veldman et al., 2016). Even though a great deal of research has been completed on why teachers leave and which type of teacher often leaves, little research explains how educational environments can overcome these issues and ensure they are promoting retention among all educators. Therefore, it is imperative that additional research is conducted to help educational stakeholders understand why teachers are leaving and to develop approaches to

overcome these reasons and also complete additional research on what keeps teachers when they have reasons to support them exiting the educational field.

Impacts of Teacher Attrition and Retention

Recruiting and sustaining good teachers is important to creating a positive school environment and promoting student achievement (Ediger, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012). Student achievement is impacted greatly by teacher attrition and retention (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Research has shown that teachers improve effectiveness with experience, especially after the second year of teaching; therefore, teacher attrition is detrimental to student achievement because students are left being taught by inexperienced and ineffective teachers (Heineke et al., 2014). When experienced teachers depart, they leave with considerable knowledge, skills, and experience that could be passed to novice teachers to help them become successful (Buchanan, 2012). If novice teachers are provided with support and knowledge to promote their success, it could discourage them from leaving their career which would help improve teacher attrition rates.

Along with impacting student achievement, teacher attrition also has financial implications (Heineke et al., 2014). School districts that have low teacher retention spend millions of dollars recruiting and training new teachers in hopes of creating effective learning environments for students (Heineke et al., 2014; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Educational researchers found that school systems in the United States spent over $4.9 billion dollars on teacher turnover in 2005 (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The additional money that districts must spend on recruiting teachers often leads to budget shortages in other areas (Heineke et al., 2014). Consequently, current teachers are negatively impacted due to funding shortages that may affect their available

resources; these can negatively impact the success they are able to experience within themselves and with their students (Guin, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

The stayers or current teachers are also often negatively impacted by teacher attrition because they experience increased stress levels due to being the ones that are expected to train and mentor the newly hired teachers who are brought in to replace the movers and leavers within the environment (Guin, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014). Having to devote time to training and mentoring the novice teachers, veteran teachers often lose out on opportunities to continue their own personal and professional development (Guin, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014).

Teacher attrition has also been found to have negative effects on the school environment (Hanselman, Grigg, Bruch, & Gamoran, 2011; Heineke et al., 2014; Zhang & Zeller 2016). Teacher and administrator attrition can negatively influence the general educational community, staff collegiality, and the trust among all stakeholders (Hanselman et al., 2011; Heineke et al., 2014; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The constant revolving door phenomenon that many educational environments experience makes it difficult to impossible to form and maintain a sense of staff cohesion and an effective community (Hanselman et al., 2011; Heineke et al. 2014; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

The inability of school districts in the United States to retain people in the teaching field is not a new problem and continues to be a nationwide problem (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). This nationwide problem has begun to cause a shortage of teachers that are desperately needed to fill the open classrooms across the nation (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The shortage of teachers in the United States is not due to too few individuals entering the field but due to too many leaving the field (Aragon et al. 2013; Dillon, 2009; Schaefer et al. 2012; Snyder, 2012; Tye & O'Brien,

2002; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The nationwide problem is a persistent reality for school districts in Virginia, as finding and retaining qualified teachers has been a constant problem for districts within Virginia since the beginning of the 21st century (Virginia Board of Education, 2009). The shortage of teachers has quickly become a threat not only to the educational environments but to the entire nation, as it leaves our future leaders being taught by inexperienced individuals which negatively impacts their academic achievement and future success (Heineke et al, 2014; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

According to Schaefer et al. (2012), "Prior research on teacher attrition and retention has seemed to focus on providing correct answer, quick fixes, and de-contextualized data" (p. 115). However, due to the adverse impact that teacher attrition has on educational environments, it is imperative that future research focuses on finding lasting solutions and building an understanding of what can be done to help decrease the attrition of teachers and in turn to increase the retention of them. Retaining teachers is a continual problem that plagues the American education system (Heineke et al., 2014); however, with additional research that helps develop an understanding of what retains teachers, the problem could begin to be solved.

This research study was conducted in urban, public elementary and middle schools in eastern Virginia. The chosen elementary and middle schools were non-fully accredited based on the set standards by the Commonwealth of Virginia. A multitude of research has been completed on the characteristics of urban public schools, the challenges urban schools face, and teacher retention and attrition in urban schools.

Urban Public Schools

Urban public schools are schools that are located in highly populated area, normally having 50,000 or more people living in the area, and are surrounded by residential and

commercial areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Urban public schools are characterized by inadequately prepared teachers, outdated materials and technology, poor quality school facilities, and principals who lack leadership abilities (Castro, 2014; Ediger, 2004; Ingersoll, 2001). Urban public schools are also known across the nation for having high rates of teacher attrition as shown through completed research studies that have concluded that teachers leave poor urban schools at a rate that is 50% higher than wealthy suburban schools (Aragon et al., 2013; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013; Ingersoll, 2001; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

Urban schools report significant problems staffing schools and manning classrooms with teachers who meet the requirement, as set forth by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), of being highly qualified (Center on Education Policy, 2006; Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2006). Urban school settings are often regarded by teachers as the least desirable schools and therefore, are often left by teachers or not sought as a possible place of employment by novice teachers (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016). Teachers describe urban public schools as less than desirable because of the high levels of student discipline problems, low student motivation, inadequate time to complete tasks, and overwhelming amounts of classroom intrusions (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013). The environment of urban public schools is viewed as so undesirable that more than half of preservice teacher candidates are wary or unwilling to teach in them (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013). Pre-service teachers feel less prepared to teach in urban schools than suburban schools (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Center on Education Policy, 2006; Johnson et al., 2006; Siwatu, 2011). Due to this unwillingness by teacher candidates, urban public schools often struggle not only with retaining teachers but also finding teachers to fill their classrooms in the first place, which becomes a costly problem for the schools (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Center on

Education Policy, 2006; Eckert, 2013; Johnson et al., 2006). The funding that must be diverted from the classrooms to offset the high levels of teacher attrition only exacerbates the concerns of the gap between low-income and wealthier schools (Hanselman et al., 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2013).

High poverty and high minority rates are characteristics of most urban public schools; urban school districts across the United States educate roughly 50% of the minority students and 40% of the students from backgrounds of the lowest incomes across the nation (Aragon et al., 2013; Eckert, 2013; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Roth & Swail, 2000). Along with having high rates of poverty and a very diverse student population, urban public schools are also known for having low levels of student achievement and low student graduation rates (Aragon et al., 2013; Eckert, 2013; Murphy, 2010). Significant portions, around 80%, of the nation's population of school aged children attend urban public schools (Aragon et al, 2013; Vaughn & Saul, 2013). Urban public schools are often found to be known as failing schools (Aragon et al, 2013; Ediger, 2004; Murphy, 2010); which means a significant portion of the school aged population is not performing at the expected level as set forth by state governments.

Urban schools consistently perform lower academically than their suburban counterparts (Hochbein, Mitchell, & Pollio, 2013). Due to the chronic low levels of student achievement that urban public schools experience, it is imperative that high-quality experienced teachers are employed by these types of public schools to help increase the achievement levels; however, urban schools are more than twice as likely as students in suburban public schools to have novice teachers (Aragon et al., 2013; Eckert, 2013). The teachers that have the experience and qualifications that urban schools are desperately searching for choose to work "in schools serving wealthy, high achieving, and white students" (Center on Education Policy, 2006, p. 158).

Urban school teachers face a myriad of challenges which deter the desperately needed experienced teachers from working in them (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013). Most of the challenges that teachers face in urban public schools are related to how the students come from backgrounds that put them at a significant disadvantage educationally and behaviorally (Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013). It has been found that student attendance, socioeconomic status of students' families, life experiences faced by the students, minimal to no parental involvement, and students' lack of prior knowledge are the primary causes of the low academic achievement of students in urban public schools and of the additional challenges teachers face when working with students in such settings (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Desimone, 2013; Eckert, 2013).

School administrators of urban schools face a constant struggle to recruit qualified teachers that are desperately needed in their classrooms (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013). Teachers are constantly needed in urban public schools due to the revolving door phenomenon that occurs within the building due to having a majority of the hired novice teachers leave within the first five years of their career (Castro, 2014). Novice teachers frequently leave urban public schools due to their unpreparedness to handle the sociological confines of the poverty a majority of their students are facing and to handle the educational weaknesses of the students (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013; Heilig & Jez, 2010). Research has shown that veteran teachers often choose to leave schools that are known for being hard to staff due to poor school conditions, lower pay, safety concerns, low student achievement, and longer work commutes (Castro, 2014; Center on Education Policy, 2006; Eckert, 2013). The novice teachers that leave urban schools have been found to have a low level of commitment to teaching and working with culturally diverse students (Castro, 2014;

Eckert, 2013). Urban teachers and school leaders are often discouraged and experience feelings of constraint because of the limited resources they have access to and the constant challenges presented by the student population (Bauml et al., 2016; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013). Urban teachers who continue teaching are known to have resiliency, or the ability to act with compassion, flexibility, and the ability to recover hardships; however, current educational research does not conclude what fosters this resiliency in them (Castro, 2014; Doney, 2013).

Research has repeatedly shown why novice and experienced teachers leave urban educational environments, why experienced teachers do not enter urban public schools, and the need for effective teachers in urban educational environments (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Castro, 2014; Doney, 2013; Eckert, 2013; Murphy, 2010; Zhang & Zeller, 2016); however, minimal research has been completed on why experienced teachers, who are desperately needed, stay. The collection of educational literature could benefit from additional studies that can explain why some teachers, when so many others do not, persevere in these known challenging environments. Overall, urban schools are known for serving very diverse student populations, having high rates of teacher turnover, lacking leadership, having outdated materials, having poor facilities, and low student achievement (Castro, 2014; Ediger, 2004). Educational policy-makers in the United States determined that the best way of raising student achievement in high-poverty, urban public schools was to measure Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP; Hochbein et al., 2013). However, the low student achievement that urban schools continue to experience impacts the school's accountability status within its state (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004).

Public School Accountability

Public schools in the United States were compelled to design student accountability

systems based on annual student assessments after the federal government passed the No Child

Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 as an update to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004). The NCLB Act was passed in hopes of advancing

America's competitiveness with other countries and to close the achievement gap that existed

nationally among poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers (Dee &Jacobs,

2011; Desimone, 2013; Ediger, 2004). The driving force behind the NCLB Act was to increase

teacher quality and effectiveness in order to increase students' academic results, especially the

academic results of specific subgroups of students (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Desimone, 2013;

Ediger, 2004). The subgroups of students that the NCLB Act focused on were English language

learners, students in special education, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and

students from minorities, all subgroups that are prominent groups in urban public schools in the

United States (Aragon et al., 2013; Castro, 2014; Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Desimone, 2013; Eckert,

2013). The NCLB Act forced schools to hire and maintain highly qualified teachers, in hopes

that it would bring quality teachers into schools to ensure that effective instruction was occurring

and student achievement was being supported (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Desimone, 2013; Ediger,

2004).

Through standardized and high-stakes testing, all public schools in the United States are

held accountable for student performance (Hochbein et al., 2013). Each state in the nation has

developed or chosen their unique state-mandated annual student assessments and state standards

related to these assessments (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004). The individual states have also

developed AYP benchmarks related to the state-mandated assessments that are used to determine

if schools are performing proficiently (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger 2004; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005). If schools are able to meet the determined benchmarks, they have met AYP and are considered to be performing proficiently; however, if a school does not meet the AYP they are considered to be failing (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005). The NCLB Act also required states to develop sanctions for persistently low-performing schools, especially for the schools that receive Title I aid (Dee & Jacobs, 2011). A majority of the individual states across the nation developed sanctions that included public school of choice, staff replacement, restructuring, and school closure (Dee & Jacobs, 2011).

Public schools that are not able to meet their AYP are known as failing schools due to their students not performing at the state expected goals (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004; Murphy, 2010). Schools that are unable to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, as set forth by state standards, are often found in urban or rural poverty-stricken areas (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004). Much of the literature on turning around failing schools stresses the importance of having strong leadership and effective teachers (Murphy, 2010; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005). However, effective teachers often leave these types of environments due to the increased stress and workload they experience (Ediger, 2004; Murphy, 2010; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Sun, Saultz, & Ye, 2017). Educational research has shown that failing schools tend to have higher rates of teacher attrition, hire larger numbers of individuals with emergency certification, and have higher rates of administration attrition (Ediger, 2004; Sun et al., 2017). Research has shown that teachers who teach in schools performing below the set accountability standards are less likely to plan to teach until retirement than their counterparts teaching in schools performing at or above the set accountability standards (Ediger, 2004; Orange, 2014; Sun et al., 2017).

A great deal of research has shown that the most important factor for turning around low performing schools is to have quality and effective principals and teachers working in them (Murphy, 2010; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Reyes & Garcia, 2014). Ingersoll (2001) stated, "One of the most pivotal causes of inadequate school performance is the inability of schools to adequately staff classrooms with qualified teachers" (p. 3). Additionally, research has concluded that teachers and school leaders improve effectiveness with experience (Heineke et al., 2014). However, additional research has also shown that teachers are more likely to leave low-performing schools (Ediger, 2004; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Sun et al., 2017), which consequently leaves low-performing schools with inexperienced and ineffective teachers, meaning student performance continues to be negatively impacted. Additionally, the increase in school accountability, the demand on teachers to complete paperwork related to classroom and school achievement, and the increase in pressure related to high-stakes testing have been found to be factors that encourage teacher attrition (Ediger, 2004; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Sun et al., 2017; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Consequently, the NCLB Act was passed to encourage highly qualified teachers to enter and be retained in educational environments; however, due to the increased demands the act placed on educators, research has found it does not encourage sustainment but encourages attrition (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Desimone, 2013; Ediger, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Sun et al., 2017; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Currently, there is minimal educational literature that focuses on why teachers stay in low performing schools despite the known challenges.

In December of 2015, an updated version of the NCLB Act was passed (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The updated version of the NCLB Act is known as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and it continues to govern and guide the United States' kindergarten through 12th-

grade public education policy (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Even though the ESSA replaced the NCLB Act, it did not eliminate the provisions related to the recurrent standardized testing of students and the accountability standards for schools related to the testing of students; however, it did begin to provide individual states flexibility in developing plans on how to close achievement gaps, increase student achievement, increase equity for all students, and increase the quality of instruction, all of which are often problems that are faced by urban public schools (Heineke et al., 2014; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Overall, the passing of the NCLB Act and subsequent the passing of the ESSA led states to develop student accountability systems that included state-mandated assessments and set benchmarks for each assessment (Dee & Jacobs, 2011). The results on these assessments in comparison to the set benchmarks are used to determine if public schools are performing proficiently (Dee & Jacobs, 2011). The Commonwealth of Virginia has developed an accountability system that is followed by all public schools to determine the accreditation status of the schools within the state (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2016).

School Accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia

Teachers who work in schools that have failed to meet the set accreditation standards are less likely to stay in the educational field than their counterparts who work in schools that have met the given accreditation standards (Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Sun, et al., 2017). The Commonwealth of Virginia has a great deal of elementary and middle school public schools that have failed to meet the set accreditation standards as set forth by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE, 2016). These Virginia elementary and middle schools that fail to perform, based on the set standards, are educational environments that are more likely to have higher rates of teacher attrition and lower rates of teacher retention.

The VDOE has developed a school accountability system by developing rigorous learning standards known as the Standards of Learning (SOL) for all subject areas at all educational levels and student assessments related to these SOLs (VDOE, 2016). The student assessments are administered annually and test students' mastery level of the SOLs in various content areas (VDOE, 2016). The assessments are taken by all public-school students in Grades 3 through 12 (VDOE, 2016). The Commonwealth of Virginia uses student results on the mandated assessments to determine the accreditation levels of all public schools, which is then used to identify schools in need of assistance and to notify the public of the progress of all public schools (VDOE, 2016). Each SOL assessment has expected student pass rates that have been set by the VDOE; the pass rates are as followed: English: 75%, mathematics: 70%, science: 70%, and social studies: 70% (VDOE, 2016).

The Commonwealth of Virginia has developed 10 different levels of accreditation; three of the levels can only be obtained by high schools, one only by newly developed schools, and six by all levels of schools (VDOE, 2016). The goal of all public schools in Virginia is to be rated as "Fully Accredited," which for elementary and middle schools means that the pass rates in all subjects were achieved (VDOE, 2016). In Virginia a public school, regardless of level, can have all accreditation denied if they fail to meet the pass rates for four consecutive years; however, before being given this label, the school can be labeled as "Partially Accredited with Reconstitution" (VDOE, 2016). Schools that are labeled as "Partially Accredited with Reconstitution" are given a specific period of time to restructure themselves in hopes of improving student achievement (Rice & Malen, 2010; VDOE, 2016). All levels of public schools in Virginia can be labeled as Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate, meaning that the school did not perform at the expected level and was not in a narrow margin of doing so.

The Commonwealth of Virginia also will award partial accreditation to schools that are close to performing at the set pass rates or are showing improvement in academic performance of certain subgroups of students; these two accreditation levels are known as "Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark Pass Rate" and "Partially Accredited: Improving School Pass Rate" (VDOE, 2016). Schools receive the rating of Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark Pass Rate when they did not perform at expected levels in one or more subject areas but were within a two-point margin (VDOE, 2016). Partially Accredited: Improving School Pass Rate is awarded to schools that do not qualify for Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark Pass Rate but are making acceptable progress towards full accreditation or are raising the achievement of previously low-performing subgroups of students (VDOE, 2016).

