

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' LIVED
EXPERIENCES IN THE TRADITIONAL AND YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL
YEAR CALENDARS

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. The lived experiences of teachers within the traditional and year-round school year calendars were generally defined as educators with prior experience teaching in a traditional school year calendar and a year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School. The theory guiding this study was Dewey's theory of experience, which suggests that individuals learn more effectively through interaction (creating meaning from experience through interaction with its physical and social settings) and continuity (the effect of prior experiences shaping future experiences). The primary source of experiential data collection was individual interviews using a purposeful criterion sample of 14 participants, in addition to a focus group interview, and participant journaling. van Manen's method of thematic analysis was used to organize data into three themes, (a) traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change, (b) traditionally positive to year-round support, and (c) an opportunity for growth that described the essence of teachers' experiences within both calendar structures. Elementary educators participating in this study described improved experiences, school culture, and a greater impact on student learning while teaching within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar.

Keywords: traditional school year calendar, year-round school year calendar, theory of experience, thematic analysis

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List of Abbreviations

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

English Language Learners (ELLs)

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress (NWEA MAP)

Standards of Learning (SOL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. This chapter establishes a background for the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars, while providing the historical, social, and theoretical contexts for this study's research. The problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions are also encompassed in this chapter.

Background

Interpreting the lived experiences of teachers at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School was essential to describing the perspectives of educators with experience teaching within both calendar structures. McMullen and Rouse (2012) examined the year-round school year calendar from a quantitative approach, analyzing its capability to effectively address overpopulation in Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina. However, McMullen and Rouse's research was unable to determine the year-round school year calendar's ability to significantly stimulate student performance on standardized assessments. Therefore, this study utilized a qualitative approach to interpret educators' experiences within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar, seeking to develop a greater understanding of the instructional environment within both calendar structures through the theoretical lens of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience.

Research associated with Dewey's (1934) theory of experience is focused on the perspective that individuals learn more effectively through interaction (creating meaning from an

experience through interaction with its physical and social settings) and continuity (the effect of prior experiences in shaping future experiences). Teachers' prior experience in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School provided a greater understanding of the instructional environment in a traditional school year calendar program and a year-round school year calendar program. Most of the existing literature on the effectiveness of the year-round school year calendar was evaluated quantitatively through its impact on addressing overcrowding and mixed results on standardized assessment achievement (Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Graves, 2010, 2011; Takyi et al., 2019). The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the instructional environment in both programs.

Historical Context

The existing research indicates that schools transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar did so to address challenges of overcrowding as well as summer learning loss (Broekman et al., 2021; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2011; 2012; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Patton & Reschly, 2013; Takyi et al., 2019; von Hippel, 2019). The traditional 180-day instructional calendar was redistributed to include two-to-three-week vacations at the end of each marking period in lieu of the normal extended summer vacation (Finnie et al., 2019; Graves, 2011; 2012; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015). The research further indicates that the year-round school year calendar effectively addressed overcrowding through the use of a

multitrack system that altered students' schedules, so the entire student body was not in attendance at the same time, while the results varied in determining its effectiveness to address academic deficiencies (Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2011; 2012; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Takyi et al., 2019). Additionally, most of the research examining the effectiveness of the year-round school year calendar has been quantitative in nature, primarily focused on its inconsistent ability to significantly stimulate student performance on standardized testing (Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2011; 2012; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMillen 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Takyi et al., 2019).

Based on the limited recent research (within the last five years), I identified the opportunity to examine the academic calendar structure through a qualitative lens by interpreting educators' prior experiences teaching within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School, including the school calendar's influence on experiences, school culture, and impact on student learning. As educators are the individuals tasked with implementing educational initiatives, interpreting their lived experiences within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar was valuable in developing a rich description of the instructional environment in both programs from the perspective of teachers. The teacher perspective is an essential component to this study because it provided meaningful experiential data that were used to describe the essence of experiences, as well as the instructional environment within both the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars.

Social Context

As success in today's public education system is based on student performance on standardized assessments, the quest to identify best practices is an ongoing process. With the commonality of the traditional school year calendar, this study was conducted to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar. This study also sought to examine the instructional environment in both programs. Therefore, the research obtained in the interpretation of the lived experiences of educators within the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars could prove to be valuable in developing a greater understanding of teachers' descriptions of the experiences, school culture, impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in both calendar structures (Dills et al., 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018 ; Graves, 2011; 2012; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Patton & Reschly, 2013; Takyi et al., 2019; von Hippel, 2019).

Theoretical Context

Elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School were examined through the lens of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience. Dewey's (1934) theoretical framework is based on individuals' interactions within a certain phenomenon and how their previous and continued experiences shape their improved understanding within that phenomenon. This study served to interpret the lived experiences of teachers with prior experience in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar, while obtaining a greater understanding of the instructional environment in both programs.

There is a gap in the literature associated with examining the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars. Existing research is limited and outdated (greater than five years old), while viewing the year-round school year calendar solely through a quantitative lens, identifying its ability to address overcrowding, but inconsistent success in stimulating student achievement on standardized assessments (Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2010, 2011; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Takyi et al., 2019). As teachers are instrumental to the implementation of educational initiatives, examining the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar through a qualitative lens allowed educators with teaching experience in both programs to share meaningful data for describing experiences, school culture, impact on student learning, while developing a greater understanding of the instructional environment in both calendar structures. Furthermore, utilizing Dewey's theory of practice as this study's theoretical framework could be valuable moving forward in examining educational initiatives comprehensively, through a qualitative lens such as educators' lived experiences, coupled with a quantitative approach such as student performance on standardized assessments.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was describing how the instructional calendar impacted experiences, school culture, and student learning in the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendar programs. As schools in today's educational system have consistently sought to identify best practices in the facilitation of the academic process, the revision of the instructional calendar has been a topic of debate among educational professionals for years (Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2011; Jez & Wassmer, 2015; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen &

Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Murray, 2016; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017; Takyi et al., 2019). McMullen and Rouse (2012) studied the transition of 22 Wake County, North Carolina elementary and middle schools from a traditional school year calendar to a year-round school year calendar due to unprecedented population growth in the Wake County Public School System. McMullen and Rouse concluded that the year-round school year calendar failed to impact academic achievement of the average student and found no evidence that any racial subgroup benefited from the revision of the instructional calendar. McMullen et al. (2015) revisited the study of Wake County, North Carolina's transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar in 2007, this time using a quantile regression approach with school and grade-by-year fixed effects to estimate the distributional impact of the year-round school year calendar. Contrary to McMullen and Rouse's (2012) previous conclusion, McMullen et al. (2015) determined that implementing the year-round school year calendar positively impacted the lowest performing students. Graves (2011) used detailed longitudinal data from the state of California to study the effect of the year-round school year calendar on the standardized test performance of disadvantaged students on reading and math assessments. Graves (2011) concluded that multitrack year-round school year calendars negatively influenced African American and Hispanic students. Fitzpatrick and Burns (2018; 2019) meta-analysis concluded that reading and math scores were modestly higher within the year-round school year calendar, including historically disadvantaged students. Fitzpatrick and Burns (2018; 2019) further shared that math effects were larger in middle school than elementary school, but the reason was unclear.

While prior researchers have examined the revision of the instructional calendar from a quantitative perspective, little recent research was available providing teachers' perspective of a

revised academic calendar structure, its instructional environment, or recommendations for improving implementation (Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2010; 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Takyi et al., 2019). Providing a more comprehensive view of the revision of the instructional calendar could identify specific areas for improvement, while providing educational leaders contemplating the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar with recent experiential data to guide its possible viability for their division. As teachers are the major facilitators of educational initiatives, interpreting their perspectives of the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar was pertinent to interpreting the calendar structure's impact on experiences, school culture, and student learning, while obtaining a greater understanding of the instructional environment in both programs.

Obtaining a greater understanding of the instructional environment within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars was essential as this study sought to close the gap in the lack of current research (within the last five years) involving the comparison of both calendar structures. Studying elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar also identified recommendations for improving implementation moving forward based on the perspective of educators (Finnie et al., 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2011; Jez & Wassmer, 2015; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen et al., 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Murray, 2016; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional

environment in both programs. The lived experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars were generally defined by educators with prior experience teaching in a traditional school year calendar as well as the year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Hutchinson, 2015; Schmidt, 2010; van Manen, 1990, 1997). The theory guiding this study was Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as it conveyed the understanding that individuals learn more effectively through interaction (creating meaning from an experience through interaction with its physical and social settings) and continuity (the effect of prior experiences in shaping future experiences).

Significance of the Study

The hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and a year-round school year calendar was significant theoretically, empirically, and practically. Theoretically, this study added to the existing research using Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as a framework to examine the pedagogical processes of educators. Empirically, this study provided recent research examining the revision of the instructional calendar based on the experiences of elementary educators at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School. Practically, this study utilized the lived experiences of teachers as a means of describing the experiences, school culture, impact on student learning, and instructional environment within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar.

From a theoretical perspective, this study was predicated on Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as it pertained to the body of knowledge regarding educators' continuous interactions within their environment at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School.

Hutchinson (2015) developed an improved understanding of his personal teaching experiences by using Dewey's theory of experience as a framework for identifying the value and significance of his experience in education. Schmidt (2010) also utilized Dewey's theory of experience to examine the effectiveness of preservice teachers as well as the careers of music teachers to understand that the quality of individuals' experiences was significant to their effectiveness. Both Hutchinson and Schmidt found the effect of experience was cumulative, with each experience being shaped by prior experiences and shaping future experiences (continuity). Additionally, Hutchinson and Schmidt found individuals created meaning from experiences as they interact within physical and social settings (interaction). The application of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience in Hutchinson's and Schmidt's research was significant to this current study because it effectively calibrated the lens with which to view teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars, thus providing the experiential data necessary to describe experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environments in both programs. As the lived experiences of teachers within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar were interpreted, meaningful insight for describing both calendar structures were obtained (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Hutchinson, 2015; Schmidt, 2010; van Manen, 1990, 1997).

McMullen and Rouse (2012) and McMullen et al. (2015) identified the revision of the instructional calendar's effective management of overcrowding using a multitrack system, while Patton and Reschly (2013) and Shinwell and Defeyter (2017) communicated its inconsistent influence on learning loss. French (2013) identified parents' enthusiasm for the implementation of the year-round school year calendar, while Winter (2005) described teachers' overwhelmingly support of transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year

calendar. Fitzpatrick and Burns (2018; 2019) conducted a meta-analysis of single-track year-round education achievement in K-12 schools in the United States, determining that both math and reading scores were modestly higher within the year-round school year calendar. However, there were very few current studies (within the last five years) examining experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar from an educator's perspective. This study utilized a qualitative lens to provide teachers' perspective of the essence of their experiences within the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars, while building upon the existing empirical data from previous research.

This study is of practical significance to stakeholders associated with the educational process. School board members, school administrators, and teachers may find value in learning about the lived experiences of educators in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Merritt, 2017; Winter, 2005). More specifically, findings from this study may provide insight for school board members, school administrators, and teachers to obtain a greater understanding of the experiences, school culture, impact on student learning, and instructional environment within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar, while identifying its possible viability for their respective school districts (Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Merritt, 2017; Winter, 2005). Studying the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars may also provide educational stakeholders with a greater understanding of opportunities provided by revising the instructional calendar for a more effective implementation (Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Merritt, 2017; Winter, 2005).

Research Questions

This study was conducted to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar to develop a description of the essence of experiences, school culture, impact on student learning, and instructional environment within both programs. Three research questions (RQs) were developed to guide this study's research.

Research Question One (RQ1)

How do teachers describe their experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

There was little recent information (within the last five years) available examining teachers' lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar, including the influence of revising the instructional calendar. This study was undertaken to discover how educators with experience in the traditional school year calendar described their experiences in comparison to the year-round school year calendar. Dewey's (1934) theory of experience was the framework utilized to examine teachers' cumulative experiences, physically and socially within both calendar structures. Results from this study provided a description of the experiences, school culture, and impact on student learning, while facilitating a greater understanding of the instructional environment within both calendar structures based on the perspective of teachers.

Research Question Two (RQ2)

How do teachers describe the school culture in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Dewey's (1934) theory of experience addressed the importance of an individual's physical and social interactions within the environment of a specific phenomenon. According to Louis and Lee (2016), school culture refers to the pattern of shared beliefs, assumptions, and value systems among a group that serves as the basis for energizing and sustaining attempts at school improvement. Louis and Lee further identified that school culture is not neutral and either leads to schools being unable to change or to movement and improvement. Schipper et al. (2020) added that school culture is characterized by teachers who take an inquiry stance in which exchanging knowledge and collaboratively developing classroom material. The lack of a positive school culture causes teachers to work in isolation, leading to decreased feelings of self-efficacy, and negatively impacting learning (Schipper et al., 2020). Therefore, I felt it was beneficial to obtain insight into the nature of teachers' work environment in both the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar.

Research Question Three (RQ3)

How do teachers describe the impact on student learning in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

There was limited recent research (within the last five years) providing a qualitative view of teachers' perspective of the impact on student learning within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar. Most of the existing literature on the revision of the instructional calendar addresses its influence quantitatively, by the ability to effectively curb overcrowding and its inconsistent impact on student standardized assessment achievement (Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2010, 2011; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al. 2015; Takyi et al., 2019). Using a qualitative approach allowed elementary teachers with experience within both calendar structures the opportunity to reflect on

their lived experiences to provide a greater understanding of the impact on student learning (Graves, 2010, 2011; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015). Exploring educators' perceptions of the impact on student learning provided a greater understanding of teachers' stance in the debate between the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars.

Definitions

1. *Learning loss* - Failure to retain previously learning academic material (von Hippel, 2019).
2. *Overcrowding* - A surge in student population that limits the space required to educate the school's entire student body at one time (McMullen et al., 2015).
3. *Professional learning communities* – Formal networks where educators work together in a collaborative culture to analyze student achievement, share pedagogy, and find areas for improvement in teaching, learning, and student achievement (Carpenter, 2018).
4. *Summer learning loss* - Failure to retain previously learned academic material after the culmination of summer vacation (von Hippel, 2019).
5. *Theory of experience* - Dewey's (1934) theoretical framework based on the principles of continuity (prior experiences help to shape future experiences) and interaction (physical and social interactions within the environment of a specific phenomenon).
6. *Title I school* - Schools that receive federal financial assistance due to a high percentage of student enrollment from a low-income area. The additional funding is provided to ensure support in meeting state academic standards (Hall et al., 2016).
7. *Traditional school year calendar* - The normal distribution of 180 instructional days between August/September and May/June with a summer vacation occurring from mid-June through August (French, 2013).

8. *Year-round school year calendar* - The redistribution of 180 instructional days throughout the calendar year with short, frequent breaks after each marking period (two to three weeks) to eliminate extensive time out of school (French, 2013).

Summary

Chapter One provided the background, historical, social, and theoretical contexts of this hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars. The problem addressed in this study was describing how the instructional calendar impacted experiences, school culture, and student learning in the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendar programs (Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2011; Jez & Wassmer, 2015; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Murray, 2016; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017; Takyi et al., 2019). Most of the previous research incorporated a quantitative lens to determine the value of implementation, providing no description of the instructional environment within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar program, nor recommendations found for improvement moving forward. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. Findings from this study helped to fill the gap in literature left by the lack of recent research describing teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars based on Dewey's (1934) theory of experience.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. Previous research has yielded mixed results in examining the revision of the instructional calendar to positively impact academic success, evidenced through its proven effectiveness in addressing overcrowded schools, but inconsistently facilitating noticeable gains on state standardized assessments (Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). This chapter includes a review of the fundamental concepts associated with the traditional school year calendar, year-round school year calendar, Dewey's (1934) theory of experience, student learning loss, prolonged engagement, and social emotional health.

Theoretical Framework

This hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experiences of elementary teachers with prior experience in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School was grounded in Dewey's (1934) theory of experience, which suggests that individuals learn more effectively by interacting within their experiences (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Stark, 2020; Schmidt, 2010). The theory of experience is predicated upon the concept that

individuals create continuity and develop their own meanings from personal experiences (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). It was beneficial to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars to obtain the perspectives of educators that have taught within both calendar structures. This study encompassed Dewey's theory of experience to provide elementary teachers with lived experiences within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar the opportunity to reflect on experiences, school culture, as well as the instructional calendar's impact on student learning based on Dewey's framework of interaction and continuity (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Schmidt, 2010). Elementary teachers that have taught within both calendar formats can more accurately provide a comparison between each experience, thus articulating experiential data relevant to developing a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990, 1997).

Dewey's (1934) theory of experience is predicated on two concepts: interaction and continuity (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). More specifically, Dewey positioned the notions of interaction and continuity into a dynamic and interpenetrating relation, identifying this relation as the living soul of the educative experience (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). According to Bassey (2010), Dewey characterized educative experience as growth that leads to further growth. Furthermore, not only are individuals' interactions in the physical environment important, but their social interactions are as well (Bassey, 2010; Dewey, 1934; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Schmidt, 2010). According to Dewey, educational experiences

live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences. The effect of these experiences is cumulative, with each experience shaped by prior experiences and, in turn, shaping future experiences (Bassey, 2010; Dewey, 1934; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). Using Dewey's theory of experience established a lens for this study to utilize educators with prior experience teaching in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School to reflect and describe experiences, school culture, and the impact on student learning within both calendar formats.

Dewey's theory of experience also addresses the benefit of learning experienced in community, suggesting that the opportunity to apply new learning against an individual's ideas, the experiences of others, as well as one's own experiences is vital. As a result, this study examined the professional learning communities of educators in both the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars (Lalor & Abawi, 2014). Professional learning communities (PLCs) are groups of teachers who consistently come together to engage in systematic and sustained cycles of inquiry-based learning (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017; Carpenter, 2018; Huijboom et al., 2020). According to Carpenter (2018), professional learning communities are formal networks of educators that work together in a collaborative culture to analyze student achievement, share pedagogy, and find areas for improvement in teaching, learning, and student achievement (Carpenter, 2018). Professional learning communities are significant to educators' experiences because it provides the opportunity for teachers to collectively reflect, discuss, and grow pedagogically (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017; Carpenter, 2018; Huijboom et al., 2020).

Dewey's (1934) theory of experience was an ideal framework for this study because it required an examination of teachers' physical and social interactions within their prior

experiences in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar, providing an elementary educator's perspective of both instructional calendars. As Dewey predicated learning on interaction and continuity in an educational setting, this study focused on the notion that the cumulative experiences of elementary teachers within both the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars could translate into a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. Furthermore, this study aimed to frame the elementary teachers' lens as valuable insight of experiences, school culture, and the impact on student learning based on Dewey's theoretical framework. The overarching goal was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers into themes that would clearly articulate a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars, while exhibiting the value of educators' perspectives based on their experiences within an educational initiative (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ho et al., 2017; Jones & Mueller, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1990,1997).

Previous studies have incorporated Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as a framework for establishing pedagogical effectiveness as a music teacher as well as a preservice teacher (Bassey, 2010; Mayer, 2015; Hutchinson, 2015; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). As Dewey's theory of experience has been utilized to determine teacher effectiveness based on cumulative interactions within the education profession, this study framed teachers' experiences within both the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar as valuable perspectives that will speak to the credibility of their lens on the instructional calendar (van Manen, 1990,1997). Interpreting the lived experiences of teachers in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar provided a great deal of insight into the instructional environment of both programs, experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and

the importance of professional learning communities (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017; Carpenter, 2018; Huijboom et al., 2020; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Margison & Strobel, 2007; Merritt, 2017; O'Neill, Geoghegan, & Peterson, 2013). Grounding this study in Dewey's (1934) theory of experience was instrumental in highlighting the ability to translate teachers' lived experiences into valuable perspectives that qualitatively describe the essence of the instructional environment in a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar program (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1990, 1997). This study added to the existing literature associated to Dewey's (1934) theory of experience by using it as a framework to equvalate teachers' experiences as the pedagogical competence required to accurately describe experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in both the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hutchinson, 2015; Schmidt, 2010; van Manen, 1990, 1997).

Related Literature

The teaching profession continues to evolve as educators have been tasked to adapt to new curricular reforms and assessments, implement social and emotional learning programs, and plan learning for an increasingly diverse student population (Merritt, 2017; Pelaez-Fernandez et al., 2021; Schuck et al., 2018). Today's educators have also been tasked with becoming knowledgeable in the use of digital platforms to facilitate and support online learning (Pulham & Graham, 2018; Mushtaque et al., 2021; Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021). Pelaez-Fernandez et al. (2021) adds that teaching is one of the most emotionally demanding jobs available. Merritt further explained that teachers engage in continuous professional development opportunities throughout their careers to develop pedagogical effectiveness. As teacher effectiveness is predominantly evaluated by the ability to stimulate student growth, educators possess in-depth

comprehension of academic curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as an intimate understanding of the effectiveness of various educational initiatives (O'Neill et al., 2013; Schuck et al., 2018).

As today's educational system is in constant search of best practices, filling the gap in literature associated with the year-round school year calendar could provide the education profession with a greater understanding of the instructional environment in both the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs, as well as a vivid depiction of the essence of teachers' experiences within both programs (van Manen, 1990, 1997). The related literature examined in this study provides insight associated with the traditional school year calendar, year-round school year calendar, student learning loss, prolonged student engagement, and social emotional health (Bell et al. 2019; Broekman et al., 2021; Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

The Traditional School Year Calendar

The traditional school year calendar is the normal distribution of 180 instructional days beginning in August/September and ending in May/June (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Gilpin, 2020; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017; Winter, 2005). The traditional school year calendar is characterized by a two and one half-month summer vacation beginning in May/June and culminating in August/September.

Historically, the school calendar in the United States has been revised to meet the demands of age (Cuban, 2008; Galven, 1989; Schulte, 2009). According to Schulte (2009), in the 19th century, schools in rural areas were often open only a few months, usually in the winter and summer, so that students could help with spring planting and fall harvesting. On the other hand, schools in urban areas were often in session all 12 months (Cuban, 2008; Galven, 1989; Schulte, 2009). It was not until after World War II that the 180-day school year with the extended summer break was more institutionalized (Cuban, 2008; Galven, 1989; Schulte, 2009). Schulte argued that there was no basis for the traditional school year calendar other than tradition.

According to Shinwell and Defeyter (2017), as schools began to be evaluated according to student achievement on standardized assessments, the issue of student learning loss (i.e., failing to retain previously taught material) started to become prevalent. Student learning loss is a significant concern because teachers would be tasked with utilizing instructional time previously designated for current level academic concepts to spiral back to reteach essential content that students were expected to have mastered prior to entering their current classroom (Broekman et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Jez & Wassmer, 2015; Patton & Reschly, 2013; von Hippel, 2019; Schulte, 2009; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017). Subsequently, student learning loss was attributed to the extensive summer vacation associated with the traditional school year calendar (Bell et al., 2019; Broekman et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Jez & Wassmer, 2015; Patton & Reschly, 2013; Schulte, 2009; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017; Takyi et al., 2019; von Hippel, 2019).

There is a lack of recent research (within the last 5 years) examining whether the traditional school year calendar is the best distribution of instructional days for students (Cuban,

2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). As the implementation of the traditional calendar can be traced back to times when agriculture and industrialism were the most vibrant occupations, the need to examine the viability of the current instructional calendar is apparent more now than ever (Merritt, 2017). Today's educational system is predicated on identifying the most effective and innovative academic practices. The need to revisit whether the traditional school year calendar is the most beneficial structure for students is a concept that should be examined just as instructional strategies are consistently revamped and revised to ensure alignment with best practices (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Murray, 2016; Winter, 2005). More recently, as the idea of privatizing the public educational system has been proposed as a method of addressing today's educational challenges, there is a need to comprehensively examine current academic practices, including the most effective instructional calendar structure (Barkan, 2018; Scafidi & Wearne, 2020).