Teachers are held accountable for students' performance on state-mandated assessment, such as the Commonwealth of Virginia's SOL assessments (Lauen & Gaddis, 2016; VDOE, 2016). Public-school teachers across the nation are put under pressure due to accountability standards; however, teachers in schools that are performing below the expected level experience more pressure and have more concern over their job security (Lauen & Gaddis, 2016; Sun et al., 2017). When a school is labeled performing below the expected AYP goals, it exacerbates the chances of them being able to retain teachers due to the additional challenges, stress, and workload they experience (Chiang, 2009; Lauen & Gaddis, 2016; Sun et al., 2017). Low performing schools often experience changes in curriculum, instruction, technology, and the amount of teacher training in attempts to improve their accountability status, thereby contributing to their increase in stress and workload (Chiang, 2009; Lauen & Gaddis, 2016; Sun et al., 2017), which consequently provides teachers with reasons to exit the environment. This research study gives voice to veteran teachers who have persisted in these challenging

environments, despite being provided with a multitude of challenges that could promote their want and need to exit their career.

Summary

An abundance of the existing educational literature has focused on what teacher attrition and retention is and the positive and negative effects of it on the various aspects of educational environments (Aloe et al., 2014; Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Beteille et al., 2012; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Chen, 2017; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Day & Gu, 2009; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Hughes, 2012; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012; Keigher, 2010; Riggs, 2013; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Urick, 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The current educational research also highlights the reasons teachers, novice and veteran, leave the profession (Alarcon, 2011; Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Beteille et al., 2012; Buchanan, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Day & Gu, 2009; Downer et al., 2015; Eckert, 2013; Ediger, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014; Kersaint et al., 2007; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Schaefer et al, 2012; Snyder, 2012; Urick, 2016; Vaughn & Saul, 2013; Veldman et al., 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016); however, minimal research exists on what keeps teachers, especially veteran teachers, in the profession.

A great deal of educational research has also been completed on school accountability practices and the impact they have on administrators, teachers, and students (Chiang, 2009; Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004; Murphy, 2010; Nicolaidou & Ainscow, 2005; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Sun et al, 2017; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; VDOE, 2016). This research has repeatedly shown the need to recruit and sustain effective, experienced teachers in failing schools; however, the current research studies primarily focus on why teachers leave these challenging environments and not what can be done to keep them in the environments that desperately need them (Chiang,

2009; Dee & Jacobs, 2011; Ediger, 2004; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Sun et al., 2017). Therefore, the gap in the educational literature shows a need for additional studies to further develop the educational community by providing information on what encourages the persistence of veteran teachers in challenging educational environments to develop an understanding of what can be done to promote teacher retention in urban, non-fully accredited public elementary and/or middle schools. It is imperative for educational communities to develop an understanding of what can be done to encourage the sustainment of veteran teachers to ensure that years of experience are being gained by teachers, especially those within challenging educational environments. The years of experience held by educators are able to promote an increase in their effectiveness, which in turns increases student learning and achievement (Aragon et al., 2013; Snyder, 2012; Sun et al., 2017; Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

This chapter provided a review of the current literature related to the described research study. Literature related to (a) the theoretical framework, (b) teacher attrition and retention, (c) causes of teacher attrition and retention, (d) impacts of teacher attrition and retention, (e) urban public schools, (f) public school accountability, and (g) the Commonwealth of Virginia public school accreditation was reviewed in this chapter to identify the current gap in the literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Previously completed research has focused on the positive and negative effects of teacher attrition and retention and the reasons teachers exit the profession (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Zhang & Zeller, 2016); however, very little research has focused on what keeps teachers in the profession, especially in the not so desirable educational environments. Therefore, this transcendental phenomenological research study sought to provide a voice to veteran elementary and middle school teachers who have persisted in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. The research study attempted to describe how participants' mindset, environmental fit, and motivational factors contribute to their persistence in these challenging educational environments. This chapter explains the design of the research study and the reasoning this design was chosen. This chapter also outlines and explains the rationale for the setting, sampling procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Additionally, the chapter articulates the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness developed in the study.

Design

A transcendental phenomenological qualitative design was utilized in this research study in an attempt to provide rich, deep, thick, and textured description of the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public elementary and/or middle schools in eastern Virginia (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological qualitative design was chosen for the described research study to help close a gap in the current educational literature and identify factors, through the voices of veteran teachers that have persisted in

challenging environments, which support teacher sustainment in urban non-fully accredited public schools. It is imperative that educational environments sustain teachers to ensure a positive school environment is created for all stake-holders and student achievement is encouraged and supported (Ediger, 2004; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012). A multitude of quantitative research has been completed on teacher attrition, teacher retention, and the effects of teacher attrition and retention on educational environments (Aragon et al., 2013; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013; Zhang & Zeller, 2016); however, minimal qualitative research has been completed on these topics. Qualitative research is chosen by researchers, instead of quantitative research, when the topic being studied is loaded with emotion, close to individuals, and practical (Creswell, 2009). It is also chosen when the topic is being sought to be understood through descriptions instead of numerical data (Creswell, 2009). The persistence of veteran teachers in challenging educational environments is a topic that meets this prescribed criterion.

As stated in Creswell (2013), a qualitative research study uses a theoretical framework to inform the study of problems that individuals or groups of individuals are facing while collecting data in a natural setting to understand their experiences related to the problem. This research study was guided by two theories (the motivation and mindset theory by Carol Dweck and the person–environment fit theory by John Holland) and used a group of individuals (veteran teachers) as participants. The study focused on the veteran teachers' experience of persistence in the described challenging educational environments. The data were collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and letter writing. Data were collected at locations chosen by the participants to increase their comfort and openness while participating in the study.

Phenomenology is one of five basic approaches to qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological studies, as explained in Creswell (2013), describe, to build an understanding

of the lived, shared experience of a group of individuals. The development of phenomenology is credited to Edmund Husserl, a German scientist who was interested in philosophy and wanted to understand human experiences at a deeper level (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2003). Phenomenological research is completed to explore a phenomenon and how it is perceived and experienced among individuals and how the individuals are able to describe their shared experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenon is an event or fact that exists but the cause or reason for it is in question (Sheehan, 2014). This phenomenological study was completed to describe the experience of veteran teachers who have persisted in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. All of the participants had lived through a similar experience and described their experience through responses to surveys, during interviews, during focus groups, and on written documents. These data collection methods sought to hear and describe the "what" and "how" of the studied phenomenon as explained by the participants who have lived through it, the ultimate goal of phenomenological research studies (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological studies also allow the researcher to bracket themselves out of the study by setting aside preconceived ideas and assumptions related to the study (Creswell, 2013), which is necessary in the described study as the researcher had personal experience with the studied phenomenon.

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological design. Transcendental phenomenology emerged as a design of qualitative research due to the need to conduct studies that focused on experiences by individuals instead of strictly material things (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology focuses on the experiences had by individuals and their connection to the thoughts, opinions, and material aspects of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological study requires the researcher to bracket out his or her own

experience as a researcher in order to see the phenomenon being studied, in a clear viewpoint (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Since I have lived the experience being studied, using a transcendental phenomenological design was necessary as it allowed me to bracket out and suspend my personal experiences when analyzing the participants' description of the experience. Journaling was completed to help bracket out personal opinions, preconceived ideas, and judgments held by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing out my bias helped the study remain focused on the veteran teachers' experience and not my interpretation of their experience. A transcendental phenomenological study also provides a clear system for data analysis, which was followed in this study (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenology was the appropriate research design for the presented study for numerous reasons. First, the research study was studying a shared experienced held by individuals, as it was studying the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Each participant in the research study had lived through the experience of persisting through a challenging educational environment as a teacher for more than five years. Second, as the researcher, I was motivated to complete the research study because I have lived the experience and had a desire to provide a voice, which has not been heard before, to individuals that have persisted in an environment that is often looked at in a negative manner. Lastly, individual interviews were the primary means of data collection in my study. Each selected participant was interviewed regarding his or her experience as a teacher who persisted in a challenging educational environment. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed to identify themes that were used to give meaning and essence to the lived experience.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study included one central research question and

three sub-questions. The questions are as follows:

Central Research Question

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers who persist in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their teaching experiences?

Research Sub-Question One

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their fit in their environment and how it contributes to their persistence in their educational environment?

Research Sub-Question Two

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their mindset and how it relates to their persistence in their educational environment?

Research Sub-Question Three

How do elementary and/or middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their motivational factors and they relate to their persistence in their educational environment?

Setting

The research study was conducted at multiple sites. All sites used in the study were middle schools and/or elementary schools located in eastern Virginia. The study was conducted in at least one different middle school and/or one elementary school to help support having maximum variation in participants. Requiring that the study be conducted in different school settings helped differentiate the sites and participants from the start of the study which contributed to the findings being reflective of different perspectives. The sites for the study were

selected based on the delimitations set for the study. The study was delimited to public (supported through public funds), urban (in a highly populated area), non-fully accredited (did not meet the set academic standards, set by the state, in one or more subject areas) elementary (serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade) and middle (serving students in sixth through eighth grade) schools.

The study was limited to urban, public schools due to the multitude of research that supports teachers leaving these types of environments at higher rates than rural or suburban schools. As Aragon et al. (2013) stated, a career in urban schools is generally seen as the least desirable; therefore, high-quality teachers are not as eager to teach in urban schools, even though these schools need them the most. Due to the statistics that have been proven through previously completed research studies, such as how teachers leave urban schools at a rate that is 50% higher than rural and suburban schools and that urban schools often have lower academic success than rural and suburban schools (Aragon et al., 2013), the study was limited to urban, public schools. Limiting the study to this type of setting was done to provide a voice to the teachers that defy the odds and stay within their environment while others are leaving or choosing not to enter at all. All of the sites used in the study were located in an area that has a population of over 1,700,000 people. The chosen sites were also all funded through monetary funds that are provided by the federal, state, and city government.

The most important factor for turning around low performing schools, a national problem, is quality teachers (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). Non-fully accredited schools, in Virginia, are public schools who did not meet the pass rates for one or more of the tested subject areas (VDOE, 2016). Due to the importance of having quality teachers in these educational environments, the delimitation of conducting the research study in a non-fully accredited public

school was added in hopes that it will help build an understanding of what can be done to keep

teachers in these environments and to attract quality teachers to these challenging environments

that so desperately need them. None of the sites used in the research study had received full

accreditation, as set forth by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Education, for the

previous school year.

The research study was also delimited to only include elementary and/or middle schools

in eastern Virginia due to accountability being handled on a similar basis in these two

environments and the organizational set-up of these environments being similar. Both

elementary and middle schools in eastern Virginia are held to state accountability standards in

English, mathematics, science, and social studies and have a core group of teachers that teach

each separate grade level. The research study did not include urban high schools in eastern

Virginia due to their accountability being affected by their yearly graduation statistics, which is

not a part of elementary and middle school accreditation in Virginia (VDOE, 2016). The study

also did not include urban high schools due to the organizational set up being different than

elementary and middle schools, as they do not always have a core group of teachers that teach

each separate grade level which can impact the teachers' stress level and amount of challenges

they face. The sites were in eastern Virginia due to convenience to the researcher. All sites were

given pseudonyms that were used throughout the study.

Participants

The research study employed a purposeful sample from each of the participating sites. A

purposeful sample is used by researchers to ensure participants can provide information, the

richest possible, on the research problem and studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Patton,

2002). Previous research has found that over 40% of teachers leave the profession before their

fifth year, and the retention rate for teachers steadily increases after the fifth year of service (Bolich, 2001); therefore, the criterion for participation in the described research study included having shared the experience of persisting in an urban, non-fully accredited public elementary or middle school for five years or more. Since the accreditation process is the same for public elementary and middle schools in Virginia, participants were invited from both settings. To gain a purposeful sample, a snowball sampling technique was used. A snowball sampling technique relies on people to help identify individuals who have lived the experience (Creswell, 2013).

Principals of urban, non-fully accredited public elementary and middle schools in eastern Virginia were contacted regarding the purpose of the research study and the criteria for individuals to participate in the study. Once this information was shared with the principals, an invitation was sent via e-mail that included the purpose of the study, the obligations of the participants, and the researcher's contact information if the contacted individuals were interested in participating in the study. The researcher asked the principal to send out the invitation to all teachers who met the participant requirements. Once possible candidates reached out to the researcher, demographic data were collected on them to ensure that a diverse sample of veteran teachers was used to achieve maximum variation. The demographic data collected on the participants included their gender, age, race, highest educational degree obtained, educational preparation, and total years of professional teaching experience. There were one male and nine female participants. There were five Caucasian and five African American participants. The participants' ages ranged from 28 to 58 years old, and their teaching experience ranged from six to 30 years. The participants held varying degrees; one participant had a doctorate degree, six participants had a master's degree, and three participants had a bachelor's degree.

After final participant selection had been made by the researcher, each participant completed the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale (Chuang, Shen, & Judge, 2016, p. 98; see Appendix F). This scale included 14 randomly ordered statements to which the participants responded using a 4-point Likert rating scale (Beasley, Jason, & Miller, 2011). The Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale is firmly grounded in the person–environment fit theory as it includes subscales for five different conceptualizations of fit (Beasley et al., 2011). The statements required the participants to reflect on their values, needs, abilities, and characteristics and how they correlate with their work environment (Beasley et al., 2011). Each statement had been pre-coded with the area of fit it relates to and the survey is scored using the Likert rating scale; if participants select 1, they strongly disagree with a statement and if they select 4, they strongly agree with the provided statement (Beasley et al., 2011). Previous research on the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale found the scale to be reliable and valid (Beasley et al., 2011). The survey was shared with participants through electronic correspondence. The participants completed the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale in an environment of their choice, at their own pace. The surveys were then collected by the researcher and were used to describe how the participants view their fit into their educational environment. The participants' responses also helped develop an understanding of whether a veteran teacher's fit with his or her environment contributes to persistence in that educational environments. Overall, the survey helped provide detailed descriptions regarding their perceived fit within the environment of each of the participants.

Due to the described study being a qualitative study, a smaller sample size was necessary to ensure that data analysis did not become impractical and time consuming (Mason, 2010); therefore, 10 were used in the study. Data collected in qualitative studies focus on building

meanings and not making generalized hypotheses; therefore, the sample sizes in this study ensured that different perceptions were exposed and the saturation of data were reached (Mason, 2010; Moustakas, 1994); using 10 participants in the presented research study ensured that this was able to occur. According to Moustakas (1994) data saturation is when the researcher has reached the capacity of obtaining new information from the selected participants.

Procedures

There were many steps that were completed during this research study. The first step was to obtain IRB approval from Liberty University. Gaining IRB approval was an important step, as it ensured that all participants receive safe and ethical treatment throughout the study (Creswell, 2013). After obtaining conditional IRB approval from Liberty University, the researcher obtained site approval from the various public-school districts and schools in eastern Virginia that would serve as sites during the study. Once the written approval had been granted from the chosen sites, the IRB was updated to obtain full approval (see Appendix C). Additionally, after site approval was granted, purposeful sampling occurred by contacting administrators of elementary and middle schools who met the delimitations set forth by the study to discuss the research study and to request an invitation be sent out to prospective participants. The provided invitation requested that the prospective participants contact the researcher regarding their possible participation in the study (see Appendix A). The researcher obtained demographic information on the interested participants to ensure that the sample of veteran teachers used in the study represented a diverse population of teachers. Once participants were selected and agreed to participate, informed consent was gained through electronic correspondence before having them take part in the data collection measures (see Appendix B). All participants who agreed to participate in the study completed the Perceived Person–

Environment Fit Scale, participated in an individual interview, participated in a focus group, and wrote a letter to a future first-year teacher. The individual interviews and participant focus group were audio recorded and transcribed. The documents from the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale survey and letter writing were collected from the participants. Data collected through these data collection measures were then analyzed to identify themes and the essence of the phenomenon.

The Researcher's Role

The role of the qualitative researcher is that of a human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a human instrument, I interacted with participants to gain an understanding and to evaluate the meaning of the interaction (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); this was accomplished by collecting and analyzing data related to the shared experience.

As an educator who has lived through the shared experience that was studied, it was important for me to understand that I brought biases and assumptions to the research study. I have worked in urban, non-fully accredited elementary schools throughout my entire teaching career; due to this, I have developed my own feelings and thoughts on the stresses and challenges that teachers face in these environments and beliefs of why teachers choose to leave or stay in the environment. It was imperative that I was able to put this aside and focus on seeing the experience from a new perspective. Moustakas (1994) describes epoche, a process in which the researcher is able to set aside prejudgments to conduct the research with an unbiased, receptive presence. Before, during, and after interacting with the participants, it was important that I did not focus on the expectations I held of what the participants should be describing, but on what they actually shared. Journaling and prayer helped ensure that I did this. Praying before interacting with participants and analyzing data helped me to complete the tasks with a clear

mind and an open heart to be able to hear and analyze what the participants were saying without judgment. Prayer helped me clear my head of previously formed opinions and approach interactions in a godly manner. Putting my biases and assumptions aside helped ensure that I was able to provide an accurate voice to the teachers who have persisted in urban, underperforming schools. I had no prior connection or relationship to the sites and participants that were used in the research study, which helped reduce bias regarding coworkers and personal acquaintances and which reduced threat to the participant's privacy.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data from multiple sources to help develop an understanding of the studied phenomenon, the persistence of elementary and middle public-school veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited environments. In qualitative studies it is imperative that evidence is provided from a variety of sources to ensure that themes are validated through triangulating content (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, data for the presented study utilized data triangulation by collecting data through several different sources, which also helped increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013). Data were first collected through administering the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale (Chuang et al., 2016) to all participants. The Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale was completed to gain descriptive data regarding the participants. Next, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant. After all participants had participated in an individual interview, additional data were collected through an all-participant focus group. Finally, data were collected through document analysis. The documents that were analyzed were letters written by the participants to a future teacher who will be working in a similar educational environment.