More in-depth data are needed to obtain a greater understanding of the experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, as well as the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs. While previous literature examined the value of revising the instructional calendar through quantitative measures such as its influence on overpopulation and state standardized assessments, there were very few current studies utilizing the perspective of elementary teachers with lived experiences within the

traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). Winter's (2005) examination of the instructional calendar from the perspective of educators found that teachers overwhelmingly supported the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar based on their lived experiences. Therefore, this study utilized a qualitative lens to translate the lived experiences of elementary educators that have taught within both instructional calendar into valuable perspectives that could be utilized to describe the essence of experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (van Manen, 1990, 1997).

The Year-Round School Year Calendar

The year-round school year calendar encompasses the redistribution of 180 instructional days throughout the academic year, diminishing the two and one half month summer vacation associated with the traditional school year calendar (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Gilpin, 2020; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). Instead, one-to-two-week breaks identified as intersessions are scheduled at the culmination of each nine-week grading period (Finnie et al., 2019; Jez & Wassmer, 2015). The year-round school year calendar alters the traditional school year calendar by redistributing instructional and vacation days more evenly throughout the

school year, diminishing the challenges attributed to student learning loss due to extended breaks of school (Bell et al., 2019; Broekman et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Gilpin, 2020; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). While this study describes one possible instructional calendar format, it should be recognized that the year-round school year calendar can vary in format and contain more than the normal 180 instructional days utilized in most schools' calendar year.

The year-round school year calendar is an educational initiative that was introduced to address student learning loss attributed to the extensive summer vacation associated with the traditional school year calendar (Bell et al., 2019; Broekman et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The year-round school year calendar has also been utilized to address issues of overcrowding (Graves, 2010, 2011; Finnie et al., 2019; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015). The goal of the year-round school year calendar is to maximize student engagement by decreasing the amount of time out of school so that students are better equipped to retain information as they transition from one academic year to the next as well as to create multiple academic tracks for schools inundated with a growing student population and the lack of adequate classroom space (Graves, 2010, 2011;

Finnie et al., 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Quin, 2017; Takyi et al., 2019; Vallee, 2017).

According to Finnie et al. (2019), the year-round school year calendar can take two forms: a single-track version and a multitrack version. In the single-track version, all students participate in the same school calendar with short intersessions between school sessions that replace a long summer vacation (Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2010, 2011; McMullen et al., 2015, Takyi et al., 2019). Intersessions can be utilized to provide remediation or enrichment opportunities for students (Finnie et al., 2019). In the multitrack version, various calendar formats are developed, assigning students a specific track to stagger the amount of students in the building at one time (Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2010, 2011; McMullen et al., 2015; Takyi et al., 2019). The multitrack version requires the school to remain open throughout the year and is primarily utilized to address student overpopulation challenges (Broekman et al., 2021; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Graves, 2010, 2011; McMullen et al., 2015; Takyi et al., 2019).

There is a significant gap in literature associated with the use of a qualitative lens to view the revision of the instructional calendar based on the perspective of educators with previous experience teaching in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar (Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). There

have been quantitative studies to examine the revision of the instructional calendar's influence on standardized assessment performance and overcrowding. For example, McMullen and Rouse (2012) and McMullen et al. (2015) examined Wake County Public Schools' transition of 22 elementary and middle schools to a year-round school year calendar in North Carolina, and Graves (2011) studied year-round school year programs in California. However, there were no recent studies (within the last five years) utilizing the lived experiences of elementary teachers with prior experience in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars to describe the essence of experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in both programs (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

This lack of a qualitative focus was a significant challenge to the education profession's ability to appropriately describe experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in both instructional calendars, including why the revision of the instructional calendar did not consistently stimulate student achievement on state standardized assessments, or if it could be reformed to be more successful (Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). A qualitative approach was needed to fill the gap in literature addressing why the revision of the instructional calendar has produced inconsistent results and if it could be reformed to be more successful (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick &

Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

McMillen's (2010) study of year-round school year calendar programs in North Carolina indicated that the transition from a traditional school year calendar to a year-round school year calendar minimally stimulated academic achievement. Based on these results, McMillen recommended that future studies focus on the possible differences in pedagogical techniques between the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars to develop a greater understanding of the impact in revising the instructional calendar. As educators are the major facilitators of the academic process, there was a need to utilize their lived experiences to help fill in the blanks left by quantitative research on the instructional calendar (Schmidt, 2010; van Manen, 1990, 1997). Teachers observe firsthand the viability of educational initiatives' influence on experiences, school culture, student learning, and the instructional environment, making educators a critical variable in seeking to obtain a greater understanding of this phenomenon.

While the existing literature related to revising the instructional calendar focused on the ability to address overcrowding and inconsistent influence on state standardized assessments, utilizing a qualitative lens allowed the lived experiences of elementary teachers to describe the experiences, school culture, the impact on student learning, and the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

Year-Round School and Student Learning Loss

Another concept associated with the existing research of revising the instructional calendar is student learning loss. Student learning loss refers to the lack of retaining previously learned educational material from one academic year to the next (Broekman et al., 2021; Dills et al., 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2010, 2011; Patton & Reschly, 2013; Scarbrough, 2017; Schulte, 2009; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017). Previous literature has primarily attributed student learning loss to the extensive two- and one-half month summer vacation of the traditional school year calendar structure (Bowers & Schwarz, 2017; Broekman et al., 2021; Dills et al., 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2010, 2011; Patton & Reschly, 2013; Scarbrough, 2017; Schulte, 2009; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017). Summer learning loss is one indicator school officials have utilized over the years when entertaining the revision of the instructional calendar (Broekman et al., 2021; Dills et al., 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Gerard, 2007; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Graves, 2010, 2011; Patton & Reschly, 2013; Scarbrough, 2017; Schulte, 2009; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017; von Hippel, 2019).

Gershenson and Hayes (2018) and Nicholson and Tiru (2019) referred to student learning loss as “summer learning loss,” “summer setback,” or “the summer slide.” Furthermore, research suggests that summer learning loss can be attributed with students losing up to two months of academic content as measured by grade-level equivalence on standardized assessments (Broekman et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Garst & Ozier, 2015). According to von Hippel (2019), learning loss is a significant issue because it can task teachers with spending the onset of the school year reteaching concepts that were expected

to have been mastered the previous academic year. As the time invested in helping students to obtain level mastery could be significant, additional instructional time is loss, resulting in the challenge of having enough time to support student mastery of designated curriculum content in preparation for cumulative standardized assessments (Magana et al., 2017). According to Patton and Reschly (2013), the inability to adequately cover material on standardized assessments could contribute to low student achievement scores. Furthermore, student learning loss establishes a gap in learning that could continuously fester as students transition from one grade to the next (Broekman et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Schulte, 2009).

While more recent studies of student learning loss lean more toward describing the gap in learning as a summer slide, students in low socioeconomic schools and students exhibiting the largest academic gains while in school was in session exhibited the largest loss of reading and math content (Bowers & Schwarz, 2017; Broekman et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; Kuhfeld, 2019; Nicholson & Tiru, 2019; von Hippel, 2019). There is a gap in literature providing recent research (within the last five years) examining the relationship between student learning loss, the instructional calendar, and how significant this issue is in today's educational system (Broekman et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Nicholson & Tiru, 2019; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

As effectiveness in today's educational system is correlated to student performance on standardized assessments, many schools utilizing the traditional school year calendar have struggled to demonstrate the ability to effectively stimulate academic achievement (Chew et al.,

2020; Gilpin, 2019; Lake et al., 2015). This has led to issues such as the loss of confidence in public education, students leaving underperforming schools in search of more productive institutions, and educational leaders seeking answers to solve the challenges of today's standardized educational system (Lake et al., 2015). According to Merritt (2017), the dynamics of the academic process are more rigorous now more than ever. Furthermore, with educational effectiveness of students, teachers, and schools being predicated on student achievement on standardized assessments, student learning loss is a comprehensive issue that could hinder academic success for all stakeholders associated with the academic process (Broekman et al., 2021; Chew et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). As a result, this study aimed to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs (Broekman et al., 2021; Gershenson & Hayes, 2018; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2018; 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Schulte, 1990; Shinwell & Defeyter, 2017; von Hippel, 2019). Studying the lived experiences of elementary teachers in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar could also result in the identification of instructional strategies to address student learning loss (van Manen, 1990, 1997). As previous studies solely examined the revision of the instructional calendar to stimulate student achievement on standardized assessments or address overcrowding, there was little to no insight explaining why revising the instructional calendar did not yield consistent results (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse,

2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

Year-Round School and Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement is a concept often linked to the year-round school year calendar as it refers to the opportunity to increase student exposure to instruction by diminishing extensive time out of school associated with the traditional school year calendar's two- and one-half month summer vacation (Nguyen et al., 2018). According to Cooper et al. (2003), student learning is positively impacted when instruction is continuous. Additionally, extended breaks such as the two- and one-half month summer vacation interrupts the rhythm of instruction, facilitating learning loss, and widening the achievement gap (Cooper et al., 2003; Darnon et al., 2018; Reardon et al., 2019; Quin et al., 2019). Prolonged engagement is predicated on the framework that providing students with additional time within the instructional environment will positively impact academic achievement, curbing student learning loss attributed to extended time away from school (Cattaneo et al., 2017; Magana et al., 2017; Mandel et al., 2019; Yesil, 2019). Revising the instructional calendar is a strategy that has been utilized to provide students with prolonged engagement through two processes. First, incorporating a one-to-two-week period (5-10 instructional days) at the conclusion of each marking period, called an intersession, that provides the opportunity for student remediation or enrichment (Finnie et al., 2019; Magana et al., 2017). Students struggling in a specific content area or strand (based on standardized assessment data) could utilize the intersession period to receive remediation in that specific area. Intersessions could also be incorporated to frontload foundational information in preparation for the next quarter (Finnie et al., 2019). According to Gerard (2007), utilizing intersessions is an

advantage of revising the instructional calendar because additional time is allocated for remediation throughout the fall, winter, spring, and summer breaks.

Second, students could also be afforded the opportunity to participate in enrichment activities that are standard driven but facilitated using a more hands on approach such as project-based learning or engaging in programs that support social emotional health (Magana et al., 2017). According to Gerard, offering enrichment programs to students is a key component aligned with the implementation of a revised instructional calendar. It should also be recognized that revising the instructional calendar not only provides students with additional instructional time but allows teachers the opportunity to reflect on instructional strategies, analyze student achievement data, and plan for the upcoming quarter.

Merriitt (2017) argued that teachers in today's educational system identified additional planning time as a critical need for pedagogical success as well as the growth of student achievement. Intersessions not only provide teachers with additional time to remediate and/or enrich their students, but it also facilitates the opportunity to participate in professional development or devote time to their social emotional health (Magana et al., 2017). As today's educational system is predicated on ensuring students exhibit mastery of state standards of learning, the ability to provide teachers with additional time for reflection, pedagogical growth, or to simply decompress is a luxury that could stimulate academic achievement tremendously (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 202; Magana et al., 2017).

There is a gap in literature associated with recent research (within the last five years) examining the relationship between revising the instructional calendar and prolonged engagement (Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard,

2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). Furthermore, there is little to no recent research available examining the relationship between the revision of the instructional calendar and opportunities for remediation and enrichment for students during normal school hours (Magana et al., 2017). As today's educational system recognizes the necessity for teachers to differentiate instructional practices to address the diverse needs of its students, examining the current impact of the academic calendar structure will ensure all decision making supports comprehensive success while transitioning away from a generalized one size fits all approach (Domina et al., 2019).