Interviews

After each participant completed the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, they participated in a face-to-face interview with the researcher in an environment selected by the participant. Allowing the participants to select the environment encouraged them to provide honest and candid responses as they did not have to worry about their administrators or colleagues hearing their responses. During their interviews the participants answered 13 open ended questions regarding their sustainment in an urban, non-fully accredited public school (see Appendix D). The interview questions focused on their motivational factors, their mindset, and their environmental fit. Each interview was audio recorded and the researcher took additional notes regarding aspects that could not be recorded, such as facial expressions and hand gestures. After the completion of the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed by an online program. The transcripts were used during the data analysis phase (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

The following served as the primary interview questions:

1. Why did you choose to work in the teaching profession?

2. How did you come to work in an urban educational environment?

3. How do you describe your teacher preparation program?

4. How would you describe what it means to be a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

5. What is challenging about being a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

6. What stresses do you experience while being a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

7. What would you describe as your motivation for persisting as a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

8. How would you describe your mindset as an educator?

9. What positively or negatively influences your mindset to change as an educator in a challenging environment?

10. How would you describe how you fit into your educational environment?

11. How would you describe your fit with your administrator?

12. How would you describe your fit with your colleagues?

13. What factors influence your fit with your environment, administrator, and/or colleagues?

The interview questions were created through the literature review. The questions used in the interviews and the focus group related to the motivation and mindset theory, one of the theories that was used to guide the study. The motivation and mindset theory focuses on how mindset can be transformed, and when it is transformed positively, how it can support resilience, sustainability, and perseverance in an individual (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). The person–environment fit theory also guided the construction of the interview questions as it recognizes that individuals' fit within their work environment can impact their acceptance within and dedication to their work (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997). The participants were asked 13 questions during the interview, which served as an adequate amount to develop an understanding of how the participants perceived their persistence in challenging educational environment and how their mindset and environmental fit influenced their persistence.

Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 were asked to understand the participants as educators. These questions focused on building background knowledge of the participants and on obtaining descriptive information regarding their career choice and motivation for making these choices.

Questions 5 and 6 focused on the challenges and stressors that the participants experienced as veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Urban schools are widely known as the least desirable educational environments (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013). Teachers describe urban public schools as less than desirable because of the high levels of student discipline problems, low student motivation, inadequate time to complete tasks, and overwhelming amounts of classroom intrusions (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013), which all add to the amount of challenges and stressors experienced by teachers in these environments.

Questions 7, 8, and 9 focused on the mindset that each participant holds. These interview questions related directly to Research Sub-questions 2 and 3. These questions were grounded in Dweck's (2006) mindset and motivation theory. Dweck (2006) theorizes that when individuals possess a growth mindset, they are capable of changing over time and are able to experience personal growth. Individuals that hold a growth mindset are also more resilient and able to face and overcome challenges easier (Dweck, 2006).

Questions 10, 11, 12, and 13 were asked to build an understanding of the participant's fit within his or her educational environment. Since these interview questions focused on the participant's fit within his or her environment, they directly related to Research Sub-question One. The person–environment fit theory proposes that if an individual's wants match with an organization's wants, both experience positive consequences (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011).

Holland (1997) suggested that when individuals fit within their work environment, they are more apt to have a higher work ethic and dedication to their environment.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are conducted to promote the interaction among participants and support discussion regarding the shared experience among them (Creswell, 2013). The focus group allowed the participants to explain and clarify what was expressed during the individual interviews and discuss the shared experience with each other. For the described research study, the researcher conducted one focus group with all participants (see Appendix E). The focus group was conducted online and used a protocol that was developed before the start of the focus group meeting. The interview protocol focused on themes that were identified from the individual participant interviews. The focus group questions were as followed:

1. As a veteran teacher, describe your experience with teacher attrition in your current educational environment.

2. Specifically explain why you remained in an urban, non-fully accredited public school.

3. How did your teacher preparation program adequately prepare you to persist in your current educational environment?

4. How did your retention as a teacher in a challenging environment impact student achievement and the educational community?

5. What strategies, initiatives, or programs would you suggest to be implemented to positively influence teacher retention?

6. As current teachers in challenging educational environments, what do you recommend to positively impact teacher retention?

The developed focus group questions were also developed through the literature review. Questions 1, 2, and 3 sought to develop a fuller understanding of the participants' experience in an urban, non-fully accredited public school, their preparation to persist in the described environment, and their specific reasons for remaining in them. Teachers are constantly needed in urban public schools due to the revolving door phenomenon that occurs within the building due to having a majority of the hired novice teachers leave within the first five years of their career (Castro, 2014).

Question 3 focused on developing an understanding of the impact of the participants' retention in their educational environments. Teacher attrition and retention can impact educational environments in numerous ways (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Student achievement and school monetary resources are impacted greatly by teacher attrition and retention (Aragon et al., 2013; Bernhardt, 2012; Schaefer et al., 2012; Snyder, 2012; Zhang & Zeller, 2016).

Questions 4 and 5 addressed the characteristics, strategies, initiatives, and programs that can be implemented to address and promote teacher retention in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. Previously completed research studies have identified that motivational traits sustain teachers in their environment (Bernhardt, 2012). Bernhardt's (2012) study was completed to identify and define intrinsically motivated teachers and the extrinsically motivated teachers.

The focus group was also audio recorded and transcribed by an online program upon completion. The researcher also took notes throughout the focus group. The notes and transcripts were read numerous times to help provide deeper descriptions of the uncovered

themes (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). All collected data were stored in a locked file cabinet or a password-protected computer.

Letter to Future First-Year Teacher

Each participant was asked to compose a typed letter after the completion of the individual interviews and focus group. Each participant was asked to send the researcher the letter through e-mail correspondence or by requesting the researcher to personally collect the letter at a chosen location. The participants were asked to write a letter to a future first-year teacher who would be entering a similar environment. The participants were asked to write about what they feel could be done to ensure the first year is successful for the educators and what helped them succeed in a similar environment. Also, to ensure that the letter closely related to the experience being studied, teachers were asked to share the positives of persisting in a challenging educational environment, how the environment has changed throughout their time in it, and what they did to ensure they were able to persist in a challenging environment. Having the participants share advice on what encouraged persistence in a challenging educational environment allows this task to relate to Research Sub-questions 2 and 3. This letter served as a personal artifact document and was used by the researcher to develop a more complete narrative of each research participant's lived experience.

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Data Analysis

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Data for the study were collected through multiple sources to ensure that the triangulation of data could occur. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and personal artifacts. After the data were collected, they were analyzed to develop rich, deep, thick, and textured description of the lived experience of the participants.

The Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale (Chuang et al., 2016) was not analyzed to gain statistical support but to gain descriptive support of the veteran teacher's fit with his or her current educational environment. The Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale was scored to help the researcher understand how the participants view their fit with their colleagues, administrators, and environment. The scores of the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale were used along with the participants' interview and focus group responses to develop deeper descriptions of their fit within their environment and how it contributed to their persistence in urban, non-fully accredited public schools.

The modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) was used to analyze the data collected through the personal interviews and focus group. This method included epoche/bracketing, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, horizonalization, and textural and structural descriptions to provide meanings and essences of the studied experience (Moustakas, 1994). Using this method, it was imperative I went through processes to achieve epoche (Moustakas, 1994). Achieving epoche assists researchers in bracketing their personal biases (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche requires researchers to become transparent to their selves, allowing them to view experiences through a different lens (Moustakas, 1994). As researcher of the described study, I had no prior or direct experience with the sites or the participants; however, I had previously lived through the studied experience. Due to this, it was imperative that I consistently bracketed out thoughts with an open mindset to ensure the study remained focused on the participants' experiences. Throughout the research experience, I kept a detailed journal of my personal thoughts of the environments, the participants, and my related experiences and reflected on this journal when reading through the collected data.

Moustakas (1994) describes phenomenological reduction by describing the textural language as the researcher continually observes internal and external consciousness. While conducting the research study, the researcher described and identified phenomenon with textural attributes and descriptions with an experiential reference. Textual attributes and descriptions focus on the "what" of the experience and the structural descriptions focus on the "how" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon was identified through the participants' responses and actions and the common themes that exist amongst them. The phenomenon was then described and supported using their lived experiences in the challenging educational environments.

Imaginative variation was incorporated into the data analysis to help guide the researcher through the research study. Using imaginative variation helped identify the meanings of themes using structural descriptions of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The structural descriptions of the experience focused on the factors of what was being experienced and how these factors identify with what was being described as the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The last stage of data analysis for transcendental phenomenological studies is to integrate the textural and structural statements into a unified statement about the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) describes this stage as "intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (p. 100). The meanings of the themes were identified using the lens of the researcher reflecting on the phenomena that occurred in a specific time and place with specific people (Moustakas, 1994). During this stage, the researcher reflected and documented specific textual and structural characteristics of the participants to attain the essences of their experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). I reflected and

documented in journal notes the specific structural and textual characteristics of each participant. These journal notes were completed to attain the essence of the meaning of the participants' experiences.

The personal interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed, word-by-word, by a professional transcriptionist. The researcher's notes and transcripts were read through multiple times and member checked (Moustakas, 1994). While the researcher was reading the transcripts, the researcher memoed thoughts and evaluated the relevance of the participants' provided statements (Moustakas, 1994). After the researcher has conducted numerous readings of the transcripts, the relevant statements were listed by horizonalization, which allows each statement to have equal meaning (Moustakas, 1994). These statements were coded and then used to identify themes that exist in the data. Atlas.ti was used to code material and sort the codes through sorting techniques. The researcher then interpreted the themes and organized them into textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Textual descriptions focus on the "what" of the experience and the structural descriptions focus on the "how" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions were then compiled to describe the studied phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The participants' written compositions were analyzed using the same method as the interviews and focus group transcripts and helped develop a deeper understanding of the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools.

Trustworthiness

The four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research studies are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The

research study described included methods that increase credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure the results of the study are trustworthy.

Credibility

Credibility of qualitative research involves connecting the study's findings with reality to develop believable results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was addressed in the study through multiple methods. The triangulation of data was one method that addressed credibility. Triangulation of data is achieved when the researcher is able to gain information regarding the participants' perspective through multiple sources (Creswell, 2013). Data were collected through the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Survey, individual interviews, focus groups, and written documentation. Using multiple data collection methods helped ensure that the researcher was able to get a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Another method that was used to address credibility is member checking. Member checks were completed to allow the participants to confirm the conclusions drawn by the researcher to ensure they match what the participants were expressing. Member checks help ensure that the research does not add distortions to the descriptions provided by the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

Both dependability and confirmability relate to the consistency of the research study and the understanding that the results being shared are supported through the study (Creswell, 2013). There were several methods that were used to ensure that the research study has increased dependability and confirmability. Audit trails, checking and rechecking the collected data, and peer reviews helped increase the dependability and confirmability of the research study. Throughout the research process, an audit trail was developed. This audit trail provided a detailed description of the steps taken during the research process along with a timeline of the

research process (Creswell, 2013). The data were checked and rechecked multiple times to ensure that the researcher was drawing the appropriate conclusions that could be supported through the collected data. Peer reviews were completed to gain outside perspective on the study and the conclusions (Schwandt, 2015). The peer reviews were completed on a regular basis by the local dissertation committee member. The triangulation of data also helped maintain dependability and confirmability throughout the research study.

Transferability

Transferability is another aspect of qualitative research studies that promotes trustworthiness. Transferability in qualitative studies refers to the ability of the research study to be judged by others to determine if it can be applied to other settings (Creswell, 2013). Transferability was maintained in the described research study by using the maximum variation of participants and providing thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Using a maximum variation of participants ensured that the participants represented a wide variety of individuals and different types of populations. Thick descriptions were developed by recording everything while collecting data and using these recordings to describe the participants' experience. These thick descriptions helped readers develop a full understanding the studied phenomenon.

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Ethical Considerations

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Since this research study involved human participants, ethical considerations were an imperative aspect to include before, during, and after the completion of the study. Creswell (2013) described the five phases of qualitative research studies in which ethical issues may arise. These five phases are prior to conducting the study, beginning to conduct the study, during data collection, while analyzing data, when reporting the data, and when publishing the research study

(Creswell, 2013). This research study considered ethical concerns during all stages of the research study.

Prior to conducting and beginning to conduct the research study, IRB approval and site approval were obtained. The IRB ensured that the human participants received safe and ethical treatment throughout the study. The site approval also ensured that the sites involved were aware of the study, what the study consisted of, and provided the researcher with permission to conduct the study. Also, before beginning to conduct the research study, the participants were provided informed consent after being notified of the purpose of the study. This informed consent provided the participants with information on the purpose of the study, the procedures of the study, and any possible risks of the study. The informed consents were signed by the participants and stored by the researcher.

During the research study, when reporting the data, and when publishing the study, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the sites and participants. Pseudonyms are names, different from the person or place's original name, which are assigned. Additionally, when reporting the data and publishing the study, no identifying information related to the participants or sites was shared or implied. This was done to help protect the identity of the site and participants used in the study. Throughout the research study, collected data were stored on a password-protected computer and hard copies of the data were kept in a locked file cabinet.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological research study sought to provide a voice to veteran teachers who were able to persist in challenging educational environments for more than five years. The research study was conducted in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia and guided by Moustakas' (1994) methodological framework. Data were

collected through an environmental-fit survey, individual interviews, all-participant focus groups, and letters written by the participants. The data were analyzed using memoing and coding while bracketing out the researcher's biases. Overall, the study was completed to help close a gap in the literature related to teacher sustainment, motivation, mindset, and environmental fit in urban public schools by providing a voice to individuals who have lived through the phenomenon. Closing the current gap in the literature will inform the educational community of factors that encourage teacher sustainment, which has been proven to positively impact the school community, increase student performance, and promote student achievement (Aragon et al., 2013; Doney, 2013; Heineke et al., 2014; Snyder, 2012).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach was used to explore "how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). This study sought to provide a thick, rich, and descriptive voice of veteran teachers who share the phenomenon of persisting through challenging educational environments for more than five years (Creswell, 2013). The study focused on providing them a voice regarding their motivational factors, environmental fit, and mindset and how it supported their persistence in their challenging educational environment.

The methods used to conduct this study were defined in detail in Chapter Three. This chapter will present the data analysis and findings of the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Survey, individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter documentation that were all aligned with the central research and three research sub-questions that were used to guide the study.

Participants

The participants of this qualitative research study were chosen from one urban school district in eastern Virginia. The participants were chosen from this district due to it being an urban, public-school district comprised of a larger number of non-fully accredited schools, at all levels. The participants for this study were chosen according to their teaching experience. All of the study's participants have taught for more than five years and have taught in an urban, non-fully accredited public school in eastern Virginia. The schools that the teachers served in were

comprised of two elementary schools (Riverdale Elementary School and Riverrun Elementary School). All schools were assigned pseudonyms. Once permission to conduct the study was granted via Liberty University's Institutional Review Board on October 8, 2019, and with prior permission from the school district, an e-mail was sent to prospective participants to schedule an introductory meeting with them. The prospective participants were identified by administration at the schools that fit the desired educational environment. Administration of non-fully accredited elementary and middle schools within the chosen district were e-mailed to identify perspective participants; however, only elementary administrators were able to provide names of teachers that had five or more years of service within the described environment. Due to having no middle school teachers meeting the necessary criteria of being a veteran teacher, no middle school teachers were used in the described study.

During e-mail correspondence, a majority of interested participants wished to interview during the introductory meeting due to multiple scheduling conflicts with district and state required meetings. The participants were comprised of educators who lived through the experience of teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school and have been teaching for more than five years. Ten participants volunteered to participate in the study. Their teaching experience ranged from six to 30 years. There was one Caucasian male, five African American females, and four Caucasian females. Multiple grade levels and subject areas were represented in the study. All participants were assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics Overview

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Current Grade Level	Years of Experience
Thelma	58	Female	Caucasian	1st grade	17
Gloria	55	Female	African American	4th grade	8
Norma	52	Female	Caucasian	5th grade	30
Jennifer	33	Female	Caucasian	5th grade	10
Thomas	30	Male	Caucasian	4th grade	6
Lisa	34	Female	African American	3rd grade	6
Pamela	36	Female	Caucasian	3rd grade	6
Anne	30	Female	African American	3rd grade	6
Susan	35	Female	African American	1st–5th grade	6
Char	50	Female	African American	K–5th grade	20

Below are individual descriptive portraits of each of the study's participants. The participant's portrait describes the participant's age, ethnicity, current grade level taught, past grade level(s) taught, total years of experience teaching in non-fully accredited urban schools in eastern Virginia, their reason(s) for choosing to work in the teaching profession, their perceived fit with the various aspects (job requirements/expectations, supervisors, school district, school environment, and coworkers) of their work environment, and a short description of what it means to them to teach in an urban, non-fully accredited public school. All participants were assigned pseudonyms. Additionally, other information, such as the specific location of their school

district, the name of their school district, and the name of their school were eliminated to maintain the participant's confidentially.

Thelma

Thelma is a Caucasian female in her late 50s. She is the mother of one grown child. She entered the teaching field as a career switcher, as she previously owned and managed a small business. She wanted to become a teacher because of her past experiences as a student. Growing up she had teachers who impacted on her life and she wanted to be like them and really make a difference in children's lives and help them succeed. She has been teaching for 17 years, all at the same urban, non-fully accredited public school in eastern Virginia. She has taught three different grade levels within the school but has spent most of her career in the lower grades (first and second grade). She perceives herself as having a very good match to her job, a match to her supervisors, a little match to her school district, a good match to her school, and a good match to her coworkers within the school. When asked about her experiences teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited school, she said, "It's challenging. I think it that it is probably my biggest reward in life, in many ways. You can see where you have helped kids and that is something you don't ever forget."

Gloria

Gloria is a 55-year-old African American female. She is single and the mother of two daughters, both of adult age. She entered the teaching field as a career switcher, as she previously was an accountant. She chose to enter the teaching profession in hopes of improving children's futures and providing them with experiences that they could transfer to the real world. Working in business, she saw many individuals come out of school illiterate, and she wanted to change that, in hopes of improving society. She has been teaching for eight years, all at urban,

non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. She has taught four years at her current school. She has recently graduated with her Master's in Educational Administration and hopes to become an assistant principal in the near future. She would like to continue her educational career as a school administrator in an urban district. She perceives herself as having a good match to her job, a very good match to her supervisors, a good match to her school district, a good match to her school, and a good match to her coworkers within the school. When asked about her teaching experience in urban, non-fully accredited public schools, she said:

> There are a lot of challenges. The challenges a lot of time occur because of the checkpoints that are necessary because the state requires them. You also have to constantly meet the demands of the students that are working below grade level.

Norma

Norma is a 52-year-old Caucasian female. She is married and the mother of one son, of adult age. She has been teaching for 30 years, with 17 of the years at an urban, non-fully accredited public school. Her experience before teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited school was in a rural school district in another region of Virginia. When her family relocated to eastern Virginia, she accepted a position within her current school district and has worked at two schools within the district. Norma knew from a young age that she wanted to become a teacher. As a child, she would often play school, and her dreams of becoming a teacher were reassured her freshmen year of college after completing an observation in a classroom for one of her college courses and realizing that it was truly her calling in life. Overall, she perceives herself as having a very good match to her job, a match to her supervisor, a match to her school district, a little match to her school, and a little match to her coworkers. When asked about her teaching experience in an urban, non-fully accredited school, she said:

I think it's a very important job, but teaching in a not fully accredited school in an urban

setting has . . . I don't want to say pitfalls, but it has its own unique set of problems. But

the children here, they are still children, and they deserve to get the best.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 33-year-old Caucasian female. She is married and has two children of

elementary school age. She has been teaching for 10 years, six at her current assigned

elementary school. Before teaching at her current school, she taught in another urban public

elementary school in eastern Virginia. Her previous school was also a non-fully accredited

school as it held the status of accredited with warning. She always knew she wanted to be a

teacher and never imagined herself doing anything else in life; in fact, she explained she never

even entertained the fact of making any other career choice. She can vividly remember the

teachers that had a positive impact on her life, and she has always tried to be a teacher that also

have a lasting impact on her students. Overall, she perceives herself as having a very good

match to her job, a very good match to her supervisor, a match to her school district, a good

match to her school, and a match to her coworkers within the school building. She described her

teaching experience in an urban, non-fully accredited school as "challenging. You are constantly

trying to meet all students' needs, managing behavior, meeting the demands of the school,

district, and state, and playing multiple roles daily. It is rewarding but does not come easy."

Thomas

Thomas is a single Caucasian male in his 30s. He has been teaching for six years, all

within the same district. He received his Master's in School Administration and hopes to

become an administrator at some point in his educational career. He has experience teaching in

both upper and lower grades. He prefers teaching the upper grades and feels he is a better fit

there. Thomas, from an early age, had a love for working with children. As he completed his

college coursework for education, he realized his love for working with children grew and that

he developed a yearning for providing equitable education to all children, regardless of their

background. He perceives himself as having a very good match to his job, a very good match to

his supervisor, a good match to his school district, a good match to his school, and a good match

to his fellow educators. He described teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school in

the following manner:

> Challenging, as most educational settings are, but it is the most fulfilling environment in
>
> which to work. There is less time to focus on the picture-perfect classroom, cut-and-
>
> paste instruction, and trendiness and more focus on results, being change-agents, and
>
> collaboration.

Lisa

Lisa is an African American female in her 30s. She has two children, one of elementary

school age and one of preschool age. She has been teaching for six years, all in urban, non-fully

accredited public schools. She has taught the past three years at her current location. She

currently teaches third grade. When originally starting college, she thought she wanted to be an

accountant; however, during her freshman year of college many of her close friends were taking

college courses to become educators. She witnessed how much they enjoyed them and working

with children, and so she decided to change her college major to elementary education. Even

though she originally had not chosen to study education in college, she has always enjoyed

taking care of children and was often tasked with doing so when she was growing up. She

perceives herself as having a good match to her job, a complete match to her supervisor, a good

match to her school district, a good match to her school, and a little match to the fellow educators

in her building. She described teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school as

follows:

> Rewarding and difficult. There are the good days, bad days, and the very bad days. It is
>
> rewarding to see the students have their "aha moments" and to grow but it is difficult
>
> because of the lack of parental involvement, the behaviors, and the increased demands on
>
> us as teachers.

Pamela

Pamela is a married Caucasian female in her 30s. She has one son, of pre-school age.

Her entire teaching career has been in one school district at the same school. She has taught only

third grade. Pamela has always had a love for children. When starting college, she aspired to be

a pediatric nurse; however, due to medical emergencies early in her college years, she was forced

to change her major. Since she knew she loved children and wanted to have a career working

with them in some manner, she decided teaching would be a good second career choice. She

perceives herself as having a very good match to her job, a very good match to her supervisor, a

good match to her school district, a very good match to her school, and a good match to her

coworkers. She described working in an urban, non-fully accredited public school as follows:

> A way to make a positive difference in the lives of students. Many of my students, have
>
> few, if any role models. It means a lot to me personally and professionally to be able to
>
> give positive into their lives.

Anne

Anne is a married African American female in her 30s. She has one young child. She

has taught in two different schools in two different districts in eastern Virginia. Both of the

schools she has taught at have been non-fully accredited public schools. She chose to move to

her current school to be closer to her family. She did not become a teacher until completing the career switcher program at an approved university in Virginia; however, she always knew she wanted to have a job in which she was able to help people. She has been teaching for six years. She is currently teaching third grade but has also taught kindergarten. She perceives herself as having a good match with her job, a good match with her supervisor, a good match to her school district, a good match to her school, and a match to the fellow educators in her school. Anne described working in an urban, non-fully accredited public school as follows:

> Challenging but rewarding. It is hard because you realize that the students do not always come in 100% focused because of their outside factors but you still have high expectations to meet. I live for the moments where I can see the look in a student's eyes when things finally click for them.

Susan

Susan is a single African American female in her 30s. She has been teaching for six years, all in urban non-fully accredited public schools. She taught four years at her first school before requesting a transfer to her current educational environment. She has taught only upper grades and is now teaching students in first through fifth grade in a smaller group setting. She has recently received a master's degree and certification to become an administrator; however, she is not sure that she wants to move into taking an administrative position at the moment. She chose to become a teacher because she has always loved children and wanted to be able to make a difference in their lives. She perceives herself as having a good match to her job, a good match to her supervisor, a match to her school district, a match to her school, and a good match to the individuals she works with. She described teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public

school can be described as "not easy. There is nothing easy about it and it is definitely not for the type of teacher that thinks teaching is easy and is fun all the time."

Char

     Char is a married African American female. She has one child of adult age. She has been teaching for 12 years in the same school district but has 20 years of teaching experience total. She has recently graduated with her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and is striving to be an assistant principal in the near future, in the current urban district she works in. She currently teaches resource classes for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. She was inspired to become a teacher when she became a young mother. As a young mother, she interacted with her son's teachers and saw that a teacher's mindset has the ability to positively or negatively impact students. This idea motivated her to become a teacher who did powerful things. She perceives herself as having a very good match to her job, a good match to her supervisor, a very good match to her school district, a good match to her school, and a good match to her instructional team. She described being a veteran teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school as "working in an environment with multiple barriers. However, the barriers can be broken if teachers want to use key strategies, hold the right mindset, and build intrapersonal relationships with the students."

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Results

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     All of the data collection methods focused on the research questions that were used to guide this research study. The participants' responses from the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, individual interviews, focus group discussion, and written letters were thoroughly reviewed and coded into four themes that describe and reflect why veteran teachers persist in

urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. This section presents the themes that emerged when analyzing the collected data.

Theme Development

After all data were collected from the multiple data collection methods, a detailed analysis was completed. The triangulation of the data is an essential component of developing and understanding the essence of the participants lived experience; therefore, data were collected through Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, individual interviews, online focus group discussions, and written documents (Moustakas, 1994). To develop thorough answers to the research questions that guided the study, the collected data were analyzed. Through the analysis, themes were found that described the participants' lived experience. The information below describes the process used to discover the themes that were present in the collected data.

Epoche. I used Moustakas' (1994) process for phenomenological reduction. Epoche is the process that requires the bracketing of personal feelings to ensure that they are set aside before the data analysis. Bracketing out personal thoughts and feelings ensured I was able to remain focused on the participants' experience. I kept a journal to write down my personal thoughts, feelings, and questions before, during, and after each individual interview and focus group discussion. Keeping a journal helped me remain focused on the participants and their lived experience and remove my personal bias related to the studied lived experience.

Horizonalization and clustering. After the data were collected (and transcribed as needed) from the participants' Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and written letters, the documents and transcriptions were reviewed to identify textual themes.

After each individual interview was completed, I transcribed it using an online transcription program. I reviewed each developed transcription by listening to the recorded audio while reading through the provided transcript. I made corrections to the transcripts, if needed, to ensure they were completely correct. Once the individual interviews were completely and correctly transcribed, I read through them several times and highlighted important statements made by the participants.

The focus group discussion was also transcribed using the same process as the interviews. I read the transcription from the focus group and the written letters several times and highlighted important statements made by participants. Horizonalization was used as data were collected to ensure the themes were brought out of the data and ensure that significant statements used by participants during individual interviews, focus group discussions, and letter writings were highlighted.

After significant statements were highlighted from the collected data, they were coded and then separated into themes that described the phenomenon of veteran teachers persisting in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. A table of coding as related to themes can be found in Appendix G. Through coding and clustering the data it was discovered four descriptive themes derived from the collected data. Atlas.ti was used to assist in the process of coding and clustering the data. The major themes from the study that contributed to teacher persistence beyond five years in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia were (a) Challenging but Impactful (b) Fitting in with Coworkers and Administration, (c) Never Stop Trying, and (d) Love for Students. The textural themes captured the essence of the participants and were approved by the participants.

Challenging but impactful. The individual interviews, online focus group discussion,

and letters written to a future teacher revealed that the veteran teachers recognized, daily, that

they work in a challenging and stressful educational environment; however, despite the

challenges they face, they identify their work as being necessary and impactful. All 10

participants introduced and described numerous challenges and stressors they face working in

their educational environment. The participants acknowledged that challenges and stressors

occur within their environment from students, parents, coworkers, administration, the school

district, and the state department.

During the individual interviews and online focus group discussions, the veteran teachers

described the challenges that they face working in an urban, non-fully accredited public school.

Anne said, "The students are not always focused on their education because of outside factors,

and that is challenging." Thomas said, "The biggest challenge I have is the lack of parent

involvement and communication." Thelma, Lisa, Anne, Jennifer, and Pam also agreed with

Thomas that the biggest challenge to them is the lack of parental support and the students

knowing they are not always held accountable for their education at home. Char said, "The lack

of resources, especially technology, is challenging." When asked about the biggest challenge

Norma faces in her environment, she said, "You have to wear a lot of hats here. Not only am I a

teacher but I am a nurse, a social worker, a counselor, and a provider of their basic needs." The

veteran teachers also acknowledged facing challenges with student behavior, the lack of

appropriate time needed to ensure all students have a firm understanding of taught concepts, and

the decreased freedom in curriculum and instructional decisions.

The participants also shared the abundance of stressors that teaching in an urban, non-

fully accredited public school bring to them as an educator. Susan said, "We are constantly

pressured and reminded that we must perform, it is very stressful." Jennifer agreed with Susan that the constant reminder of needed student performance is stressful and challenging. She stated:

> We know we have to perform. We know that the students must be able to show their growth and learning but it is like we are constantly reminded of it, like we don't know that is all ultimate goal. We are trying our best to reach that goal but at times it becomes overwhelming to constantly hear about it as our goal.

Norma also agreed with Jennifer and Susan. When asked about the constant reminder of the need to perform and how it is perceived by her, she stated:

> There are a lot of observations. We have a lot of people coming in and out of our classrooms. We have a lot of pressure put on us from our administrators, but it is because they have it put on them by the higher powers about accreditation from the state. It seems like everything always revolves around that.

Thomas also expressed how the pressure to perform was a stressful component of teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school. He stated:

> That is the biggest stressor for me. We have so much pressure on us to move a child, academically, a significant amount within one school year without strong home support or a solid educational foundation, all while dealing with the stresses that come along with daily classroom instruction. This, multiplied by 8–10 for each student who needs to make significant growth.

Numerous veteran teachers also acknowledged that the amount of documentation that they are required to keep is stressful. Gloria said, "We have lesson plans, numerous reports, tracking sheets, PLC documents, planning documents, and meeting notes to complete. It is a huge

workload with a lot of deadlines to keep up on." Seven of the participants agreed with the workload being a stressful aspect of their environment. Lisa said, "There just is not enough time to complete everything that is expected of us."

Even though a great deal of the participants' individual interviews and online focus group discussions focused on the challenges and stressors they feel their educational environment is filled with, they always returned their discussion of their lived experience to the students they serve and how they are able to remain focused on them and not the overwhelming feelings brought on by the negative aspects in their environment. Also, in the completed letters written to future teachers, several of the participants acknowledged that their educational environment is filled with numerous challenges and stressors and that, as a teacher in these environments, it is imperative that they are accepted and handled in effective ways to ensure they do not impact the effectiveness of work that is done with the students, since the students are the main focus of their work. The written statements by the participants also revealed that they were unaware of all the challenges and stressors they would face in an urban, non-fully accredited public school, but even upon facing them they remained committed to the students they serve to ensure they positively impacted them, which is what drew them to the educational field to begin with.

The participants acknowledged the challenges and stressors and described them in great detail but expressed their acceptance of them to ensure they can continue to carry out their work of serving the students. Anne said, "Despite all the tasks and expectations that trickle down to teachers, I still remain focused on my students and their progress. It can be overwhelming but I just keep focusing on them." Through the individual interviews, online focus group discussions, and completed letters it was shown that the veteran teachers' ultimate goal of working in their environment was to impact the students with whom they work, regardless of the amount of

challenges and stressors they face. Regardless of the increased challenges and stressors, the veteran teachers showed the ability to face them and overcome them, to remain focused on the students they are serving. Norma said, "We keep our stress and emotions under control, and keep it about them." All 10 of the participants provided rich descriptions about how knowing they have the ability to impact the students they serve motivates them to continue their work despite any challenges and stressors they face.

During the individual interviews all 10 participants expressed ways in which they impact students and how it encourages them to persist in their educational environment. During his individual interview, Thomas said, "Working in this environment comes with challenges, as most educational settings do, but I believe it is the most fulfilling environment in which to work." During the online focus group discussion, he said, "I want to work in an environment where I can do the most good. I think the students we serve need teachers who are passionate about not just educating them, but supporting their social-emotional well-being and growth." Char said, "I truly care and take responsibility for the children whose lives I touch. I want to propel students to go beyond the unimaginable." Jennifer, during her individual interview, stated:

> I come to work every day knowing that I have the ability to change my students' lives.
> Not only can I change their day and provide them with the safety and stability so many of
> them need, but I can also provide them with knowledge that can make sure their future is
> better than their present. Knowing this is why I keep coming back, they need me.

Thelma said, "I had teachers that made a big impact on my life. I want to be one of those teachers that really make a difference in a kid's life and I want to help them succeed." When asked about what motivates her to persist in an urban, non-fully accredited public school, Thelma stated:

I enjoy working with the student population that attends a school such as ours. I know a lot of them don't get the support they need at home, so I try to give them all I can, even though at times they make it challenging for me, through their behavior. They need the skills I am teaching when they grow up and my biggest goal is to give them those skills.

During the online focus group discussion, nine of the participants specifically mentioned that the reason they remain in an urban, non-fully accredited public school is because of the students and the impact they can have on those students. Norma stated:

I feel that I have made a difference and that is what really matters to me. These children are the ones who make me really feel needed. Don't get me wrong, I do care about test scores, improving the status, the paperwork, but I care about that because it is a must. I care about the children because that is what matters the most to me. I feel that I have made a difference and I cannot imagine doing anything else.

Gloria said, "It is my personal preference to teach students who need an educator. They need an educator that has a vision that all students, regardless how challenging they can be, can learn and succeed with adequate motivation and inspiration." Lisa stated:

I have been one of these little girls sitting in the classroom of the urban, non-fully accredited public school. I remember the teachers I had that saw the potential in me, before I saw it and motivated me to succeed. Every student in my classroom needs that same thing. They deserve it and need me.

In the letters written by the participants it was also acknowledged that they continue to preserve in their educational environment despite the challenges because of the students and the impact they can have on them. Susan wrote:

The students are not always easy to work with, they can be disruptive, disrespectful, and

violent. The students you will serve just need a little extra love and attention and we are

the ones that get to give that to them. I am good at building good teacher and student

relationships which helps make the work I do easier.