Social Emotional Health

Social emotional health is a concept increasingly being recognized as an essential component of comprehensive success and well-being (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021). According to Jones-Schenk (2019), evidence is growing that social emotional skills are better predictors of academic and career success than intelligence quotient (IQ). Jones-Schenk (2019) further shared that understanding elements of social emotional health was a critical competency for all educators seeking to foster academic and career success for their students. In this study, social emotional health refers to the effective ability to establish positive relationships, experience and regulate emotions, while navigating and learning in one's environment (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021). More specifically, Greenberg et al. (2017) translates social emotional health into five competences: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Examples of characteristics within the five competencies include self-efficacy and optimism (self-awareness), managing stress and controlling impulses (self-management), empathy and

compassion towards others (social awareness), communicating clearly and negotiating conflict constructively (relationship skills), and taking the health/well-being of one's self and others into consideration (responsible decision-making) (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021).

There is a gap in literature associated with the instructional calendar's influence on the social emotional health of educators and students. Previous studies have examined the instructional calendar's influence on standardized assessments and overcrowding, but there is little to no current research (within the last five years) describing the role the academic calendar structure plays in impacting the social emotional health of teachers and students (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). This study established a relationship between the instructional calendar and the opportunity to allocate time to the social emotional health of educators and students (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021). The traditional school year calendar provides educators and students the opportunity to decompress and dedicate time to social emotional health during the two- and one-half month summer vacation, two-week holiday break at the end of December, and the one-week Spring Break. The year-round school year calendar provides educators and students the opportunity to relax and invest in their social emotional health at the culmination of each quarter, through two-to-three-week intersessions, the two-week holiday break at the end of December, the one-week Spring Break, and the four-week summer vacation. As a result, this study developed the lens that considering the instructional calendar's influence on the social emotional

health of educators and students could positively impact the comprehensive well-being of teachers and students (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021).

Supporting educators' social emotional health could lead to heightened pedagogical effectiveness, which could stimulate student achievement and professional growth, while strengthening the school culture (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021). As teaching is one of the most emotionally demanding professions available, it should be recognized that the challenges educators face often causes distress, frustration, and emotional exhaustion (Palaez-Fernandez et al., 2021; Van Hal et al., 2017). According to Patulny et al. (2019), teaching is characterized by high rates of anxiety and frustration. The inability to manage the demands of the education profession has been connected to teacher attrition (Palaez-Fernandez et al., 2021; Van Hal et al., 2017). As a result, investing in personal happiness and well-being is an essential component of successfully navigating the education profession (Patulny et al., 2019). Effectively supporting the social emotional health of educators leads to increased job satisfaction and lower turnover intention (Palaez-Fernandez et al., 2021; Patulny et al., 2019). This study framed the perspective that allowing teachers the opportunity to invest in their social emotional health is a positive impact afforded by the instructional calendar.

On the other hand, supporting students' social emotional health could lead to increased academic achievement and improved interactions with peers and teachers in the school setting (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Kim & Shin, 2021). Datu et al. (2017) shared that there has been increasing recognition that well-being can be a precursor of academic success. More specifically, happy individuals are likely to have high levels of academic engagement, intrinsic motivation, academic self-efficacy, academic self-regulation, and academic achievement (Datu et al., 2017). According to Lopez-Perez and Fernandez-Castilla (2018), the

school's role is to bring students to their maximum academic and personal potential. Lopez-Perez and Fernandez-Castilla further added that students do not only learn about different subjects while attending school but develop as a person by establishing meaningful social connections and advancing their social emotional skills. As a result, schools are one of the most influential contexts in students' growth and development (Lopez-Perez & Fernandez-Castillar, 2018). This study utilized the lens that today's educational system seeks to positively contribute to the comprehensive development of students as a whole, both academically and social emotionally. Providing students the opportunity to invest in their social emotional health through the revision of the instructional calendar structure could support the growth and development of well-rounded learners.

New Horizons

As the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs, examining the instructional calendar's influence on experiences, school culture, and student learning could act as a segue for future research. Educational stakeholders could be interested in more recent research examining the impact of the instructional calendar on experiences, school culture, and student learning. The literature utilized in this study could serve to recalibrate the lens used to examine the impact of the instructional calendar as well as the value of educators' experiences within a phenomenon to speak to its viability from a teachers' perspective.

The experiential data from this study could provide insight for future research currently nonexistent in previous studies, including the value of educators' perspectives and the influence

of school culture (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). Furthermore, the use of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as a theoretical framework to highlight the teacher as an expert within a specific educational initiative based on experiences in that phenomenon is also a lens that has not been utilized in previous studies examining the instructional calendar (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

While quantitative data, such as student achievement on standardized assessments and addressing overcrowding, have been utilized to identify the positive impact of educational initiatives, there was a lack of recent research providing the perspectives of the very individuals (teachers) tasked with implementing the educational initiatives being used to prepare students to take standardized assessments (Chew et al., 2020; Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The subsequent sections convey the possibilities of how the study of the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars could result in a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both calendar programs while filling the gap in research associated with the impact of the instructional calendar (Polkinghorne, 1989, 2005, van Manen, 1990, 1997).

The Value of Educators' Perspectives

Obtaining experiential data from elementary teachers who have taught within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars could provide insight into the influence of the instructional calendar on student achievement as well as areas in need of growth, if any. As educators are the individuals tasked with implementing the educational initiatives adopted by their school divisions, they possess a valuable perspective that includes comprehensive knowledge of specific educational initiatives, the impact of the educational initiative on student learning, knowledge of students' perspective of the initiative, knowledge of parents' perspective of the initiative, and viability of the initiative moving forward (Tallman, 2019). According to Gozali et al. (2017), many education researchers argue that there has been a shortage of teacher voice in education decision making. More specifically, Gozali et al. (2017), defines teacher voice as the views, experience, and perspective of educators on educational policy and practice. The perspectives of elementary teachers with experience within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar could also expand the body of research of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience and the notion that the quality of educators' experiences within a given phenomenon (instructional calendar), accompanied by the quality of social interactions within that same phenomenon positively impacts their pedagogical development, while exhibiting the value of teachers' perspective. Previous studies incorporating Dewey's (1934) theory of experience have primarily focused on analyzing preservice educators as well as music and art teachers (Bassey, 2010; Dewey, 1934; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). This study expands upon the literature available on Dewey's theory of experience being utilized as a theoretical framework by studying the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year

calendar programs. The qualitative approach of collecting experiential data to develop a description of the essence of the instructional calendar of the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar while obtaining a greater understanding of the experiences, school culture, and impact on student learning could diminish the gap in literature by providing insight associated with elementary teachers' physical and social interactions within Browning and Thompson Elementary schools, as well as their continues experiences as educators within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars based on Dewey's theory of experience.

Previous studies such as McMullen and Rouse (2012), McMullen et al. (2015), and Graves (2011) have examined the revision of the instructional calendar through a quantitative lens, focusing on its influence on overpopulation and student performance on standardized assessments. This study's qualitative approach could provide a greater understanding associated with the impact of the instructional calendar on experiences, school culture, and student learning (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The insight obtained through this study could also contribute immensely to the value of utilizing the perspective of educators to examine the impact of educational initiatives. Gozali et al. (2017) shared teachers possess a unique knowledge about the classroom that is a key component for successful decision-making and implementation. Additionally, as the adults closest to the classrooms and schools, teachers possess critical knowledge and expertise about educational issues, while also being the individuals with the greatest and most direct stake in the policies and initiatives being developed (Gozali et al., 2017). Ultimately, when teachers are involved in the decision-making process,

they become better implementers because of the increased sense of ownership and responsibility of the outcomes (Gozali et al., 2017).

School Culture

As previous studies were predicated on analyzing the impact of revising the instructional calendar quantitatively, examining the influence of social interactions within the traditional school year and year-round school year programs could lead to a greater understanding of how the instructional calendar impacts social interactions among staff and students (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). This gap in the literature could be diminished by examining the school culture within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars, as well as the quality of social interactions within grade level and content area professional learning communities (PLCs). According to Karadag et al. (2020) school culture is defined as the term generally referring to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written/unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions. Additionally, school culture encompasses physical/emotional safety of students and teachers, the organization of school processes, and the degree racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity is embraced and celebrated (Karadag et al., 2020). As schools are composed of students and teachers with a diverse set of experiences, beliefs, and values, a positive school culture harnesses the differences of their stakeholders and motivates them to collectively move in the same direction through a concentrated mission and vision (Osturk et al., 2021). A positive school culture establishes value in its stakeholders, regardless of their role, which drives the organization to move in the desired direction of its leadership

(Karadag et al., 2020; Osturk et al., 2021). The insight emerging from this study could contribute to a greater understanding of the role school culture and social interactions within grade level and content area clusters play in the instructional environment within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs.

As Dewey's theory of experience (1934) is predicated on the quality of teachers' continuous interactions within their social and physical environment, professional learning communities (PLCs) are a component of school culture examined within this study. More specifically, the dynamics of teachers' experiences within grade level/content area teams were important to examining the quality of the school culture within Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools. According to Eshchar-Netz and Vedder-Weiss (2020), PLCs are communities of practice where teachers are mutually engaged in a joint repertoire of practices to advance their goals. PLCs include acquiring skills, knowledge, and language related to teaching, while developing as an individual member of the educational community (Esh-Netz & Vedder-Weiss, 2020). PLCs are encouraged to consistently utilize reflective practices coupled with systematic inquiry to improve instructional practices moving forward (Eshchar-Netz & Vedder-Weiss, 2020). Much of the literature analyzing PLCs have identified five characteristics of effectiveness: sharing a common view of the mission, reflecting on practice, participating in reflective discourse, offering feedback to one another on instruction, and keeping student learning as the central focus (Thoma et al., 2017). Examining the interactions of elementary educators within their respective PLCs provided insight into the manner in which teachers collaborated for pedagogical growth and development. Examining PLCs also provided theoretical insight for this study as the fundamental concepts of effective professional learning communities are aligned with Dewey's (1934) theory of experience's concepts of interaction and

continuity within the physical and social environment. Dewey's perspective is that the higher the quality of continuous interaction within the physical and social environments leads to effective pedagogical growth.

Summary

Previous literature examining the instructional calendar has produced inconsistent results, with some studies identifying the value in revising the academic calendar structure to effectively address overpopulated schools, while other studies highlighted the inability of the instructional calendar to consistently impact standardized assessment performance in a positive manner (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). McMullen and Rouse (2012) studied Wake County Public Schools' transition of 22 elementary and middle schools from a traditional school year calendar to a year-round school year calendar in 2007 to address issues of overcrowding using a multitrack system in North Carolina. Initially, McMullen and Rouse (2012) concluded that the transition to the year-round school year calendar had no impact on third through eighth grade cumulative reading and math achievement scores on state standardized assessments. McMullen et al. (2015) later refuted McMullen and Rouse's (2012) findings, concluding that the year-round school year calendar positively influenced academic achievement on third through eighth grade cumulative reading and math state standardized assessments for low performing students. In a study of year-round school data in California, Graves (2011) concluded that utilizing a multitrack system negatively influenced academic

achievement on standardized reading, math, and language assessments for low socioeconomic, limited English proficiency, African American and Hispanic students.

As prior research was quantitative in nature, the majority of the existing literature identified success solely through standardized assessment scores (Chew et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). What is currently unclear is why the revision of the instructional calendar has inconsistently exhibited a positive impact on student academic success. There is little to no current research (within the last five years) utilizing a qualitative lens to examine the impact of the instructional calendar (Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). As a result, the existing data is primarily one dimensional, lacking insight from educators with experience within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Cuban, 2008; Cooper et al., 2003; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Finnie et al., 2019; Ferguson, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 2018; Fitzpatrick & Burns, 2018; 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Takyi et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). Additional relevant questions facilitated by this study included: What specific aspects associated with the revision of the instructional calendar were in need of improvement, if any? What steps were taken by educational leaders to prepare teachers for the

revision of the instructional calendar? What was the quality of the school culture in the schools being studied? What was the quality of the instructional environment in the schools implementing a revised instructional calendar? What specific instructional strategies were utilized in conjunction with the revision of the instructional calendar?