Char wrote, "No school will ever be perfect. There will always be expectations of teachers,

paperwork, curriculum, students, parents, and colleagues . . . the students here though make me

want to stay. I enjoy teaching them and helping them be successful."

As indicated in this study, the participants shared a sense of working in a challenging

environment with increased stress on a daily basis; however, they were willing to accept these

increased challenges due to their sense of being needed to ensure they are impacting the students

they are serving. This sense of being needed proved to be rewarding and motivating to the

participants. Likewise, the participants also emphasized that their positive fit with their

coworkers and in-school administration encouraged their persistence in their teaching careers.

Fitting in with coworkers and administration. The Perceived Person–Environment Fit

Scale, the individual interviews, the online focus group discussion, and written documents

revealed having a positive fit with coworkers and in-school administrators was a motivational

factor for veteran teachers to persist in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern

Virginia.

The participants shared through their Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, individual

interview, and online focus group discussion, that they had a positive fit with their coworkers,

especially those on their grade level team. The veteran teachers rated their fit to their coworkers

using the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale. This scale showed that all 10 participants

rated their fit to their coworkers at a positive level. Four participants viewed themselves as being

a match with their coworkers and six participants viewed themselves as being a good match with their coworkers. Their level of match to their coworkers was based on similar personalities, work styles, and lifestyles. The veteran teachers provided their lived experiences with their fit with their coworkers, in depth, during their individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and written documentation.

During the individual interviews, nine of the 10 participants described how working with coworkers with whom they have a positive fit makes the work they do as a teacher easier and more enjoyable while providing them with individuals with whom they can collaborate, learn from, and be understood and supported by. Norma stated:

> We all play a role on my team. I am the mother, the guider, the experienced one. I am the one that answers all the questions. Others know all about the technology, behavior management skills, small group ideas, and things like that. We have our strengths and weaknesses and we need each other.

Jennifer said, "My coworkers understand what we all are dealing with. I can go to them and get ideas to use in my room or with a student. They make me feel like I'm not alone here." Thelma said, "We have a friendship. We all work hard and pull our equal weight. We work smarter, not harder and we share ideas." Anne said, "We are all working with the same vision. We can work together and get things done faster. We can use each other." Thomas, Susan, Pam, Lisa, and Gloria all revealed that, like the other participants, they could work with their team to gain ideas to use in their classroom, to split the expected workload, and to get support and guidance which led to their work becoming less challenging.

During the online focus group discussion, several of the participants acknowledged that when there is a combination of staff that fits together, especially on each grade level team, that the work they complete becomes easier and more effective. Norma stated:

Once we have a combination of staff on teams that work well together, we begin to make progress with students and data goals. When you are on a team that works well together and stays together, planning becomes easier and we can get it done quicker. We know each other strengths and weaknesses. We can help each other out and decrease the workload that each of us experience by relying on each other. If you have positive teammates that work well together, you can support and encourage each other to keep going, especially on the hard days.

Jennifer stated:

You need a team or at least one coworker you can talk to. Someone in your environment that understands, can just listen, and give advice as necessary. Teaching can be a very lonely, frustrating, and personally devastating. You need someone that gets that and can help you when you need it. Plus, when you have people that can share the workload with you it helps lessen some of the stress.

The other participants supported the ideas that were shared by Norma and Jennifer and added the importance of having individuals that understand you are working towards the same goal with the same vision. The veteran teachers agreed that this helps create a team atmosphere with teachers who want to achieve the same outcome. The participants expressed when there is unification within the school, all their work becomes more effective and impactful. Also, during the online focus group discussion, several participants described times in their career when they

did not have positive relationships with their coworkers. They explained how this made work hard, discouraging, and lonely.

Through the letters written to novice teachers, many of the participants continued to express, as they did during the individual interviews and online focus group discussion, the need to build positive relationships with the coworkers in their building to ensure that the planning, implementing, and reflecting work that is required of them becomes easier, faster, and more enjoyable. The veteran teachers expressed this need to ensure that the novice teachers had a support system that understood their challenges and understood the common goal they were working to achieve. Pam wrote, "You have to work together, if not, you will not be able to meet the vast needs of the students." Gloria wrote, "It is important that you work well with your team. Plan together, collaborate together, talk about things together. You are in it together and it makes it more enjoyable when you all get along." Susan wrote, "Learn to work as a team, it will help everything run smoothly."

The veteran teacher's fit with their administration and the level of support and guidance they received from their administration, specifically the in-school administrators, was an additional part of the theme that occurred frequently in collected data from all 10 participants. Throughout the data analysis of the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, individual interviews, and online focus group discussion, it was apparent that all participants' persistence in their challenging educational environment was partly encouraged by the relationship they held with and the support they received from the in-school administration.

All 10 of the participants rated their fit to their administrators at a positive level on the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale. Two participants viewed themselves as being a match with their administrator, three participants viewed themselves as being a good match with their

administrator, four participants viewed themselves as being a very good match with their administrator, and one participant viewed themselves as being a complete match with their administrator. Their level of match with their administrator was based on having similar values, similar personalities, similar work styles, similar lifestyles, and desired leadership style.

Along with the participants' view of their fit with their administrator as shown through the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale, during the individual interviews and online focus group discussion all 10 veteran teachers described, in depth, their perceived fit with their administrators and the impact that their in-school administration has on their work. During the individual interviews, eight out of the 10 participants made positive expressions regarding their feelings on their current school administrator. Thomas said, "Working for my current administrator has been a wonderful experience. I value his model for leadership and as an aspiring leader it shows me what I would like to become." Char said, "I feel like I have a great fit with my administrator, I enjoy working for him." Likewise, Char, Norma, Jennifer, Thelma, Gloria, Lisa, and Anne also specifically made similar statements regarding their fit with their administrator and how it brought happiness and ease in their work environment. Jennifer said, "I have an amazing fit with my administrator. I am thankful for it every day, because it makes it easier coming to work." Overall, the veteran teachers found happiness in working with their administrators and through more detailed explanations, the veteran teachers described how this happiness encouraged their persistence in their environment.

During the individual interviews and online focus group discussion, the participants explained that their positive fit with their administrator(s) were based on the level of support, positivity, current expectations, collaboration, and communication given to them. Gloria stated:

Our administrators have the staff's buy-in which has led to greater results in our building. They have a great vision of the school and because we helped develop that vision, we are more positive about it. He is a people-person. He makes you feel good about the work you are doing and he supports you. He is tuned in to his staff. He is very knowledgeable of pedagogy and he understands that we are working in an environment that isn't what you read about or saw in your teaching program and because of this requires different methods at times. He allows us to try different methods to make sure we are helping our students.

During the online focus group discussion, Thelma stated:

In past years, the required paperwork and expectations placed on us were so overwhelming I was not sure I could continue to do it. However, this past year has not been as overwhelming because we have had more support. Our principal has eased up on some of the requirements that were repetitive and not effective. The administration is really for the teachers and their well-being and when you know you are supported, it goes a long way.

Char and the other participants agreed with the importance of feeling supported by their administrator. Char said, "It is very important that the principal be on the same page and supports you. It shows you that your profession is value-added and that you are significant." Thomas said, "He is a believer in his teachers and the work that happens in the school building. When you share the same idea on the big picture, you know you have his support, which is so much needed as a teacher." Lisa also expressed similar views to the other participants and specifically acknowledged that administration can impact the ease of working in such a challenging environment. She stated:

We feel like we can go to them with a problem and they will give a solution. They listen, and that is all we really are ever asking for. As an employee, you want someone to listen to you, hear your problems, and help you figure out a solution. They make it easier to work here. They make it a lot easier.

Anne, Susan, Norma, Jennifer, and Pam shared similar ideas as the rest of the participants. They shared their ability to talk to them, find support from them, encouragement from them, and ease with working with them. Throughout the individual interviews and online focus group discussion, it was apparent that a positive relationship with administration motivated the participants to continue in their environment, despite any challenges. Pam at the end of the online focus group discussion said, "I feel appreciated by my administration and that makes you feel valued and needed."

Throughout the study, the participants also specifically explained the professional impacts of working with administrators they feel they have a fit with and are supported by. Anne said, "He pushes us out of our comfort zone which allows us to constantly better ourselves." Pamela said, "He has helped me become a leader in school, something I was not sure I could do." Susan said, "They encourage us to constantly grow, they give suggestions of how we can continue to develop as teachers and professionals." Like Anne, Pamela, and Susan, the other participants also acknowledged that their administrators encourage their professional growth to ensure they are developing as teachers and being as effective as possible.

Additionally, during the online focus group discussion, a majority of the participants agreed that administrator's actions can support teacher retention. Norma stated:

Administrators can make or break a school. I've been at another urban, non-fully accredited public school and one year we got new administration; they were wonderful.

They positively influenced all of the staff and supported us; within three years we were
fully accredited. My administrator now reminds of that duo I found inspiring and I know
that it will only mean good things.

Susan and many of the other veteran teachers concentrated on the administration's ability to create a positive climate and culture in the school building during the online focus group discussion. Char said, "The school climate is controlled by the administration." The participants discussed that having a positive climate is imperative to retain teachers in an environment that is known for a high amount of challenges and stresses. Susan stated:

The school needs to feel like a home, a place you want to be. It needs to be somewhere
you feel positive about. You can always tell the mood of a school building by just
walking around the halls and peeking into the classrooms. I work in a positive
environment, I like coming here. My principal has worked hard to build this. We get
positive notes left for us, we get acknowledgement, we get simple thank-you's, we get
support, we get treated like professionals. It makes all the difference when you do not
mind coming to your workplace.

The veteran teachers agreed that a positive school climate is solely, first, created by the administration acknowledging the hard work and dedication of the teachers, letting the faculty and staff know they are important and valued, showing empathy and sympathy when the faculty needs it, encouraging staff, and respecting all faculty and staff in the building.

Additionally, with creating a positive school culture and climate, the participants also described specific characteristics of administration that can encourage teacher retention in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Lisa, during the online-focused group discussion, mentioned that administrators that have an open-door policy with all employees, acknowledge

the employees' hard work, support actions that teachers must take with parents and teachers, and have high expectations of all employees can strongly support teacher retention in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. A majority of the participants agreed with Lisa's statements and many added to her ideas. Gloria said, "School administration that articulates and implements policies that promote teacher support, supports and encourages growth in teachers, and build an environment that has a positive culture and climate." Thelma stated:

> I have seen a lot of teachers fail at teaching because of poor administration. If the administration is not supportive and committed to helping the teachers grow and be successful it becomes very problematic. Beginning teachers are already overwhelmed with trying to learn and manage student behavior, curriculum, teaching methods, collaborating with others and if they don't feel like they have someone in their corner they just quit.

Char wrote in her letter, "It helps if administration is supportive, effective, and consistent in behavior issues." Thomas also acknowledged characteristics of administration that promote persistence of teachers; in his letter, he wrote, "Having supportive administration is important, you can go to them to help identify resources and ways to solve problems."

Throughout the study, all of the participants shared their feelings on their fit with their coworkers and current administrator and how their positive fit encourages them to persist in their environment. As conveyed in the interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter writing the participants also expressed the importance of having stamina and believing in the importance of persisting despite the challenges.

Never stop trying. Through the individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter writings the participants shared how they face numerous challenges in their

educational environments daily but despite these challenges they continue to be dedicated to their work and their mission in teaching. The individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and written letters showed that all 10 participants held mindsets that had characteristics of a growth mindset. A growth mindset is characterized by the ability to experience personal growth, understanding failures and challenges are not negative but can bring lessons and growth, accept challenges, and strive for success without the need for acknowledgement (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2006). Nine out of 10 of the participants discussed, specifically, having specific characteristics of a growth mindset during their individual interview and all 10 of the participants acknowledged holding a growth mindset during the online focus group discussion and the importance of it to get through the work they do in their environment.

During the individual interview, Susan said, "No matter what is going on, if it has been a bad day or a good day, I must do whatever the kids need to make them successful." Lisa stated:

The kids are not easy to work with every day and at times they can be downright difficult. But no matter what I love to motivate them. I celebrate them when they get something and when they don't get something, I tell them their brain is growing because you can learn from what you did wrong.

Jennifer said, "Teaching is a draining field. It takes everything out of you. Some days you are the best teacher, rocking it and other days you wonder why you became a teacher. But every day, you have to give it your all to the babies sitting in front of you." Char said, "Teaching starts with the right mind-set. You have to just stay positive and know you can do powerful things; encourage, empower, and inspire."

The veteran teachers also expressed the importance of being open to change and in being flexible due to the constant changes they experience in curriculum and instruction, technology, expectations, and the student population. Several participants focused on how this is important to ensure that the students still receive what they deserve in the school setting. Thelma stated:

I'm pretty flexible and open-minded. I embrace change always, but it is a lot easier when it is positive change. Even if I don't see it as positive, I just go with it, because I need to make sure that I can continue to help kids and that is the positive that I look at always.

Norma stated:

I have a growth mindset. I've been doing this work for a long, long time. I've had to change a lot through the years. There was a time when there were no computers in the school, and now everything is about technology. Everything has changed and I had to change with it to make sure the children kept learning.

Anne said, "There is no one-size-fits all teaching approach. You have to change all the time to ensure you are meeting children where they are socially, physically, morally, and scholastically."

Numerous participants shared during their individual interviews and through their letter writings that the challenges they face actually provide them with motivation. Pam said, "Obviously, teaching is a struggle every day. I get frustrated with the lack of parental support, but that drives me more often to provide extra support to my students." Susan wrote, "You cannot come into teaching here with the idea it will be easy, because it is not. You see how much the students depend on you, you know you have to do whatever it takes." Char wrote, "It is frustrating and overwhelming here at times, but you forget that when you remember you are here for the students and their learning."

Along with their persistence as an educator being supported by their personal growth mindset, the veteran teachers described holding a growth mindset as related to their students and holding the belief that their students can develop a growth mindset also. During the individual interviews and online focus group discussion, all 10 participants expressed that they believed that regardless of the challenges their students present them or experience themselves due to their behavior, background, lack of experiences and exposure, current academic level, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and level of support for their education they are able to learn, grow, develop, and be successful in all that they do. Gloria said, "At times, I feel as though you have to set your mind to a positive outcome for students no matter what educational setting they are in or what background they are from." Char said, "My students can be propelled to go beyond the unimaginable. They can do it through being encouraged, empowered, and inspired."

Additionally, the veteran teachers emphasized the unconditional love they have for students and how it motivated them to persist in their challenging educational environments.

Love for students. The individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter writings revealed that the veteran teachers recognized that they had a strong unconditional love for children and cared deeply about the success of all children. The participants' persistence in their educational environments was strongly encouraged by their dedication to, care for, and call to work with children. During the study, all participants identified that the reason they chose to work in the teaching profession is because they loved children and had a desire to impact young people's lives. Along with children being the reason they entered the profession, all of the participants identified the students as being a motivation to persist in an urban, non-fully accredited public school.

Even before becoming a teacher, all of the participants had a calling to work with others and care for helping others in some capacity. During the individual interviews, all 10 of the veteran teachers described their reasoning for entering the teaching profession was related to the desire to work with children and/or help others. Some of the participants were drawn to the teaching field due to personal experiences they had as a child, while others were drawn to it because of the natural love for children they had and the yearning they held to make a difference. Thomas said, "I chose to work in the profession because I love working with children and I wanted to impact them." Along with Thomas, seven of the other participants presented a very similar reason for entering the field. The other two veteran teachers provided a description of a personal experience they had that drew them to the educational field. These two participants were also two individuals that held different careers before becoming an educator. Gloria was drawn to the field because she saw a need to help young people prepare for the future and leave school career ready and able to be successful in society. Thelma was drawn to the field because she was impacted by teachers she had and wanted to be able to do the same for others. All of the participants knew that teaching was the career for them due to the love and care they have for others and the drive to impact them in some way.

All 10 of the participants expressed having a love for working with children and care for students during the individual interviews. During her interview, Susan stated:

> I am motivated, daily, by the students. I love to see to see the spark in their eyes when they finally understand a concept that is being taught and I love to help them to be successful on concepts they are not understanding.

Anne said, "I truly care and take responsibility for the children whose lives I touch every day." Pamela believes that her continued love for students motivates her to remain in her career; she explained:

> I love my students. I recognize the needs that they have and I want to help them, not
>
> only, to be successful in what they are expected to do but also in becoming productive
>
> members of our society. If not me, then they may not have anyone else to support them.

Lisa grew up around a lot of younger children and was tasked with watching and caring for them while growing up. She always enjoyed this while growing up, which showed her she loved children and being around them, which encouraged her to enter the teaching profession. Additionally, Lisa summarized her thoughts about her love for students and how they motivate her to continue to persist in her challenging environment; she said:

> The kids motivate me to stay. To me, the students remind me of my friends growing up.
>
> They remind me of my students that grew up on the other sides of the tracks. I know
>
> what happens when they don't take school seriously. I want them to know I care. I want
>
> them to know you can be an African American with dreads or tattoos and still be able to
>
> grow up and make a difference. I want them to know that with hard work, they can do it.

Jennifer, since she was in elementary school, knew she wanted to be a teacher. She always liked being around children and desired to have a career where she could impact others, so she felt that there was no other career choice for her. During her interview, Jennifer mentioned numerous times that she persists in a challenging educational environment because she cares about her students and wants the best for them, now and in the future. She said:

> I wish I could say that working with students here is always easy and enjoyable, but it
>
> isn't. However, despite any hard time they give me, I strive to ensure they know I love

them, I care about them, and that they can be more successful than they ever imagined. I want them to know, that despite any hard time, I'm here for them and want them to work for the best now and in the future.

Several of the veteran teachers also mentioned having a love for students in their letter writings. Jennifer wrote, "You have to love students. They need your love and support." Anne said, "Students in these types of schools need you and it isn't just about educating them. You have to show them your love, support, and belief it them all of the time." Char wrote, "I love kids and you have to. These children will really make you feel needed."

During the individual interviews and the focus group discussion, the participants described that working with students can present many challenges and add additional stressors to their career; however, many participants still expressed that their dedication and love for students overrides these negative aspects. Gloria said, "I chose to work in the teaching profession to better students in academics and help them with real-life experiences. I wanted to make an impact on young people by helping them with skills they needed." As the interview continued, Gloria discussed the stressors and challenges, as they relate to students, that she faces daily as a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school. She shared that students' behavior, lack of parental support, significant gaps in student learning, and the wide range of learning needs of students are challenging and stressful. However, despite all of these challenges the students present, Gloria said, "My motivation to stay is that I make a difference in the children's lives. I get to help the students with pivotal skills in life. I know I don't just make an impact on them while they are in school, but for forever."

Like Gloria, Thelma described that despite the stress and challenges that can be brought on by students she continues to remain focused on them in a positive manner because she cares for them and their success. Thelma stated:

> Because of their background, it worries me and is stressful for me to think about what is going to happen to my students when they grow up and if they will make good choices. But my biggest goal and what I focus on is that I can give them skills that they are going to need when they grow up. They can learn to read, to do math, and life skills. I can give them that.

All 10 participants mentioned that students were one of their most important motivational factors to persist in a challenging educational environment. Through the sharing of their lived experiences through the completion of the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Survey, individual interviews, online focus group discussions, and letter writings, it was discovered that four themes can be used to describe veteran teachers' persistence in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. The four themes were (a) Challenging but Impactful, (b) Fitting in with Coworkers and Administration, (c) Never Stop Trying, and (d) Love for Students.

Research Question Responses

In order to describe the lived experience of the participants who taught in non-fully accredited, urban, public schools for five or more years in eastern Virginia, one central research question and three sub-questions were proposed to guide the purpose of this research study. The themes that were identified through a thorough data analysis informed the response to each research question and will be discussed in the following section. The answers to the research questions convey the essence of the lived experience through textural and structural descriptions of the lived phenomenon. The textural description is what the participants experienced through

the lived experience and the structural description is how the participants experienced the phenomenon in the described environment.

Central Research Question. How do elementary and/or middle school teachers who persist, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their teaching experiences?

Based on the data gathered through the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Survey, individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter writing, it was evident that veteran teachers described working in an urban, non-fully accredited, public school through various lenses. These lenses were challenging, stressful, rewarding, impactful, positive, and negative. The veteran teachers discussed how their positions are not easy, because they are filled with challenges and stressors; however, despite the negative aspects, they are still able to find aspects of their job that they are motivated by, love, and find rewarding.

The teachers identified numerous aspects of their work that they found discouraging and stressful. The aspects that were found challenging were increased demands from the school and district, not enough time to complete tasks, student behavioral challenges, little to no parental support, little input on how instruction should occur, an abundance of paperwork and documentation to complete, an abundance of classroom visitors and observations, and increased demands to perform proficiently. The participants described that these aspects made their work challenging and discouraging; however, these factors were not enough to stop their persistence in their environment.

Regardless of the abundance of challenges the veteran teachers face, the participants focused a majority of their discussion of their experiences on aspects that were positive and motivating to them. The participants were highly motivated by the students they serve in their environment. The veteran teachers all experienced a sense of calling to serve others and love for

children since they were younger and were highly motivated in their profession by the students they serve. They found pleasure and motivation in seeing their students grow and develop and obtain lifelong skills. The professional relationships that the veteran teachers built with their fellow educators and administration were an additional aspect that the participants found positive in their environment.

Research Sub-Question One. How do elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their fit in their environment and how it contributes to their persistence in their educational environment?

This question was designed to discover the importance, if any, that environmental fit has in the persistence of veteran teachers in challenging environments. It focused on discovering the veteran teachers' fit with their coworkers, administrators, school environment, and school district and whether fit encourages their persistence in an urban, non-fully accredited public school.

When viewing the data collected from the 10 participants, it is clear that fit in their environment supports their persistence in their educational environment. The participants were asked about their fit with their coworkers, administrators, school, school district, and job requirements when completing the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Scale; however, during the individual interviews and focus group discussion, the participants were specifically asked about their fit with coworkers and administrators and the veteran teachers openly provided detailed descriptions of their experience with both of these aspects of their career and the impact on the work that they complete.

All of the participants described that they were a good to a very good match to their coworkers. During the individual interview, all 10 of the participants expressed that they got along with their coworkers, especially with those on their grade level teams, and expressed how

this made their work easier. During her individual interview, Thelma discussed how there have

been years that she did not fit with her coworkers and other years that she fit with them perfectly.

Thelma stated:

> When I first started teaching, my team wouldn't share anything with me and they didn't
>
> want to work as a team because they had been teaching for so long, they just already
>
> knew what they would be doing, it made working in the school hard and became very
>
> stressful for me.

I asked Thelma if her fit with her coworkers influenced the stress she feels or increased the

challenges of her job, and she replied:

> Yes. When I got a friendship with my team and we all pull our equal weight, it makes
>
> my job easier. When everybody puts in equal weight, the work gets done easier and
>
> without as much stress. I love my team now and we really work well together. We all
>
> contribute things and it makes it much easier to get things done.

Norma also discussed how having coworkers that fit together and work well together can

decrease the stress that comes with being an educator in a non-fully accredited, public school.

She stated:

> When we can all fit together, it takes a lot of stress off of you, because we don't have to
>
> do everything alone and can come together to discuss our challenges and problems and
>
> plan effective instruction for our students.

Thomas also shared that he works well with the teachers at his school and that he enjoys working

not only with his grade level team but other teachers across different grade levels and other

educational specialists within the building. He also commented on how he is able to use the

individuals he works with as resources and as a learning tool. During the online focus group

discussion, Anne expressed that a major reason she continues working in her environment is because she enjoys working with colleagues. The other participants agreed that they viewed their coworkers as a positive aspect of their environment and a motivation to continue to stick around, despite the other hardships. The professional relationships built with the participants' coworkers provide them with a support system that understands the work they are completing because they are all working towards a common goal.

Along with expressing their positive fit with their coworkers, all participants also expressed having a positive fit with their administrators. The participants presented how, like with their coworkers, their fit with their administrators can be a factor that positively or negatively impacts their persistence as an educator in a non-fully accredited public school. Jennifer, Norma, Thelma, Susan, and Gloria all talked about how past administrators really made their jobs difficult and impacted their outlook on their work. Jennifer stated:

> I had an administrator in the past, that I just could never seem to build a relationship with. It was like we were exact opposites in all ways. It made coming to work miserable and I really began to question my career choice.

Norma shared:

> Administrators and how they treat their staff can make or break a school. I have seen the impacts of good administration and bad administration and it is amazing to see how just one aspect of a school impacts the entire environment.

The participants that shared how past administrators negatively impacted their outlook and work focused on how communication, support, and professional relationships were nearly non-existent with them and were aspects they desired to have.

All the participants expressed how at least one of their current administrator's challenges,

encourages, communicates with, and supports them and because of this they feel like they can face the challenges and stresses of their educational environment and be successful despite them. Pamela stated, "We work well together. He appreciates me and what I do in my learning environment. He has helped me become a leader in the school, which is something I was not sure I could ever be." The veteran teachers all acknowledged that school administrators play a pivotal role in their persistence in their challenging educational environment. During the online focus group discussion, the participants all agreed that teacher retention can be positively impacted by the administration's desire to have open lines of communication, support teachers when dealing with students and parents, acknowledge staff's hard work, encourage professional growth, encourage collaboration, and create a positive school climate.

Research Sub-Question Two. How do elementary and middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their mindset and how it relates to their persistence in their educational environment?

Sub-question Two was grounded in Dweck's (2001) motivation and mindset theory, which focuses on the type of mindset an individual has and how it impacts the success he or she is able to achieve. Sub-question Two was used in the study to uncover the types of mindsets that veteran teachers hold and identify how their type of mindset relates to their persistence in their educational environment.

Through the data analysis it was obvious that the mindset that veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools hold is that of a growth mindset. Individuals who hold a growth mindset accept challenges, new opportunities, change, and support to ensure they are able to experience success (Dweck, 2006). Susan stated, "I have to do whatever the students need me to do to help them be successful. I know that I cannot give up because they need me, they are

my motivation." Norma, Gloria, and Jennifer specifically addressed having a growth mindset

and how it is imperative they have one to continue teaching in a challenging environment.

Norma stated:

> I'd say it's a growth mindset. I've been teaching for a long time and I've had to change a
> lot through the years to make sure that I was able to teach the students and they are able
> to learn.

Gloria said, "My mindset is a growth mindset. I feel as though you have to set your mind to a

positive outcome for students no matter what background they come from." Jennifer stated, "I

believe I have a growth mindset. You have to be willing to accept the hard times here because

regardless you are trying to accomplish a goal." The other seven participants did not

acknowledge specifically having a growth mindset but described themselves holding traits that

are often characterized by individuals that hold a growth mindset. Through their descriptions of

their lived experience they explained that they embrace the challenges of their environment, they

are open to feedback and support to help them grow and develop in their career, they believe all

individuals can learn and grow despite their background, and they believe that despite any

mistakes or failures that occur they can continue to be successful in their work.

Having a growth mindset is also characterized by constantly pursuing accomplishments

without the need for praise and rewards (Dweck, 2006). All of the participants openly shared

their lived experience as a veteran teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school and

how they strive to be successful in their work with the students they serve; however, none of the

participants discussed the need or want for praise and rewards for the work they do. During the

individual interviews and focus group discussion, all of the participants shared constant stresses

and challenges that they face, such as low parental support, varied learning abilities of students,

behavioral concerns, an abundance of paperwork, nonstop observations and walk-throughs, frequent meetings and professional developments, and the constant reminder of the importance in achieving accreditation standards; however, despite all of these challenges and stressors, the participants each highlighted how they are focused solely on helping their students be successful, now and later in life, continue to grow, and show them that they can become anything they dream of.

Along with holding a growth mindset personally, the veteran teachers also acknowledged that they believed the students they serve have and should have a growth mindset. The participants acknowledged through their description of their lived experience that they believed that all students they serve have the ability to learn, grow, develop, and be successful. Regardless of their background, behavior, race, ethnicity, or current level the veteran teachers acknowledged that they believe they can be successful in all that they do and that they are committed to show them that through listening, understanding, being what they need them to be, time, exposure, and expectations.

Research Sub-Question Three. How do elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their motivational factors and how they relate to their persistence in their educational environment?

This question was proposed to uncover what aspects in the challenging educational environment are found to be motivating to the veteran teachers. The veteran teachers were asked specifically during the individual interview and online focus group discussion to describe what motivates them to persist in their educational environment. All of the participants described the students as being their biggest motivational factor to persist in their work. During the focus group discussion, Thelma stated, "Many of our children get little to no support at home for a

number of reasons. I believe it is my calling to reach as many of these children as possible, whether it be academically, socially, or emotionally." Additionally, during the focus group discussion, Lisa shared a personal story related to her motivation to persist in the described environment. She stated:

> As I was growing up, I was one of these little girls sitting in the classroom of the urban, non-fully accredited public school. I don't remember all of my teachers, but I do remember the teachers that motivated me and saw potential in me before I knew what potential was. I needed that and every student that sits in a desk in my class needs it. I will be there for them.

All of the participants shared that they were drawn to the teaching field because they had a love for children and/or a desire to serve others. The veteran teachers reiterated throughout their individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter writing that their work is about the students and ensuring that they are learning and growing. Char said, "It is overwhelming but I just keep focusing on my students and their progress." The participants repeatedly discussed the students that they serve as their motivation to persist in their environment despite any amount of challenges or stressors that they face. Susan said, "When that light goes on for them, and you know they finally got it, it makes it all worth it."

Summary

The purpose of the described transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe veteran teachers' lived experience of persisting in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Ten veteran teachers participated in the study. Data were collected through the administration of the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Survey, individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and written letters. A thorough data analysis was completed following

Moustakas' (1994) steps of data analysis and revealed four themes that described the persistence of the participants in the described educational environment. The four themes related to teacher persistence in non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia that emerged were (a) Challenging but Impactful, (b) Fitting in with Coworkers and Administration, (c) Never Stop Trying, and (d) Love for Students. The emergent themes sought to interpret and describe veteran teachers' persistence in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. The themes addressed and answered the research questions that were developed at the start of the study, using theoretical frameworks and related literature, and guided the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the persistence of veteran elementary and middle school teachers who persevered at urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the insights developed by conducting this research study. It provides a detailed summary of the findings from the data collected. It also provides an extensive discussion of the findings and presents implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research based on the discovered findings.

Summary of Findings

This transcendental phenomenological study focused on the experience of veteran teachers' persistence in the educational field, specifically in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. One central research question and three sub-questions, all developed through current theoretical frameworks and educational literature, guided the study. Throughout the research study, I used journaling to continuously bracket my feelings and personal biases due to my personal experience with the lived experience, which allowed me to clearly analyze and interpret the data as they were presented (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Through a thorough data analysis four themes were identified. The four themes were (a) challenging but impactful, (b) positive fit with others in the building, (c) never stop trying, and (d) love for students. The four themes that emerged from the collected data captured the veteran teachers' experiences and directly answered the research questions that guided the study.

The central research question that guided the study asked, How do elementary and/or middle school teachers who persist in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their

teaching experiences? Responses to the central research question revealed the first theme: challenging but impactful. All 10 participants in this study expressed that teaching in an urban, public, non-fully accredited school was challenging; however, despite the daily challenges they know they are completing work that is meaningful and are impacting their students which has always been a desire of theirs. Per participant narratives, all 10 of the participants decided to become a teacher because they had a desire, in some capacity, to work with children and/or to help others. During the individual interviews, the participants described that they were drawn to the educational field because they wanted to help others and make a difference. Even though each of the veteran teachers described different reasons for becoming a teacher, all 10 of the participants explained that they were drawn to the educational field because it would provide them with an opportunity to serve others. Throughout the individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and in the letter compositions, the veteran teachers acknowledged that the educational environment in which they work is full of challenges and stressors that are brought on by the students, by parents, by coworkers, by administration, by the school district, by the state, and by themselves. The participants described that they experienced these challenges and stressors on a daily basis; however, they do experience days that are better than others when they are faced with what seems like less challenges. However, despite the abundance of challenges with which their educational environment is filled, the participants are not focused on or overtaken by them. They remain concentrated on the ultimate work of serving the students and helping them be successful. All of the veteran teachers who participated in the study focused their narratives more on their work of helping the students be successful, leaving an impact on their students to ensure they can be productive individuals in the future, and working to show

growth is possible in all of their students than on the negative aspects, even though they face them constantly and consistently in their educational environment.

Three research sub-questions guided the study further. The first sub-question asked, How do elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their fit in their environment and how it contributes to their persistence in their educational environment? The responses to Sub-question One revealed the second theme: positive fit with others in the building. Through their responses to the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Surveys, during the individual interviews, and during the online focus group discussion it was shown that all of the veteran teachers who participated in the study felt they had a good match to their coworkers and their building administration. The narratives of the participants showed that their fit with their coworkers and administration helped ease the challenges they faced and helped them believe they were working in a positive environment. All 10 participants expressed that they felt they had a positive match to their building administrator: two participants felt they were a match, three participants felt they were a good match, four participants felt they were a very good match, and one felt they were a complete match to their building administrator. The veteran teachers based their level of match to their building administrator on their similarities in values, personality, work style, work expectations, and desired leadership style. The participants explained that they all felt comfortable with their administrators and looked towards them as a role model, support, leader, problem solver, listening ear, and professional friend. During the online focus group discussion, the participants acknowledged that building administrators can create working environments that are easy or hard to work in and that they have the ability to solely support teacher retention or encourage teacher attrition. The veteran teachers also acknowledged that the school climate is an aspect that can

support teacher retention or encourage teacher attrition. Additionally, the participants' narratives revealed that they felt they had a good fit with their coworkers, enjoyed working with them, were able to rely on them for help, and were able to learn and grow because of them. Through several of the participants' narratives of their lived experience, they explained that when they had years when they did not feel they had a positive fit with their coworkers, it made the work they completed more difficult and less enjoyable. They described that having a negative fit left them feeling without support and conflicted on the work that they needed to complete. The participants in this study persisted in their environment because of their positive fit with their administration and the level of support they are given from them and their positive fit with their coworkers, especially those on their grade level team.

The second sub-question asked, How do elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their mindset and how it relates to their persistence in their educational environment? Responses to Sub-question Two revealed the third theme: never stop trying. I anticipated that the participants in the study were persisting in their environments because of the mindset they hold. According to Dweck's motivation and mindset theory an individual's beliefs can affect his or her personal achievements (Dweck, 2001); all of the veteran teachers in the study have experienced achievement by persisting in a challenging and stressful educational environment. The responses from the participants during the individual interviews, focus group discussions, and written letters to novice teachers showed that the veteran teachers are aware of the increased challenges and stresses they face teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school; however, they still choose to remain dedicated to their work instead of finding an easier environment to work in or giving up on their work altogether. All 10 participants discussed various challenges and stresses, such as lack of parental support,

wide ranges of learning needs, increased frequency of observations, behavioral issues, increased

paperwork, and the constant reminder of needed accreditation, that they face in their

environment and how these factors can be overwhelming at times; however, they accept these

challenges because they know they are there to help their student's experience growth and

success. More than half of the veteran teachers specifically acknowledged having a growth

mindset as it relates to their career while the others described themselves as having

characteristics of individuals that hold a growth mindset. The characteristics they described

themselves as having were resilient, reflective, open-minded, positive, helpful, self-confident,

life-long learner, and helpful. The veteran teachers' lived experiences showed that they know

they are not always successful and have difficult days in their work, but despite this, they

continue their work to ensure they are effective in what they do. Teachers also have a growth

mindset about their students, believing they are able to be successful in all that they do, despite

any challenges they bring or are experiencing, their background, their current level, or their race

and ethnicity.