A review of the literature identified that Dewey's theory of experience (1934) has been utilized in studies examining the effectiveness of teachers' experiences based on their physical/social interactions within the educational environment as well as continued experience in the profession (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). Dewey's theory of experience (1934) has not served as a theoretical framework for examining the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Seaman, 2019; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). As a result, providing the opportunity for this study to expand upon the available literature utilizing Dewey's theory of experience (1934) as a theoretical framework for examining the education profession.

This study addressed the gap in the literature, by using a qualitative lens to highlight the value of elementary teachers lived experiences within the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars as the expertise necessary to speak to the viability of the instructional calendar moving forward based on Dewey's (1934) principles of interaction and continuity (van Manen, 1990, 1997). Additionally, this study expands upon the current literature on Dewey's theory of experience by utilizing it as a theoretical framework for developing a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars from the perspective of educators (Bassey, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015; Mayer, 2015; Schmidt, 2010). As this study established the precedence for utilizing the

perspective of educators to examine the impact of the instructional calendar on experiences, school culture, student learning, and the instructional environment, future studies could recognize the value of embracing teachers' perspectives of educational initiatives to examine viability moving forward based on their lived experiences within specific phenomenon.

Conducting qualitative research allowed for experiential data to be gathered that not only described the essence of the instructional environment within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars but revealed the impact of the instructional calendar on the social emotional health of students and teachers. As innovation in today's educational system is predicated on utilizing the best pedagogical practices, this study could be beneficial to school divisions in search of a method of comprehensively addressing the instructional and social emotional needs of their students and teachers. Additionally, a qualitative approach allowed for a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment, experiences, school culture, and impact on student learning within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars, as opposed to solely examining the impact of the instructional calendar on overpopulation and standardized assessment performance. A qualitative lens also allowed for the collection of experiential data that will not only explain the instructional environment in a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar program but provide intricate details about educators' perspective of this educational initiative moving forward. As educators are the individuals tasked with facilitating educational initiatives, a high level of training is received, and a wealth of experience is acquired in the process of implementing academic programs. Ironically, when educational initiatives are cumulatively analyzed, it is seldom routine to obtain the input of the very educators tasked with implementing the program to examine its viability or what specific areas need improving moving forward. It is common

practice to quantitatively view educational success, often tasking educators to abandon one educational initiative to implement the next popular educational initiative being coveted (Chew et al., 2020). This hermeneutic phenomenological study of the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars described the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. The details that emerged from the perspective of educators helped to fill in the blanks left by quantitative research, such as why it was successful or not, what other variables should be examined, and the important role teachers play in implementing instructional calendar initiatives. As a qualitative lens allowed a comprehensive lens of the instructional calendar, the overarching goal of this study was to provide a greater understanding of the influence of the academic calendar structure. This helped to provide future researchers the opportunity to further elaborate on emerging themes that could add to pedagogical growth and development, as well as the comprehensive improvement of the educational experience for students and teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. This study describes educators' experiences teaching within a traditional school year calendar and a year-round school year calendar. Data collection methods for this study include individual interviews, a focus group interview, and participant journaling. van Manen's (1997) thematic analysis method was utilized to collect experiential data, developing collected information into themes to describe the essence of the instructional environment in a traditional school year and year-round school year calendar program. This chapter provides essential details associated with the hermeneutic phenomenological design, procedures, and data analysis methods so that sufficient information is available for the replication of this study.

Research Design

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research provides the opportunity to intimately understand and describe the personal life experiences of participants. This study encompassed a phenomenological approach, allowing the researcher to gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants. According to van Manen (1997), phenomenology is the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience. This study was based on a hermeneutic phenomenological research design. According to Galven (1989), hermeneutical phenomenology is defined as an analysis by which the meaning of the various ways in which we exist can be translated from the vague language of

everyday existence into the understandable and explicit language of ontology without destroying the way in which these meanings manifest in our everyday lives.

A hermeneutic design was essential for this study because my experiences teaching within a traditional and a year-round school year calendar program were important in interpreting the instructional environment in both the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs described by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ho et al., 2017). The hermeneutic phenomenological research design was ideal for this study because I sought to interpret the lived experiences of teachers who have taught in both a traditional school year calendar and a year-round school year calendar to describe the instructional environment in both calendar programs (Ho et al., 2017; van Manen, 1990). Individual interviews, a focus group interview, an online questionnaire, and participant journaling allowed teachers to reflect on their cumulative lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar.

In this study, experiential data were gathered to analyze and develop into themes or experiential structures that characterize the instructional environment in both traditional and year-round school year calendar programs (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). Utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach for this study allowed teachers' lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar to be characterized by themes that describe the instructional environment in both calendar programs (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; Robertson-Malt, 1999).

The phenomenon in this study was the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars. The traditional school year calendar is the normal distribution of 180 instructional

days beginning in August/September and ending in May/June. The year-round school year calendar is defined as the redistribution of 180-day instructional calendar distributed evenly throughout the year with one-to-two-week intersession periods at the end of each marking period. A qualitative method of study was ideal in this situation as I sought to bring a greater understanding of the essence of the instructional environment in the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs based on the lived experiences of elementary teachers. As participants shared their lived experiences as elementary teachers, a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars was established.

Research Questions

This qualitative study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Research Question One

How do teachers describe their experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Research Question Two

How do teachers describe the school culture in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Research Question Three

How do teachers describe the impact on student learning in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Setting and Participants

As the focus of this study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars, Thompson

Elementary School and Browning Elementary School were ideal settings because both initially utilized a traditional school year calendar and transitioned to the year-round school year calendar. Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School were selected for this study because they possessed an instructional faculty and staff with experience teaching within both instructional calendars.

Setting

Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School are public schools in southeast Virginia, and two of 62 schools in Brickwood County Public School System. Grade levels pre-kindergarten through fifth grade are offered at Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School. At the time of the study, Browning Elementary had a population of 552 students, while Thompson Elementary had a population of 781 students. Of the student population at each school, 100% receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch. Each school's leadership consists of one principal, one assistant principal, and one dean of students. Students at each school have traditionally scored in the lower 50 percentile in overall standardized testing for the state of Virginia. The demographic breakdown of the student population at Browning Elementary School is 41% Hispanic, 29% White, 23% African American, 3% Asian, 4% two or more races. The demographic breakdown of the student population at Thompson Elementary School is 41% Hispanic, 40% African American, 11% White, 4% Asian, 3% two or more races, < 1% Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander, and < 1% American Indian/Alaska Native.

Participants

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are several diverse sampling strategies that can be used in qualitative research. Purposeful criterion sampling was used in this study to obtain textual rich cases. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that purposeful criterion sampling

involves the intentional selection of participants that meet specific criteria. Participants in this study were selected based on their prior experience teaching in both the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School.

Phenomenological researchers examine the lived experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To obtain experiential data associated with the lived experiences of elementary teachers in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar, it was essential to select participants who could provide valuable insight to address the study's research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants in this study were kindergarten through fifth grade teachers at Browning Elementary School or Thompson Elementary School with prior experience teaching in a traditional school year calendar as well as the year-round school year calendar.

Data saturation refers to the point where the research no longer provides new information that aids in the understanding of a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the sample size for phenomenological studies should be a heterogeneous group of between 10-15 individuals. The sample size for this study was 14 participants.

Researcher Positionality

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative studies are predicated on philosophical assumptions that are important in the development of the research study. After teaching within the traditional school year calendar and then transitioning to the year-round school year calendar, I developed an interest to learn more about other educators' perspective of the instructional environment in both programs. My experience teaching in both calendar formats

allowed me to recognize how the year-round calendar afforded teachers additional instructional time to remediate students. As an educator with 17 years of experience, I have experienced the implementation of various educational initiatives (e.g., reading programs, math programs, classroom management models, year-round school year calendar) without providing the educators tasked with facilitating the program an opportunity to participate in the planning or evaluation process phases. Neglecting to include teachers in the planning or evaluation process of an educational initiative is a critical mistake as meaningful experiential data could help school divisions to more appropriately allocate resources to ensure effective implementation.

Social Constructivism Paradigm

A social constructivism worldview was used to study elementary teachers' lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), social constructivism is predicated on the view that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Therefore, it is recognized that elementary teachers' lived experiences are subjective and based on interactions with other persons (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

As a result of significant teaching experiences within both the traditional and year-round school year calendars, my philosophical assumptions associated with this study are that the year-round school year calendar diminishes extended time out of school that can address the effects of student learning loss. I also believe that the year-round school year calendar provides educators with additional time to teach instructional material, remediate, and provide enrichment activities for their students. I understand the important role that school culture and professional learning communities (PLCs) are to pedagogical growth and development. I do not teach at Browning

Elementary School or Thompson Elementary School, nor do I possess a preexisting relationship to their staff or student populations. This study examines three philosophical assumptions in this section, *ontological*, *epistemological*, and *axiological*.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption of the study was based on the understanding that multiple realities exist, associated with how teachers' will describe their experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell & Poth (2018), the ontological assumption relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. The study of elementary teachers' lived experiences within both instructional calendars provided multiple perceptions and realities of study participants. Individual interviews, a focus group interview, and participant journaling provided experiential data based on elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars, reflecting on their personal recollection of the instructional environment in both programs.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption entails that I have a relationship with the participants in the study based on my experiences teaching within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the epistemological assumption of conducting a qualitative study means that researchers will try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied. The experiential data gathered from individual interviews, a focus group interview, and participant journaling were interpreted and developed into themes used to develop a rich description of the essence of the instructional environment in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption encompasses the importance of the personal values that may emerge in the study of elementary teachers' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in a qualitative study the researcher is cognizant of the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of the information gathered from the field. As an educator with 14 years of experience within a traditional school year calendar and three years of experience in a year-round school year calendar, I have experienced the transition of a Title I elementary school from improvement status to full accreditation in two consecutive school years.

Researcher's Role

I acted as the instrument for collecting and interpreting data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative researchers act as an instrument by collecting data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. I am an educator of 17 years with 13 years of experience in [REDACTED], two years of experience in [REDACTED], and two years of experience in [REDACTED]. The experience in [REDACTED] was at the elementary level, with 10 years in a traditional school year calendar and three years in a year-round school year calendar. The experience in [REDACTED] was at the secondary level, with both years in a traditional school year calendar. The experience in [REDACTED] was at the secondary level in a traditional school year calendar. All 17 years of educational experience were in Title I schools with 100% of the population receiving free breakfast/lunch. During my first 10 years teaching within a traditional school year calendar program, the school reached full accreditation status on one occasion prior to implementation of the year-round school year calendar. During my three years

of experience teaching within a year-round school year calendar, the school obtained full accreditation status in two consecutive school years.

Procedures

The execution of this study required strategic planning and organization. This section describes the steps utilized to conduct this study. The explanation of this study's procedures includes required site permissions, information associated with obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, soliciting participants, data collection and analysis plans by data source, and an explanation of how triangulation was achieved.

Permissions

Upon defending the proposal, the next step was to obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A). Upon receipt of IRB approval, an email was sent to the administration of Brickwood Public Schools to obtain written consent to conduct the study at Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School (see Appendix B). It was essential to obtain permission for access to the teachers at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School prior to contacting them personally (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A consent form for participants was developed through a Google form and linked into an email indicating agreement to participate in this study, including the understanding of the option to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; see Appendix C).

Recruitment Plan

Purposeful criterion sampling was used in this study to obtain textual rich cases. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that purposeful criterion sampling involves the intentional selection of participants that meet specific criteria. Participants in this study were selected based on their

prior experience teaching in both the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School. The sample size for this study was 14 participants. The sample consisted of eight teachers from Browning Elementary School and six teachers from Thompson Elementary School. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the sample size for phenomenological studies should be a heterogenous group of between 10-15 individuals. The participating teachers from Browning Elementary School consisted of three kindergarten teachers, two special education teachers, a health and physical education teacher, and a fourth-grade teacher. Browning Elementary School teachers participating in this study possessed between four and 17 years of teaching experience. The participating teachers from Thompson Elementary School consisted of two fourth-grade teachers, two fifth-grade teachers, an ESL teacher, and a special education teacher. Thompson Elementary School teachers participating in this study possessed between three and 12 years of teaching experience.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were asked to electronically sign consent forms by typing their name and submitting the Google form. The Google form settings were developed to automatically email responses to me. After receiving consent from each participant, I scheduled each individual interview virtually. At the onset of each interview, I explained the purpose of individual interviews and assured anonymity by assigning each teacher a pseudonym (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As COVID-19 caused Brickwood Public School System to transition from in-person instruction to a virtual format, interviews were conducted virtually using the Google Meet application. Each individual interview was recorded using the Google Meet application. Participants unavailable for virtual individual interviews opted to complete the individual online Google form. After all individual interviews were completed, a focus group

interview was conducted. During the focus group interview, I facilitated an opportunity for each participant to journal by sharing a separate Google document with each participant.

Data Collection Plan

For this study to be trustworthy and reliable, valid data triangulation was necessary. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data triangulation involves the act of utilizing more than one source of data collection to ensure the integrity of the study's findings. Data collection for this study first involved individual interviews (see Appendix D). Participants were given the option of participating in a virtual interview or completing an online questionnaire. Face-to-face interviews could not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so interviews were conducted virtually utilizing the Google Meet application. Focus group interviews (see Appendix E) and participant journaling were utilized to gather further experiential data. Individual interviews were conducted prior to the focus group interview so common themes could be identified among individual teachers. The focus group interview comprised individual teachers providing commonly themed experiential data.

Participant journaling was utilized in this study to help interpret information in the development of common themes or experiential structures that characterize the instructional environment in both the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School (van Manen, 1997). Participant journaling refers to the act of recording reflective notes as data are collected and analyzed, allowing for the sharing of information in written form (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Individual Interviews (Data Collection Approach #1)

The primary method of gathering experiential data for this study was through structured individual interviews. A structured interview style utilizes a designated list of questions to be

posed to each participant (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Structured interviews were ideal for this study to establish consistency in the experiential data collected for the development of common themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; van Manen, 1997). In-depth interviews allowed teachers to reflect and relive their lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar to capture the fundamental concepts (school culture/climate, instructional planning, professional development, teacher buy-in) of the instructional environment in both calendar programs. Participants were given the option of taking a five-to-ten-minute online questionnaire in lieu of engaging in a 20-25-minute virtual individual interview. A set of predetermined open-ended questions were utilized to maintain focus during interviews and ensure consistency with each session (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure clarity and validity, a peer-review panel was used to review the interview questions (see Appendix D).

For individual interviews, teachers were asked a series of predetermined questions that helped them describe their lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar. The purpose of questions one through four was to provide individual perspectives of each participant's prior teaching experiences in the traditional school year calendar. Dewey's (1934) theory of experience conveys the importance of prior experiences shaping the meaning of future experiences. Teachers were given the option to be interviewed in a setting most suitable for their comfort (i.e., virtually using the Google Meet application). Teachers were informed the interview would be recorded using the record function in the Google Meet application as well as the opportunity to take notes through participant journaling (i.e., I shared a Google doc with individual focus group members). A back-up audio recording device was on hand in the case of technical difficulties with the initial device. I tested the audio device prior to the onset of each individual and focus group interview. Individual interview questions

were examined by a peer review panel (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The individual interview questions were finalized upon receiving IRB approval (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I asked the following questions to determine the commonality of participants' prior teaching experiences and motivation for teaching at Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another. RQ1
2. Please explain your prior experiences as a teacher. RQ1
3. What do you enjoy the most about being a teacher? RQ1
4. Why did you choose to teach at Browning/Thompson Elementary School? RQ1

Questions associated with teachers' perspectives and understanding of the year-round school year calendar were asked to gather information related to the phenomenon being studied: the year-round school year calendar. Questions five and six were used to determine if common perspectives existed among participants.

5. Please share your feelings about the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
6. Please explain the difference between the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School and other elementary schools in your district if any. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3

Questions associated with the physical and social settings of Browning/Thompson Elementary School were asked. This was essential as Dewey's (1934) theory of experience is predicated on the importance of the physical and social environment in a phenomenon. Questions seven and eight were incorporated to obtain a greater understanding of the quality of the school environment in Thompson/Browning Elementary School.

7. Describe the school climate at Browning/Thompson Elementary School. RQ2
8. Please identify the grade level that you currently teach and describe the climate of your grade level team. RQ2

Next, questions pertaining to the preparation for the implementation of the year-round school year calendar as well as recommendations for improvement were covered. Questions nine through eleven were aligned with the principle of continuity which Dewey's (1934) theory of experience describes as developing meaning of future experience based on prior experiences. I asked these questions to determine if participants possessed common perspectives of year-round school year calendar needs moving forward.

9. Please identify and explain the professional development opportunities received in preparation for teaching in the year-round school year calendar. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
10. In what ways can the year-round school year calendar at Browning/Thompson Elementary School be improved? RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
11. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to have this conversation. I really appreciate it. One last question: What else do you think is important for me to know about teaching in the year-round school year calendar at Browning/Thompson Elementary School? RQ1, RQ2, RQ3

Experiential data emerging from individual interviews provided the lived experiences of teachers with prior experience within the traditional school year calendar and current experience within the year-round school year calendar (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The lived experiences of each participant were utilized to identify common themes associated with the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

overarching goal was for the individual interviews to aid in answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

RQ2: How do teachers describe the school culture in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

RQ3: How do teachers describe the impact on student learning in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Individual Interview Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan # 1)

Individual interview data (audio/video recordings) were transcribed and kept secure using a device that was password-protected and locked in a file cabinet. Experiential data were gathered and analyzed using van Manen's (1997) thematic analysis method. More specifically, thematic analysis involved the process of recovering the theme(s) or structures of experience embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). Making something of a text or lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). Thematic analysis is not a rule-bound process, but a free act of seeing meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). The steps listed below were utilized to analyze individual interview data in alignment with van Manen's (1997) unbound process of thematic analysis.

1. Conducted audio/video recorded virtual individual interviews using the Google Meet application. After receiving each online consent form, participants received an

- acceptance email asking for the days and times of their availability to participate in a virtual interview. Teachers were given the option of participating by submitting an online questionnaire that consisted of individual interview questions developed into a Google form in case they were unavailable for a virtual interview or uncomfortable being recorded.
2. Transcribed audio-video recorded individual interviews using the Sonix transcription software. Printed online questionnaire submissions.
 3. Created a new file under this study's title using the NVivo 12 Plus program with the following categories as nodes: school culture and climate, instructional planning, professional development, and teacher buy-in.
 4. Uploaded each saved individual interview transcription. Highlighted participants' responses to each question and dragged and dropped the data under the corresponding node to organize experiential data.
 5. Documented emerging meaning of each teachers' experience.
 6. Organized statements into themes.
 7. Synthesized the themes (i.e., description of the textures of the experience).
 8. Reflected on personal textural descriptions (i.e., description of the structures of personal experience).
 9. Developed rich, textural experiential structures describing the meanings of my personal experiences.
 10. Repeated the above steps for each teacher.

Focus Group Interview (Data Collection Approach # 2)

After all individual interviews were completed, I conducted a 25–30-minute focus group

interview. Focus group interviews in qualitative research encompass a group of people who are selected to share their perspective of a specific topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A focus group was appropriate for this study to aid in identifying common themes to describe the fundamental concepts (school culture/climate, instructional planning, professional development, teacher buy-in) of the instructional environment in both the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs. The focus group comprised five teachers based on common-themed experiential data emerging in individual interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a virtual interview was conducted using the Google Meet application. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), focus group interviews are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, or when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant.

I grouped participants based on common themes that emerged during individual interviews. A focus group was an ideal data collection method in this study to provide further insight into the essence of teachers' lived experiences in the year-round school year calendar (van Manen, 1997). As Dewey's (1934) theory of experience entails the perspective of learning within the community of a common phenomenon, a focus group provided further insight into the social climate of Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools.

Focus Group Questions

Questions one through ten were important in revealing participants' perspectives of the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools. As the study was focused on describing the essence of the instructional environment in the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs, these questions provided insight into teachers' perceived description of the year-round school year calendar. In alignment with

Dewey's (1934) theory of experience, these questions helped to establish meaning from teachers' lived experiences within the year-round school year calendar.

1. What aspects of the year-round school year calendar set it apart from the traditional school year calendar, if any? RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
2. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Browning/Thompson Elementary School valuable, if any? RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
3. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Browning/Thompson Elementary School challenging, if any? RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
4. In what ways was teaching in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar different, if any? RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
5. Describe the culture/climate at Browning/Thompson Elementary School. RQ2
6. Describe the various types of professional development opportunities that were administered prior to the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
7. Describe the various types of professional development opportunities that were administered after the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
8. Describe your perspective of how the redistribution of the academic calendar at Browning/Thompson Elementary influences instruction, if at all. RQ3
9. Describe your perspective of how the year-round school year calendar can be improved, if at all. RQ1, RQ2, RQ3
10. Describe your perspective of instructional practices that are being implemented by the year-round school year calendar at Browning/Thompson Elementary that could be

beneficial in the traditional school year calendar programs in the county, if any. RQ3

Teachers participating in the focus group were given the option to be interviewed in a setting most suitable for their comfort (i.e., virtually, using the Google Meet application). Teachers were informed that the virtual focus group interview would be recorded using the record feature in the Google Meet application as well as the option to journal using an individually shared Google document. A back-up audio recording device was on hand in the case of technical difficulties with the initial device. I tested the record feature prior to the onset of the focus group interview. The focus group interview questions were examined by a peer review panel (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus group interview questions were finalized upon receiving IRB approval (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Focus Group Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan # 2)

Focus group interview data (audio/video recordings) were transcribed and kept secure using a device that was password-protected and locked in a file cabinet. Experiential data were gathered and analyzed using van Manen's (1997) thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis involved the process of recovering the theme(s) or structures of experience embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). Making something of a text or lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). Thematic analysis is not a rule-bound process, but a free act of seeing meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017; van Manen, 1997). The steps detailed below were taken to analyze the focus group interview in alignment with van Manen's (1997) unbound process of thematic analysis.

1. Analyzed the experiential data collected from all individual interviews and online Google forms for commonalities, identifying five candidates to participate in the focus group interview.
2. Conducted audio-video recorded focus group interview. Shared a separate Google document with each focus group interview participant to provide the opportunity to journal during and after culmination of the interview.
3. Transcribed audio-video recorded focus group interview using the Sonix transcription software.
4. Uploaded saved focus group interview transcription. Highlighted focus group interview participant's responses to each question and dragged and dropped the data under the corresponding code (school culture/climate, instructional planning, professional development, and teacher buy-in) to organize experiential data using the NVivo 12 Plus software.
5. Documented emerging meaning of teachers' experience.
6. Constructed a composite experiential structure describing the meaning of all teachers' experiences and developing a universal description of experiences.

Participant Journaling (Data Collection Approach #3)

Another source of data collection for this study was participant journaling, which is a data collection method in which participants share their thoughts and ideas associated with a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I shared a separate Google document with each participant and instructed them to utilize the document to share thoughts and ideas throughout the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the focus group interview culminated, I gave participants the following prompt: Please share any

additional feelings associated with teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools. This method was utilized to obtain further insight into the instructional environment in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar programs (van Manen, 1997). Due to time constraints or the inability to share during the focus group interview, teachers were allowed five to ten minutes to share any additional pertinent information through journaling or typing on their individual Google document.

Participant Journaling Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan # 3)

For this study to be trustworthy and reliable, valid data triangulation was necessary. As a result, experiential data collected through participant journaling was applied to all questions posed in the focus group interview. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data triangulation involves the act of utilizing more than one source of data collection to ensure the integrity of the study's findings. Participant journaling refers to the act of recording reflective notes as data are collected and analyzed, allowing for the sharing of information in written form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant journaling was aligned with Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as it allowed participants the ability to reflect on their prior experiences to develop meaning for future learning. Participant journaling was utilized to interpret information in the development of common themes or experiential structures that characterize the instructional environment in both the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs at Browning Elementary School or Thompson Elementary School (van Manen, 1997).