The third sub-question asked, How do elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban,

non-fully accredited public schools describe their motivational factors and how do they relate to

their persistence in their educational environment? The responses to Sub-question Three

revealed the fourth theme: love for students. Reflections during the data collection revealed that

participants described their motivational factors in varying ways; however, all 10 participants

described factors that were related to the students they serve. All of the veteran teachers in this

study expressed that they were encouraged to become a teacher because they either loved

children or had a desire to help others. All of the participants in the study expressed that they

face challenges with their students daily. The challenges they faced, as related to students, can

range from behavior, to academic, to emotional challenges, to parental involvement; however, despite these challenges they remain dedicated to their work and ensuring that their students are able to experience growth. All of the veteran teachers that participated in the study made direct quotes and shared personal stories about how they feel they have accomplished their work and/or are motivated by the moments when their students learn something new and are able to apply it to current and future situations. The motivation for veteran teachers to persist in their challenging educational environment came from the students they serve and ensuring that the students are able to grow and gain skills that allow them to be successful now and later in life.

An abundance of knowledge was acquired from the participants of this study through the multiple data collection methods. Completing a rigorous data analysis led me to conclude that the veteran teachers have an unconditional love for the students that they serve, and despite the numerous challenges they face, they find their work impactful. All of the participants also expressed the importance of never giving up despite the challenges and stressors and fitting in with the other individuals within the building.

Discussion

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to describe the persistence of veteran elementary and middle school teachers who persevered at urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. This study focused on the need to build an understanding and discover how to retain teachers in educational environments that are often thought of as challenging. This study confirmed both empirical and theoretical literature. The participants' description of the lived experience supported previous literature while giving a deeper understanding of how their environmental fit, mindset, and motivational factors impact the persistence of veteran teachers.

Relationship to Empirical Literature

This study focused on why veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools persist in their educational environments despite the increased challenges and stressors that they consistently face. Current educational research related to the focus of this phenomenological study centers primarily on teacher attrition and the factors that contribute to it and teacher retention of novice teachers and what encourages it. There is minimal educational literature on teacher retention as it relates to veteran teachers, especially of those in challenging environments. This section will describe the connection between the recent empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the information revealed through the data analysis of the described study.

Factors that contribute to teacher retention. Current educational research on what increases teacher retention describes numerous factors that have been found to encourage persistence among teachers, especially that of novice teachers. In previous studies, attending an effective career preparation program, working in a school that has a positive school climate, building and maintaining positive relationships with students, being allowed to have input on the teaching methods used, and having a supportive administrative staff have all been found to be factors that encourage increased teacher retention (Bernhardt, 2012; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Dagenhart et al., 2010; Eckert, 2013; Snyder, 2012; Veldman et al., 2016). The information that was revealed through the data analysis of this study did not support that the persistence of teachers is supported through attending an effective career preparation program. All 10 of the participants shared a very different preparation program and path that they took to become a teacher. A majority of the participants shared that they developed and grew as a teacher, primarily through their own experiences as an educator and learning from their coworkers

instead of through their chosen program. Additionally, as the participants described their lived experience, they did not mention that having input on the teaching methods used in their classroom encouraged them to continue in their environment. Three of the participants did mention that one challenge that they faced in their environment was that they lack the ability to have complete say in how instruction is completed in their classroom; therefore, this previous finding was not supported through the results of this research study.

The results of this study do validate that the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools is encouraged by having supportive administrative staff, working in a school that has a positive school climate, and building and maintaining positive relationships with students. Principals' leadership is one of the major components of effective schools and is also a factor that impacts a teacher's level of satisfaction with their job and, therefore, contributes to their persistence in their career (Beteille et al., 2012; Urick, 2016). Past studies have found that when teachers do not receive the appropriate amount of support from their in-school administration they feel stressed, overworked, and underappreciated which promotes teacher attrition (Beteille et al., 2012; Kersaint, et al., 2007; Urick, 2016). The participants' lived experiences supported these results, as having supportive administration relates to one of the themes that emerged from analyzing the collected data from the Perceived Person–Environment Fit Survey, individual interviews, online focus group discussion, and letter writings in the presented study. Throughout this study, the veteran teachers revealed that they felt like their administration positively impacted them through the support given by them, the encouragement provided by them, and the positive relationship they had with them which helped create an uplifting school environment. Jennifer stated:

I have a good relationship with my administrator. I feel like I can go to talk to him about

anything, professional or personal, and he will provide a listening ear. He provides

solutions to problems that are brought to him and I feel that he has his teachers' backs. It

is nice to know that you have someone in your corner when you are having a bad day or

experiencing a challenge of some sort.

All of the participants in the study expressed that they felt that they were a good match to their

in-school administration. The veteran teachers in the study all described having a positive

relationship with their school leader and agreed that it helped decrease the challenges and

stressors that they experience in their educational environment due to their administrators being

there to provide them with advice, an outlet to express themselves, a support system when

needed, and an encouragement through the difficult days. In a study completed by Otto and

Arnold (2005), it was found that when teachers do not receive the level of support they feel is

needed by their school leaders, they experience increased levels of dissatisfaction and stress and

decreased levels of appreciation and work ethic. The described study supported these findings

by showing through the participants' rich and thick descriptions that when teachers receive the

support they feel is needed they have increased levels of satisfaction, appreciation, and work

ethic and decreased levels of stress which encourages them to persist despite the constant

challenges they face.

Additionally, through the completion of the described research study it was found that

veteran teachers' fit with their coworkers promotes their persistence in the educational field.

Past research had not identified this as a factor that increases teacher retention. All of the

participants in this study described their positive fit with their coworkers and how it provided

them with a support system, individuals to collaborate with, and others to learn from. Several of

the veteran teachers described how having a grade level team that fits well together allows the

school year to become easier to manage and less stressful. Many of the veteran teachers,

additionally, shared that they prefer when their grade level teams stay together or the school staff

remains the same as it allows more time to be spent on accomplishing their common goal and

allows them to rely on the strengths of others, instead of devoting time to getting to know each

other and learning how to best work together. This has been supported by past research, as

previous studies have found that veteran teachers are often negatively impacted by teacher

attrition because they experience increased stress levels due to being the ones expected to mentor

and train the newly hired educators (Guin, 2004; Heineke et al, 2014).

Veteran teachers and the students they serve. Past research has found that individuals

enter the teaching profession for idealistic reasons, such as providing children with opportunities,

making the world a better place, and impacting others (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Heineke et al.,

2014; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). The results of this study supported this past research, as love

for children is a theme that emerged through analyzing the data collected throughout the study.

All 10 of the participants in this study revealed that they unconditionally love the students that

they serve in their educational environment. Along with unconditionally loving their students,

all 10 veteran teachers acknowledged that they entered the teaching profession because of their

desire to help others and love for children. However, it has been found that the love for students

and the positive attitudes towards the students are not enough to sustain teachers in the teaching

profession (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). The veteran teachers that

participated in the study described the students that they serve as a major motivational factor to

persist in their environment; however, as past research has shown, the desire to impact students

is not enough, alone, to encourage them to persist in their challenging educational environment.

Along with their love for and desire to impact students, the veteran teachers also needed to be

motivated by their fit with their coworkers, positive relationship with in-school administration,

and mindset they hold.

The veteran teachers acknowledged that working with students that attend urban, non-

fully accredited public schools can be challenging but rewarding. Teacher retention can be

greatly influenced by intrinsic rewards such as knowing they are impacting students and the

satisfaction that can be gained by observing their students succeeding (Bernhardt, 2012; Rooney,

2015; Veldman et al., 2016). This study supports this finding as all of the veteran teachers

expressed that they are able to overcome the challenges in their environment because they are

motivated by seeing their students grow and experience success. Char stated:

> I am here to show kids that there is a way out. A lot of the students we serve are known
>
> as the difficult kids, I do not focus on that label but instead focus on showing them how
>
> smart they can truly become. I want to show them, if you keep trying, nothing bad can
>
> come out of it.

Veteran teachers and the challenges they face. Urban public schools are often

described as less than desirable locations to teach in due to the high levels of student discipline

problems, low student motivation, inadequate time to complete tasks, a lack of appropriate

resources, high demands, and overwhelming amounts of classroom intrusions (Aragon et al.,

2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013; Veldman et al., 2016). Previous research has also found

that urban public schools are often characterized by poor student attendance, low socioeconomic

status of students and their families, and students' lack of prior knowledge (Aragon et al., 2013;

Bauml et al., 2016; Desimone, 2013; Eckert, 2013). Throughout the study, the veteran teachers

described many challenges that have been found to be characteristic of urban public schools in

past research studies. The participants acknowledged that they constantly and consistently face challenges with students, parents, coworkers, administration, the school district, and the state department.

Previously, it had been found that teachers, both novice and veteran, leave the profession due to emotional burnout (Alarcon, 2011; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012). Emotional burnout occurs because of the increased demands, consistent challenges, and constant need to meet all of their students' differing needs (Alarcon, 2011; Downer et. al, 2015; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012). It has been previously concluded that urban teachers who continue to teach, despite the amount of hardships they face, are known to have resiliency; however, the current educational research does not conclude what fosters this resiliency in them (Castro, 2014; Doney, 2013). Through the completion of the described research study, it was found that the type of mindset that the veteran teachers hold contributes to their resiliency in their environment. All of the participants described themselves as having a growth mindset. Having this mindset allowed them to face the challenges and overcome them through hard work, dedication, and growing and developing as an educator. Holding a growth mindset has also allowed them to be encouraged by the success of their students, which has encouraged them to continue with their work despite the challenges and stressors that they face. Holding a personal growth mindset has allowed the veteran teachers to believe that they can foster their students to develop and hold a growth mindset to ensure that they can be as successful as possible, which relates to their ultimate desire to have a lasting impact on the students that they serve.

The teachers that stay. Current empirical literature describes that there are distinct groups of teachers that have higher retention rates (Hughes, 2012; Snyder, 2012). It has been found, through various completed studies, that minority teachers and male teachers are more

likely to remain in their profession (Hughes, 2012; Snyder, 2012). The results of this study do not correlate with this past research. The participants of this study had equal representation from minority and non-minority groups, as there were five African American and five Caucasian teachers that participated in the study. Additionally, there was only one male, compared to the nine female participants. The demographics of the described research study do not correlate to previous research, as they show that a similar amount of minority and non-minority veteran teachers and more female than male veteran teachers have persisted in their challenging educational environment. The demographics of the participants could be correlated with the geographical region in which the study took place, showing that a general statement of what gender or minority is most likely to be retained is not applicable to all areas and types of educational environments. Along with correlating with current empirical literature, the described research study also related to the two chosen theories that were chosen to guide the study.

Relationship to Theoretical Literature

Two theories guided this phenomenological research study. The theories were Dweck's (2001) motivation and mindset theory and Holland's (1997) person–environment fit theory. The motivation and mindset theory proposes that an individual's beliefs can affect his or her personal achievements (Dweck, 2001). The person–environment fit theory proposes that individuals' personality traits impact their ability to relate to their chosen environment and that every person has a work environment with which he or she is most compatible (Holland, 1997). Dweck's (2001) theory and Holland's (1997) theory allowed the research study to focus on the beliefs, mindset, and fit of the participants as they relate to their lived experience. This study addressed the gap in current literature through research designed to examine veteran teachers' persistence in urban, non-fully accredited public schools and what their fit was to their environment, what

their mindset was as an educator in the described environment, and what motivated them to

continue to persist in their challenging environment.

An individual can either have beliefs that are characteristic of a fixed mindset or ones that

are characteristic of a growth mindset (Dweck, 2001). Individuals that hold a growth mindset

embrace challenges, welcome feedback, believe tasks require effort, and believe that growth and

development can occur even despite failures (Dweck, 2001). Holding a fixed mindset leads

individuals to avoid challenges, interpret feedback as criticism, avoid challenging tasks, and

believe that growth and development cannot occur (Dweck, 2006). An individual's mindset

determines if he or she is able to accomplish tasks that are valued by the individual (Dweck,

2006). The described research study focused on the mindset and the motivation of veteran

teachers who persisted in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. From the statements made

by the participants in this study, it was found that veteran teachers who are able to persist in the

described environment hold personal beliefs that would be characteristic of holding a growth

mindset. The collected data revealed that the participants embrace the challenges of the

environment they have persisted in and do not allow these challenges to stop the work that they

desire to accomplish. All of the participants emphasized that there are many challenges that they

experience as a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Norma stated:

> You have to wear a lot of hats. Not only am I a teacher, but I am a nurse, a social worker,
> a counselor, and at times a provider of their basic needs. You have to have a full set of
> skills and must be willing to use them at all times.

Susan stated, "There is pressure. You know you have to have the students perform. The

students can learn, but it often takes them longer to understand a concept; however, we don't

often have the extra time because the school has to pass the test no matter what." The other

participants acknowledged challenges ranging from an increased workload due to state requirements, lack of parental support, challenging behavior from students, a wide range of students' abilities, the home-life of the students, the required lesson plans, and the lack of prior knowledge with which students enter. However, despite these challenges the veteran teachers are motivated by the students and strive to see the growth and development in all of their students and believe that they can do it, regardless of the numerous challenges they face on a daily basis. Pam stated, "My motivation is my students. I recognize the needs that they have and I want to help them achieve as best they can and be productive members in our society. If I can't do it, who will?"

Observations made about the participants serve to support Dweck's motivation and mindset theory (2001) that an individual's mindset determines his or her success. The veteran teachers in this study persisted in urban, non-fully accredited public schools because they hold a growth mindset and are able to acknowledge challenges but understand that they do not have to stop the work they can do or stop success from being experienced by them or their students. The veteran teachers persisted because they are motivated by their students and believe they are in their position to ensure that they grow and develop.

Holland's person–environment fit theory examines how, when an individual works in an environment that they are compatible in, they experience an increase in their mental and physical well-being and their sense of satisfaction while experiencing a decrease in levels of stress (Craik, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997; Nauta, 2010). The described study focused on veteran teachers' fit with their educational environment, specifically with their job requirements, coworkers, administration, school environment, and school district. Each of the participants in this study expressed being compatible with their fellow teachers and with their in-school

administration. The participants' shared experiences revealed that it was evident that having a

positive fit with their coworkers and administration helped them face the challenges of their

educational environment and overcome these challenges to ensure they could continue serving

their students. Char said, "I feel like I have a good fit; I enjoy working with my grade level

team. We all care about doing the best for our students and all understand that we are not doing

easy work." All of the other participants made similar statements about their fit with their

coworkers. The veteran teachers acknowledged that their coworkers provided them with a

support system, a team to collaborate with, individuals that could share the expected workload,

places to come to learn and grow from, and individuals to build positive professional friendships

with. Knowing that their coworkers shared a common goal helped build a sense of "being in it

together" for the veteran teachers.

 Throughout the study, the participants also described being compatible with their

building administration and the positive aspects it added to the work they complete. Anne stated,

"My principal builds a positive school climate and supports teacher collaboration which helps

support the idea that we are a team and working towards a common goal. It helps me feel that I

am supported." The participants expressed having similar values, morals, and beliefs to their

building administrator and felt that they were a good match with them. Through the vivid

descriptions of the participants' lived experiences, it was shown that due to the participants

perceived fit with their administration they felt comfortable with them and relied on them for

support, guidance, a listening ear, to create a positive environment, and motivation. Lisa stated:

  He listens to me and that is all I can really ask for. When you are an employee at this

  school you need someone to listen to your problems and help you figure out a solution for

  them; and he does just that.

All 10 of the veteran teachers shared mostly positive experiences related to their administration. The participants did share negative aspects of their administration; however, an abundance of their shared experience focused on the positive aspects of their leadership. The participants shared things they thought their administration could improve on; however, the overall experience with them was positive and brought feelings of support and encouragement. Rich and thick descriptions provided by the veteran teachers regarding their lived experiences of teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school made it evident that their perceived fit with their fellow educators and in-building administration encouraged their persistence in their educational environment, which supports the theory presented by Holland (1997).

Additionally, Holland's work theorized that adults do not randomly select their work environments but actively choose them (Boon & Den Hartog, 2011; Feldman et al., 2001; Schneider et al., 1998). Adults search for environments that express their attitudes and passions and allow them to exercise their skills, abilities, and desires (Holland, 1997). This study supports these findings as all of the participants described that they decided to become a teacher due to their love for children and/or their passion for helping others. The veteran teachers also presented that they have a strong urge to leave a lasting impact on the students with whom they work. Choosing to work in the described environment has allowed the participants to complete work that aligns with their passions and achieve their desires.

There were four themes that emerged from analyzing the collected data in this research study. The four themes were (a) challenging but impactful, (b) positive fit with coworkers and administration, (c) never stop trying, and (d) love for students. All of the themes were supported by the related literature that can be found in Chapter Two.