Data Synthesis

Experiential data were gathered to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers in the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar at Browning

Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools. I used van Manen's (1997) thematic analysis method to synthesize experiential data collected from teachers' lived experiences. Thematic analysis involved analyzing the data collected for specific themes, aggregating information into larger cluster of ideas, and providing details that support the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), thematic analysis steps include preparing/organizing data, coding and condensing codes, searching for patterns or themes in codes across different interviews, defining, naming themes, and producing results of the analysis. Coding in a thematic analysis refers to the process of aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After gathering experiential data, the Sonix transcription program was used to transcribe individual and focus group interviews. I reflected on and described my experiences teaching within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar programs. This process is referred to as bracketing or the process of sharing or airing personal experiences and beliefs to facilitate transparency (van Manen, 1997). According to Creswell and Poth, bracketing is a process of data analysis in which the researcher must set aside all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study. This process was important in avoiding the skewing of experiential data based on preconceived notions.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was predicated on the validity of experiential data collection methods and the thematic analysis of the findings (van Manen, 1997). I ensured trustworthiness of data collection through triangulation of 14 individual interviews, a focus group interview, and participant journaling. According to Creswell and Poth (2018),

triangulation involves utilizing multiple data collection methods to arrive at one central theme. Polkinghorne (2005) explained that conducting interviews of multiple participants would provide various perspectives that can ensure triangulation. I ensured trustworthiness by using a peer-review panel to improve transparency of this study for future purposes.

Credibility

Credibility in this study ensured my personal views and beliefs did not compromise the integrity of the research process. I was transparent and articulated personal experiences and philosophical beliefs within the prospectus. I have taught within the traditional school year calendar for 12 years and within the year-round school year calendar for three years. After initially teaching within the traditional school year calendar with limited student success on standardized assessments, my school transitioned to a year-round school year calendar, resulting in elevated levels of student achievement on standardized assessments. My experiences within both the traditional and year-round school year calendars served as the motivation for learning how teachers with similar experiences described the year-round school year calendar. I sought to bring further meaning to the year-round school year calendar experience by learning how teachers with similar experiences described their experiences in the year-round school year calendar. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) this concept is referred to as clarifying researcher bias. Credibility also refers to the communication that this study's findings accurately described the perspectives of elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study to be trustworthy and reliable, valid data triangulation was also necessary. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data triangulation involves the act of utilizing more than one source of data collection to ensure the integrity of the study's findings.

Transferability

Transferability involves the recognition that this study's findings could be applicable in other contexts of future research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The methods of experiential data collection and subsequent processes for this study were articulated through a rich textural description of teachers and their lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar programs (van Manen, 1997). The data collected in this study is representative of elementary teachers with lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Dependability

Dependability involved the ability to account for the change in conditions within this study of elementary teachers' lived experiences in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar. I used an audit trail to provide details associated with the steps utilized in the process of conducting this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018) (See Appendix G). An audit trail ensures transparency by providing a description of the research steps taken from the start of the study through reporting the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, this study can be repeatable under the same circumstances in another place and time (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Confirmability

Confirmability is associated with the understanding that the findings were obtained from the experiential data gathered. I used member checking to review collected information and to ensure the information was accurately interpreted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). More specifically, member checking included providing study participants with the findings of the study to ensure

their perspectives were captured accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), this process ensures the confirmability of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the personal nature of qualitative studies, it was essential to address ethical considerations associated with this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prior to the onset of this study, I obtained IRB approval as well as the approval of Brickwood County Public Schools' research department. A central office administrator of Brickwood County Public Schools was assigned as my sponsor, who served as a point of contact to answer my questions, as well as supervise the data collection process within Brickwood County Public Schools. Written, informed consent was obtained from individual participants at Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools. I informed participants that participation in this study was completely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any time. The anonymity of participants' identities was ensured by the assignment of a pseudonym to each teacher. All experiential data were stored on a password-protected device then kept under lock and key to ensure anonymity. Lastly, all identifying information associated with this study will be shredded and destroyed after 3 years, as required by the IRB.

Summary

As the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar, individual interviews, a focus group interview, and participant journaling were utilized to develop a description of the instructional environment in both calendar programs. Data collection through individual interviews, a focus group interview, and participant journaling was essential to ensure triangulation as well as to preserve the integrity of this study's

findings. Using van Manen's (1997) thematic analysis method allowed for the interpretation of experiential data gathered from elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar programs. The data were characterized into themes or experiential structures that developed a description of the instructional environment in both calendar programs. Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability will allow the procedures of this study to be duplicated in the future. Ethical considerations were taken to ensure the anonymity of this study's participants, including a full documented description of plans to ensure it is maintained. Next, Chapter Four includes the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. Chapter Four includes (a) participant descriptions, (b) a participant demographic table, (c) a theme, related codes, and numerations table, (d) Theme 1: Traditionally Stressed to A Year-Round Welcomed Change, (e) Theme 2: Traditionally Positive to Year-Round Support, (f) Theme 3: An Opportunity for Growth, and (g) research question responses.

Participants

Purposeful criterion sampling was used to identify participants for this study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), purposeful criterion sampling involves the intentional selection of participants that meet specific criteria. Participants in this study were kindergarten through fifth grade teachers with prior experience teaching in the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs at Browning Elementary School or Thompson Elementary School in Brickwood County Public School System.

The sample size for this study was 14 participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), sample sizes in phenomenological research may vary in size from 10 to 15 participants. A rich description of 14 elementary teachers is provided. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the anonymity of each participant, as well as to protect the name of their specific school designation. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a researcher protects the anonymity of participants by

assigning aliases to individuals. Participant demographics including teacher's pseudonyms, years of experience, and school pseudonyms are included in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Years of experience	Area of Focus	School
Ariyah	3	Special Education	Thompson Elementary School
Gloria	13	Special Education	Browning Elementary School
Jay	6	Physical Education	Browning Elementary School
Kathie	5	First Grade	Browning Elementary School
Kayla	6	Kindergarten	Browning Elementary School
Kimberly	4	Kindergarten	Browning Elementary School
Lia	7	ESL	Thompson Elementary School
Mark	7	Fourth Grade	Thompson Elementary School
Mary Rose	17	Kindergarten	Browning Elementary School
Rebecca	12	Fifth Grade	Thompson Elementary School
Sheri	8	Fourth Grade	Browning Elementary School
Sonia	3	Fourth Grade	Thompson Elementary School
Summer	10	Fifth Grade	Thompson Elementary School
Susan	5	Special Education	Browning Elementary School

Ariyah

Ariyah is a special education teacher at Thompson Elementary School with three years of experience as an educator. She has two years of experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and one year of experience teaching within the year-round school year calendar. Ariyah grew up in the Thompson Elementary School community and enjoys seeing her students grow, develop confidence, and aspires to give back to the youth in her community.

Gloria

Gloria is a special education teacher at Browning Elementary School with 13 years of experience. She has four years of experience teaching at the preschool level and nine years of experience at the elementary level. Gloria has 11 years of experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and two years of experience teaching within the year-round school year calendar. Gloria loves learning, teaching, and working with kids.

Jay

Jay is a physical education teacher at Browning Elementary School with six years of experience. He has taught at the middle school level for three years and the elementary level for three years in the Brickwood County Public School System. Jay has four years of experience within the traditional school year calendar and two years of experience within the year-round school year calendar. He enjoys the fun involved in teaching at the elementary level and loves being around kids.

Kathie

Kathie is a reading specialist at Browning Elementary School with five years of experience. She taught first grade during the initial implementation of the year-round school year calendar and fourth grade during the second year of the year-round school year calendar. Kathie has a master's degree and enjoys seeing the growth of her students. She chose to teach at Browning Elementary School because of the positive experience she had as a college student teaching at a Title I school.

Kayla

Kayla is a kindergarten teacher at Browning Elementary School with six years of experience. She has taught third grade in a neighboring county. Kayla has four years of

experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and two years teaching within the year-round school year. She enjoys seeing students get excited about learning and chose to work at Browning Elementary School to work alongside students who might not have the same opportunities as their counterparts on the more affluent side of the county.

Kimberly

Kimberly is a kindergarten teacher at Browning Elementary School with four years of experience as an educator. She has two years of experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and two years of experience within the year-round school year calendar. Kimberly loves teaching kindergarten and “really enjoyed the balanced calendar.”

Lia

Lia is an elementary English as a second language (ESL) teacher at Thompson Elementary School with seven years of experience as an educator. She is enrolled in a leadership program and aspires to become an educational administrator. Lia has experience teaching first and fourth grades in the charter school setting in the Northeast United States. She has taught for six years within the traditional school year calendar and one year within the year-round school year calendar. Lia enjoys teaching because of the opportunity it provides to connect to her students and to ensure equity for marginalized populations.

Mark

Mark is a fourth-grade teacher at Thompson Elementary School with seven years of experience as an educator. He also has experience teaching first and second grades, as well as working with special education students in third and fifth grades. Mark has a master’s degree and is endorsed in administration and supervision. He has six years of experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and one year of experience teaching within the year-round

school year calendar. Mark loves being able to interact with his students and chose to work at Thompson Elementary School because of their transition to the year-round school year calendar.

Mary Rose

Mary Rose is a kindergarten teacher at Browning Elementary School with 17 years of experience as an educator. She also has experience teaching third, fourth, and fifth grades. Mary Rose has 15 years of experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and two years teaching within the year-round school year calendar. She has taught in Title I schools her entire career and loves watching her students grow academically.

Rebecca

Rebecca is an ESL math intervention teacher at Thompson Elementary School with 12 years of experience. During implementation of the year-round school year calendar, Rebecca was a fifth-grade teacher. She has 11 years of experience teaching within the traditional calendar school year and one year teaching within the year-round school year calendar. She enjoys working at Thompson Elementary School because “it’s like one, huge family.”

Sherri

Sherri is a fourth-grade teacher at Browning Elementary School with eight years of experience as an educator, both in the inner-city and county. She also has experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar for five years and within the year-round school year calendar for two years. Sherri loves establishing connections and relationships with her students and their families.

Sonia

Sonia is a fourth-grade teacher at Thompson Elementary School with three years of experience. She also works with ESL students and has international teaching experience at the

collegiate level. Sonia has two years of experience teaching within the traditional school year calendar and one year of experience teaching within the year-round school year. She enjoys working with children and loved the opportunity to work with a diverse demographic.

Summer

Summer is a fifth-grade teacher at Thompson Elementary School with 10 years of experience as an educator. She has seven years of experience teaching in a catholic school setting and three years of experience teaching in the public-school setting. Summer taught nine years within the traditional school year calendar and one year within the year-round school year calendar. She enjoys connecting with her students and chose to teach at Thompson Elementary School specifically because of its transition to the year-round school year calendar.

Susan

Susan is an educational administrator with Brickwood County Public School System with five years of experience as an educator. During implementation of the year-round school year calendar, Susan was a special education teacher at Browning Elementary School. She has taught two years within the traditional school year calendar and two years within the year-round school year calendar. Susan is passionate about working in Title I schools and described the year-round school year calendar as “the best thing ever.”