Implications

The findings from this research study are important to the educational community because they provided a voice to the veteran teachers who teach in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in Virginia. The findings help build an understanding of why these teachers persisted in the described environments for five or more years. While completing this study, I collected and analyzed data from the participants that would help identify the essence of the lived phenomenon. Completing this research study was important because currently there is minimum research on why teachers remain in these challenging environments while there is an abundance on why they leave the environments. This study explored why teachers persist in the described environments despite their challenging nature. The implications of this study were important in theoretical, empirical, and practical ways. This section presents the implications as they relate to Holland's (1997) person–environment fit theory, Dweck's (2001) motivation and mindset theory, current educational literature, and practices within the educational field.

Theoretical Implications

Holland's (1997) person–environment fit theory was used in this study as a lens through which to examine why veteran teachers persist in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. Holland's (1997) theory suggests that individuals' personality traits impact their ability to relate to their chosen work environment and that if there is a perceived match between an individual's self and environment, benefits to mental and physical well-being exist. With a perceived match, an individual is able to experience a sense of satisfaction and lower levels of stress (Craik, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Holland, 1997; Nauta, 2010). This study revealed that the participants are persisting in the described environment due to their match to their educational environment, especially to their coworkers and administration. The

responses from the participants revealed that veteran teacher persist in challenging environments because of their partial match to complete match to the different aspects of their job. Among these fits, the participants' responses showed that their fits with their supervisor and grade level team are two aspects of their job that reduce challenges and stresses that they face. Lisa stated, "I have a good, no, absolutely great fit with my administrator. I can go to him with anything and he will help me develop a solution. He is always there to listen." Thelma stated, "I have had some bad teams and some good teams, and let me tell you, the years I had a good team that talked and worked together, it was always a great year." All participants in this study expressed their feelings on having a positive fit with their administrator and at least one teacher on their grade level team and how these fits were an encouraging aspect of their work and helped them through the numerous challenges and stressors they face.

In addition, Dweck's (2001) theory of mindset and motivation was used to guide the described study. Dweck's (2001) theory of mindset and motivation proposes that an individual's beliefs can affect his or her personal achievements. It focuses on the effects of a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2001). This theory supports the idea that an individual that holds a growth mindset tends to be more resilient, more persistent, accomplish more, and accept challenges openly (Yeager & Dweck, 2001). This study revealed that the participants' persistence in their educational environment was motivated by the type of mindset they held. When asked about the mindset the participants held, several of the veteran teachers specifically acknowledged holding a growth mindset. The participants that did not specifically share they had a growth mindset described themselves with traits that are characteristic of individuals who hold a growth mindset. Char said, "I am a life-long learner. I try to show students that they can be the same and that everyone is capable of having life-long growth." Jennifer said, "I hold a

growth mindset. . . in this environment you have to realize you will face challenges but that you can overcome them and be successful and lead the students to success." The participants expressed throughout the study that they work in an environment filled with challenges and stressors that are brought on by the students, the parents, and the increased expectations put on them by their administration, their district, and the state. However, the veteran teachers accept the challenges, work to overcome them daily, and remain focused on ensuring their students are able to see success.

Using multiple data collection methods and completing an analysis of the collected data, it was evident that the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools is encouraged by their fit with their environment and the mindset they hold, showing the relationship and importance of Dweck's (2001) motivation and mindset theory and Holland's (1997) person–environment fit theory to the educational field.

Empirical Implications

There is an abundance of previous educational literature related to teacher attrition; however, very little literature related to teacher retention exists, specifically of veteran teachers in challenging educational environments. Existing educational literature found that teachers are leaving the educational field at high rates within the first five years of teaching (Schaefer et al., 2012). When compared to other educational environments, urban public schools are known across the nation for having higher rates of teacher attrition (Aragon et al., 2013; Castro, 2014; Eckert, 2013; Ingersoll, 2003; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). Teachers are leaving the educational field due to disillusionment with the profession, trouble with classroom management, isolation of support, poor working conditions, subpar administration, low salary, inadequate preparation, lack of mentoring, and cultural transitions from pre-service to in-service teaching (Bernhardt, 2012;

Buchanan, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Heineke et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2012; Veldman et al., 2016; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). This study expands the educational literature by examining the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools and how their environmental fit, mindset, and motivational factors encouraged their persistence in an environment that is so often left by others.

Many of the previously completed studies related to teacher persistence has been of that on novice teachers and of quantitative measures. The described study allowed veteran teachers to share their lived experience of persistence in an urban, non-fully accredited public school, which expands the empirical knowledge in the educational field. The veteran teachers in this study identified factors that encourage them to overcome the daily challenges and stresses that they face in their environment to continue to persist despite them. These factors included environmental fit, specifically with their coworkers and building administration, individual mindset, having a love for students, and a desire to leave a lasting impact on students. Understanding these factors from a first-person perspective helps connects theoretical and practical implications and identify needs for further research.

Practical Implications

There are many practical implications that could be developed from this study for educational stakeholders such as teachers, building level administrators, and college preparatory programs. Before becoming a teacher in the described environments, it is imperative that teachers understand the dynamics and demands of teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school. Urban schools are often characterized by high levels of student discipline problems, low student motivation, inadequate time to complete tasks, and increased amounts of classroom intrusions (Aragon et al., 2013; Bauml et al., 2016; Eckert, 2013). Due to these

characteristics, teachers in urban schools must be compassionate, flexible, and be able to overcome and recover from the many hardships they face (Castro, 2014; Doney, 2013). The present study supported the previously found characteristics of urban schools, as the participants' narratives included rich descriptions of the numerous challenges and stressors they face on a daily basis. Responses from the study's participants showed that teachers must be able to acknowledge the challenges that are experienced in these environments but also be able to understand that despite any hardship they experience, their ultimate goal is to impact the children and help them become successful. Norma stated, "Being a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school is an important job. Of course, you have problems that you face but at the end of everyday it is about the children and what they need." In addition, the teachers must believe that they can maintain, overcome, and still remain effective despite the challenges and stressors that they experience being a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school. Gloria stated, "Here, I have to have a growth mindset. I feel as though you have to set your mind to the idea that all students deserve to have a positive outcome. They deserve it no matter what educational setting or background that they come from, so I have to make sure they can achieve that, no matter what." Prospective teachers need to be informed of the increased challenges they will face in an urban, non-fully accredited public school to ensure that they understand what they will be experiencing on a daily basis. Additionally, prospective teachers need to be provided with professional development on developing and maintaining a growth mindset to ensure that they are able to overcome the challenges and help their students become successful in all that they do.

The practical implications for building level administrators are to know and understand the importance they play in helping increase the teacher retention in their school and school

district. All of the participants reported feeling that they had at least a match to a very good match to their administrator. Many of the participants in this study stated they felt supported by their administrator and that they made their day-to-day work easier because they could communicate with them and present them with problems to gain advice on them. Administrators that are employed to work in the described environments must have the ability to create a positive building culture, have an open-door policy, and be committed to building positive relationships with their staff. Additionally, the participants in the study were encouraged to persist in their environment due to their fit with their coworkers, especially of those on their grade level team. As an administrator in the described environment, it is imperative that when assigning teachers to grade levels and building grade level teams, personality, beliefs, styles, and values of the teachers are considered to ensure that individuals who fit together will be placed together.

The practical implications for college preparatory programs are to know that exposing future teachers to a variety of settings can help them develop an understanding of the negatives and positives of the different types of educational environments and help them develop an understanding of where they feel they fit best as a teacher. The participants in the described study felt that they fit within their educational environment due to sharing common values, morals, goals, and expectations with their coworkers, school administration, and school district. Several of the participants in the study stated that they had many opportunities to observe and intern in different educational environments and through these experiences they knew that they would fit within the described environment. Through these experiences the veteran teachers were able to develop a sense of what type of educational environment they felt most comfortable in and a calling to serve in. Providing prospective teachers with these varied experiences can

help them develop an understanding of what type of educational environment they feel they would be most compatible with based on their background, beliefs, and expectations.

Delimitations and Limitations

This transcendental phenomenological research study had numerous delimitations and limitations that are distinctive to qualitative research studies. Due to the purpose and the chosen design of the described research study, delimitations were present within the study. There were several delimitations in the study regarding the research design and participants. To be able to describe the essence of the participants' experience, the described study used a transcendental, phenomenological research design. This design was chosen to ensure that the participants were able to share their lived experience and describe why they personally persisted in the described educational environment. The participants had to have at least five years of teaching experience. Due to the abundance of research on why teachers leave the educational field, the participants were required to have at least five years of teaching experience to help add to the educational literature of why teachers stay in the field. The participants also had to have persisted through teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school in eastern Virginia. The described environment was purposefully selected because urban, non-fully accredited public schools tend to experience higher rates of teacher attrition than similar rural and suburban educational environments. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of why veteran teachers persist in these environments in hopes of increasing the recruitment and retention of teachers to these environments.

Additionally, there are many factors that contributed to the limitations of this study. First, all the participants were from the same school district. The only district used in the study was a large public-school district in eastern Virginia that serves students in pre-kindergarten

through 12th grade. Second, the study was completed in an urban school district that is predominantly comprised of African American students. Additionally, all 10 of the participants were either Caucasian or African American; therefore, diversity among the participants was minimal. This study also excluded novice teachers and focused solely on veteran teachers that had five or more years of teaching experience in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Due to these limitations, it is appropriate to state that the factors that contribute to the persistence of veteran teachers, identified through this study, may not reflect the diverse perspectives of teachers in different environments, of teachers working with different student populations, of other ethnic groups, of novice teachers, and of other regions of the world.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to describe the persistence of veteran elementary and/or middle school teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. Specifically, it sought to describe the environmental fit, mindset, and motivational factors that encouraged their persistence in these challenging educational environments. Replicating this study in suburban and/or rural public-school districts in Virginia that have schools that are non-fully accredited would be beneficial to the educational community. Suburban school districts are found in areas that are adjacent or surrounding a city and rural school districts are found in areas with smaller populations (Castro, 2014). These school districts could have a different population make-up and different socioeconomic status, which could impact the results of the study. Replicating this study in other types of school districts in Virginia would help all educational stakeholders to develop a more complete understanding of the challenges and the differences in the challenges teachers face in urban, suburban, and rural school districts, why teachers remain

despite the difficulties, and how they overcome these difficulties to continue to persist in their chosen environments.

The described research study could also be replicated using veteran or novice teachers who have made the decision to leave their challenging educational environment. Replicating the study using participants who left their environment after persisting for a period of time would help identify what factors encourage teachers to leave and what can be done in challenging educational environments to ensure teachers are encouraged to persist. Replicating the study using teachers, veteran and novice, who left the described environment would help educational stakeholders understand if there is a correlation between the factors that promote retention and the factors that promote attrition, helping them develop a deeper understanding of what needs to occur in educational environments to ensure that teacher retention is being promoted.

Completing additional research on veteran teachers in urban, fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia could also have a positive impact on the educational field. Specifically, researching the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia could help identify the differences and/or similarities in what helps increase teacher retention in the different educational environments. It could also help identify if certain characteristics of teachers allow them to persist in different types of educational environments.

The educational community could also benefit from this study being replicated in the states surrounding Virginia and/or other regions of the country. The described study was completed in eastern Virginia. Different states within the country have populations with differences in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Other states also have different

accountability standards for schools, different requirements for educators, and different resources available to them which could impact their persistence in the described environment.

Lastly, a quantitative research study could be completed on the impact of teachers' persistence on student success in urban, non-fully accredited public schools in eastern Virginia. Completing such a study could help determine if a correlation exists between teacher longevity and student achievement and measure the impact, if any, it has on the student population.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study regarding the persistence of veteran teachers in urban non-fully accredited public schools was completed to help fill the gap in current educational literature on teacher attrition and retention. Currently, there is an abundance of literature regarding teacher attrition but very limited research on why teachers stay in the educational field, specifically beyond five years in the career. This study was comprised of 10 participants who shared the experience of being a veteran teacher who persisted in an urban, non-fully accredited public school in eastern Virginia. The participants shared their experience through questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups, and letter writings. The veteran teachers shared their educational journeys while focusing on their experiences and their fit with their environment, their mindset as an educator, and their motivational factors that support their persistence in a challenging environment.

The participants provided thick, rich descriptions of their experiences as a veteran teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school in eastern Virginia. From the voice of the participants, understanding that their educational environment is challenging but supports them in having a lasting impact on students, having a positive fit with their administrators, having a growth mindset, and having an enduring love for students are the aspects that have helped them

persist despite all the challenges and stressors that teaching in an urban, non-fully accredited public school brings.

This study has begun to build an understanding on what can encourage the persistence of teachers in urban, non-fully accredited public schools. Since the described environment is known as challenging and less desirable by educators, it is essential to determine what can be done to ensure that teachers are encouraged to persist in the environment. This research study has found that hiring educators with growth mindsets, an unconditional love for students, a positive fit with administrators and coworkers, and a desire to leave a lasting impact can encourage persistence despite the constant and consistent challenges faced. These findings show that teacher preparation programs and school administrators play a strong role in ensuring teacher retention is encouraged within urban, non-fully accredited public schools.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Veteran Teacher,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the persistence of veteran elementary and middle school teachers who persevered at urban, non-fully accredited public schools in Eastern Virginia, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older and have worked at an urban, non-fully accredited, public elementary or middle school in Eastern Virginia for five or more years, and are willing to participate you will be asked to complete a General Fit Scale, participate in an individual interview, participate in a whole group focus group, and write a letter to a perspective first year teacher. It should take approximately 4 hours for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and identifying information will be requested as part of you participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate in the study, please contact me to schedule an interview by calling or e-mailing me at hmcobbs@liberty.edu.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Heather Cobbs
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Understanding What Contributes to the Persistence of Teachers in Urban, Non-Fully Accredited
Schools: A Phenomenological Study
Heather Marie Cobbs
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the persistence of veteran teachers in urban, non-fully accredited schools. You were selected as a possible participant because you have serviced students as a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited, and public elementary or middle school in Eastern Virginia for five or more years. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Heather Cobbs, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to describe the persistence of veteran elementary and middle school teachers who persevered at urban, non-fully accredited public schools in Eastern Virginia. The research study will be guided by the following research questions:

- How do elementary and middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their fit in their environment and how it contributes to their persistence in their educational environment?
- How do elementary and middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their mindset and how it relates to their persistence in their educational environment?
- How do elementary and middle school teachers, in urban, non-fully accredited public schools describe their motivational factors and how they relate to their persistence in their educational environment?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete the General Fit Scale (30 Minutes).
2. Participate in an individual interview that will be audio recorded (2 Hours).
3. Participate in a whole group focus group (1 Hour).
4. Write a letter to a potential first year teacher (30 Minutes).

Risks:

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits:

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include:
- Providing educational researchers and professional educators with literature, which currently does not exist, which will help them develop a deeper understanding on what contributes to the persistence of urban elementary and middle school teachers in non-fully accredited schools.
- The data could be used to school administrators to make informed hiring decisions, as it will provide them with qualities that exist in individuals that persisted in similar environments. It will also provide them with ways to promote longevity among staff members.
- The data could be used by teacher preparation programs as it will provide them with information they can pass on to pre-service teachers regarding potential challenges and personality traits that fit well in the described environments.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participants and related sites will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. All data that will be collected will be stored on a password locked computer or stored in a locked file cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and hard copies will be shredded and discarded. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be

included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Cobbs. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at hmcobbs@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Linda Holcomb, at ljholcomb@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

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

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

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

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 8, 2019

Heather Marie Cobbs
IRB Exemption 3527.100819: Understanding What Contributes to the Persistence of Teachers in Urban, Non-Fully Accredited Schools: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Heather Marie Cobbs,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if . . . the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose to work in the teaching profession?

2. How did you come to work in an urban educational environment?

3. How do you describe your teacher preparation program?

4. How would you describe what it means to be a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

5. What is challenging about being a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

6. What stresses do you experience while being a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

7. What would you describe as your motivation for persisting as a teacher in an urban, non-fully accredited public school?

8. How would you describe your mindset as an educator?

9. What positively or negatively influences your mindset to change as an educator in a challenging environment?

10. How would you describe how you fit into your educational environment?

11. How would you describe your fit with your administrator?

12. How would you describe your fit with your colleagues?

13. What factors influence your fit with your environment, administrator, and/or colleagues?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a veteran teacher, describe your experience with teacher attrition in your current educational environment.

2. Specifically explain why you remained in an urban, non-fully accredited public school.

3. How did your teacher preparation program adequately prepare you to persist in your current educational environment?

4. How did your retention as a teacher in a challenging environment impact student achievement and the educational community?

5. What strategies, initiatives, or programs would you suggest to be implemented to positively influence teacher retention?

6. As current teachers in challenging educational environments, what do you recommend to positively impact teacher retention?

APPENDIX F: PERCEIVED PERSON–ENVIRONMENT FIT SCALE

[Removed for copyright. The scale may be viewed on p. 98 of Chuang et al. (2016). See

http://web.ba.ntu.edu.tw/professor/contents/aichia/ChuangShenJudge2016APIR.pdf]

APPENDIX G: CODING AND THEMES

Challenging but Impactful	Fitting in with Coworkers and Administrators	Never Stop Trying	Love for Students
Challenges	Collaboration	Growth Mindset	Caring
Stressors	Support	Embrace Challenges	Life Calling
Pressures	Positive Relationships	Successful	Dedication
Stressful	Guidance	Student Growth	Desires
Impact	Culture and Climate	Persistence	Motivation
Student Success	Common Visions	Flexibility	Student Success
Student Needs		Open to Change	Making a Difference
Student Focused		Resilient	
		Student Beliefs	