Results

The results of this study comprise the collection of data from nine virtual individual interviews, five online questionnaire submissions, a five-participant virtual focus group interview, and five journal entries from each focus group member. I conducted nine individual interviews virtually using the Google Meet application, while five teachers chose to participate in this study by completing an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire was a Google form

developed to provide teachers the opportunity to participate in this study by independently answering the same individual interview questions posed in virtual interviews. A five-participant focus group interview was conducted virtually, using the Google Meet application. I shared a separate Google document with each of the five focus group participants for the purpose of recording thoughts and sharing additional information throughout the interview. All recorded individual and focus group interviews were uploaded to the Sonix application to be transcribed. I read individual interview and focus group interview transcripts 15-20 times each to develop an overall sense of teachers' experiences within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar. Significant phrases and sentences identified in teachers' responses during individual and focus group interviews were color-coded, reviewed repeatedly, and analyzed for commonalities. All individual and focus group interview transcripts were uploaded to the NVivo 12 Plus program to further organize significant phrases and sentences according to the concepts of the instructional environment being referenced (school culture/climate, instructional planning, professional development, teacher buy-in). Individual interview and focus group interview participant responses were highlighted, dragged, and dropped into the coded concepts (school culture/climate, instructional planning, professional development, and teacher buy-in). I extracted the meanings of individual and focus group transcripts to identify thematic aspects of teachers' experiences within the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs. Three themes were identified through the data analysis process: (a) traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change, (b) traditionally positive to year-round support, and (c) opportunity for growth (see Appendix F). Themes, codes, and enumerations are provided in Table 2.

Table 2*Themes, Related Codes, and Enumerations*

Themes	Related Codes	Enumerations
Theme 1: Traditionally Stressed to A Year-Round Welcomed Change	Culture and Climate	78
Theme 2: Traditionally Positive to Year-Round Support	Intersessions	83
Theme 3: An Opportunity for Growth	Preparation for the Year-Round School Year Calendar	14
	Professional Development	12
	Teacher Buy-In	88
	Instructional Planning	30
	Calendar Structure Issues	16

Theme 1: Traditionally Stressed to A Year-Round Welcomed Change

In developing a response to RQ1, the theme “traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change” was identified. Traditionally stressed in Theme 1 is attributed to the experiential data collected that described the essence of teachers’ experiences within the traditional school year calendar as stressful, characterized by burnout. Teachers attributed elevated levels of stress and burnout to the lack of time to invest in social emotional health throughout the school year. All teachers participating in this study described their experiences

within the traditional school year calendar as more stressful in comparison to their experiences within the year-round school year calendar. Susan characterized her experiences within the traditional school year calendar as being “exhausting, tiring, and draining.” Mark summarized his experiences within the traditional school year calendar as “teachers begin feeling burned out by the end of the nine weeks but did not have a break in between that allowed them to refresh.”

“A year-round welcomed change” in Theme 1 is attributed to the experiential data collected that described the essence of teachers’ experiences within the year-round school year calendar as more positive than in the traditional school year calendar because of the two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter that provided time to relax, rejuvenate, and to devote to social emotional health throughout the school year. All teachers participating in this study described more positive experiences within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. Kayla shared, “It was an opportunity to give myself what I needed, and that was a mental break.” Kathie communicated that the year-round school year calendar was “much better for the mental health of everyone involved.” Susan added that the year-round school year calendar was “a huge morale booster.”

Teachers’ comparison of their experiences within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar initially revealed a difference in the distribution of instructional days between both calendar structures. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, nine elaborated on the disparity in the calendar structure between the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar. The traditional school calendar was described as beginning in September, ending in mid-June, and containing a two-and-a-half-month summer vacation. Mark shared that the traditional school year calendar started “after Labor Day.” Kathie

communicated that the traditional school year calendar was characterized by “almost three months of summer.”

The year-round school year calendar was described as beginning in July, ending in early June, and containing five weeks of summer vacation. Kayla articulated that the year-round school year began in “the middle of July” and consisted of “nine weeks on and three weeks off.” Gloria explained, “The year-round calendar started in July. We worked for nine weeks and then we had an intersession break. You had three weeks off.”

Teachers’ comparisons between the experiences within the traditional and year-round school year calendars revealed differences in each calendar structure’s influence on social–emotional health. In the traditional school year calendar, opportunities to devote to social–emotional health revolve around holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and a two-and-a-half-month summer vacation. Teachers shared that the extended time between opportunities to decompress contributed to feelings of burnout. Of 14 teachers participating in this study, eight shared their frustration with the traditional school year calendar because of the lack of time to devote to social emotional health. Kayla described her lived experiences with the traditional school year calendar as “noticing that a lot of teachers began to become burned out. They were exhausted. They were stressed out. They weren’t getting the breaks they needed for themselves.” Kathie stated, “Everyone was frustrated.” Susan articulated, “You are exhausted. You are tired. You are drained.”

Teachers within the year-round school year calendar identified the opportunity that intersessions provided to allocate additional time to social emotional health. All teachers participating in this study identified their preference for the year-round school year calendar

because of the opportunity intersessions provided to invest in social emotional health throughout the school year. As Kayla explained,

Having the option to choose to work or take a break for my own mental health purposes was fantastic. When I transferred here you could just see the people were glowing, like they felt relieved. I did notice that people were happier, freer. It seemed like a much happier place to be.

Susan articulated,

I love it, oh my gosh, it is the best thing ever! In all seriousness, having built-in breaks throughout the school year is the best thing since sliced bread. At all schools, but especially Title I schools, the grind is real. The physical, mental, and emotional energy it takes to teach, to ensure their mental health is a priority and to connect them with wraparound services is a 60-hour-a-week job that you have to complete in the standard 40 hours. As we all know, by February you feel dead, and it isn't even testing season yet. With year-round school, it was truly magical. That truly shifted my mindset. I would just go all-out teaching because I knew that there was a break so close. I would be able to decompress, relax, and enjoy it.

Sherri conveyed,

I loved the year-round calendar because the burn out among kids and students was not as profound as it was in my experience with the traditional calendar. I was very happy teaching on the balanced calendar and the kids ended up loving it too.

Another topic of discussion that was identified in the comparison of teachers' experiences within the traditional and year-round school year calendars was instructional planning. The understanding was that the traditional school year calendar provided very little time at the end of

each quarter to adequately prepare for the upcoming quarter due to the time required to finalize students' grades for report cards. Preparation for the upcoming quarter includes tasks such as reflecting on previous instructional practices, analyzing student data, and targeting instruction for the next quarter based on deficits identified during data analysis. Kimberly shared,

When the marking period is over after nine weeks in a traditional school year calendar, you get a weekend, and you have to come back ready for new content. This does not yield a good head space for students or teachers.

Teachers shared the perspective that within the year-round school year calendar, two-to-three-week intersessions provided additional opportunities for instructional planning. Sonia described utilizing additional time during an intersession to “plan for the next semester” as well as using a subsequent intersession to complete “reading and writing lesson plans” for the upcoming quarter. Kathie shared that the intersessions were essential for “lesson planning purposes.”

Supporting student achievement was also identified as a topic of discussion during teachers' comparison of the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars. The understanding was that teachers' experiences within the traditional school year calendar revealed that opportunities for supporting student remediation were commonly provided during the summer after the culmination of the school year. Susan articulated,

How silly is it that we remediate during the summer after everything has already been taught? It's silly, right? I love intersession because we were able to address strands that would be fundamental later during the school year like strengthen a student's knowledge in ordering fractions or value of fractions to make ordering fractions and decimals easier later in the year.

Supporting student achievement within the year-round school year calendar was predicated on utilizing intersessions to provide remediation, enrichment, targeted instruction, spiraling content, frontloading information, and addressing deficits attributed to the summer slide throughout the school year when the information being covered was still familiar to students. Of the five-member focus group, four members identified how intersessions provided opportunities to spiral content from the previous quarter, diminish the summer slide, and frontload information for the upcoming quarter. Mark explained that intersessions supported student achievement by providing the remediation that they needed. You could tell students were a little bit further ahead than what they were before remediation. Because of our intersessions we were able to target what they needed help in, and we were able to get our lessons to target exactly what they needed assistance in. We used a lot of hands-on activities. Students were able to retain more. I just know that the year-round school intersessions were really targeted and really helped students of color and minorities, because the summer slide is very crucial.

Ariyah shared that the intersessions provided students the opportunity to “thrive from having opportunities to enroll in intervention services if needed. We had more flexibility to focus on areas of weakness for specific groups of students to show growth.” Rebecca added that she was able to support student achievement during intersessions by “spiraling content from the previous quarter.”

Theme 2: Traditionally Positive to Year-Round Support

In developing a response to RQ2, the theme “traditionally positive to year-round support” was identified. “Traditionally positive” in Theme 2 is attributed to the experiential data collected describing the essence of the school culture/climate within the traditional school year calendar as

positive and family-like in structure. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, 12 described the existing school culture/climate within the traditional school year calendar as positive. Mary Rose described the school culture/climate within the traditional school year calendar as “supportive and comparable to a family.” Rebecca articulated that the school culture and climate within the traditional school year calendar was “family like in structure.”

“Year-round support” in Theme 2 is predicated on teachers’ perspective that the essence of the school culture/climate was elevated within the year-round school year calendar due to the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter that provided the opportunity to relax, rejuvenate, and invest in social emotional health throughout the school year. All study participants described a more positive school culture/climate within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. As Susan shared,

With year-round school, it was truly magical. While yes, we started the school year earlier than most, we were able to have a three week break just around the corner. That truly shifted my mindset. Rather than wanting to conserve energy, I would just go all-out teaching because I knew that there was a break so close. I would be able to decompress, relax, and enjoy it.

Teachers’ comparison of the school culture/climate between the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar revealed that the school culture/climate within the traditional school year calendar was positive and family-like in structure. Of 14 teachers participating in this study, 12 articulated an existing positive school culture at Thompson Elementary School and Browning Elementary School within the traditional school year calendar. Kayla shared that working at Browning Elementary provided her with “a sense of community.” Gloria articulated that the culture and climate at Browning Elementary was “very positive and

supportive.” Lia explained that working at Thompson Elementary was “like a family for me. I feel very strongly connected to the school.”

Of the participants, two teachers communicated that the school culture at Browning Elementary School was negative, but their perspective was not attributed to the calendar structure being implemented. Susan described the existing school culture as “the climate wasn’t great, but that wasn’t because of year-round school.” Kimberly stated,

The climate for the whole world was pretty bad after we had to dismiss in March without warning, not knowing we would not see them until the following school year, but I do not think that speaks to the climate of the school in general.

Individual interviews revealed that the school culture/climate improved at Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools after implementation of the year-round school year calendar. All teachers participating in this study identified a positive improvement of the school culture/climate within the year-round school year calendar. Kayla communicated that Browning Elementary was a “happier place to be” after transitioning to the year-round school year calendar. Rebecca stated the school culture/climate at Thompson Elementary was “fantastic” within the year-round school year calendar. Ariyah shared that the school culture/climate within the year-round school year calendar improved “comradery between parents, teachers, and students.”

The improved school culture/climate within the year-round school year calendar was attributed to the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter, as well as Brickwood County Public Schools’ personnel decisions that allowed teachers not in support of the change in calendar structure to transfer to a traditional school year calendar school in the district. All study participants indicated that intersessions were the catalyst for improving

the school culture and climate at Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools.

Kayla noted,

I feel like our school was very positive and optimistic. Our teachers worked very well collaborating and being productive. I feel like it was pretty much the consensus that we all believe in our students and we're all here for the same reason. We want to continue to teach them day in and day out and I think everyone who is here wants to be here year-round. We were all very excited about that and having the option to have three weeks off allowed us to be refreshed, positive, and build each other up even more.

Kimberly explained, "the year-round school year calendar was a great way to change the culture" because of the time two-to-three-week intersessions provided to decompress and rejuvenate.

Ariyah shared that "switching over schedules helped us start the year on a productive track."

Theme 3: An Opportunity for Growth

In developing a response to RQ3, the theme "An opportunity for Growth" was identified as a theme based on the experiential data collected describing teachers' perspective that the essence of the transition from the traditional to the year-round school year calendar is predicated on the opportunity for multiple tiers of support to be provided in improving the social emotional health of students and teachers, the instructional growth of teachers, and the academic growth of students. All study participants articulated that the impact on student learning was greater within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar because of the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter that served as the catalyst for the comprehensive improvement of students and teachers. According to Sherri,

I love the year-round school year calendar because the burn-out among students was not as profound as it was in my experience within the traditional school year calendar. I also had an opportunity to work extra hours supporting my own students during intersessions. It allowed me to catch them up and help avoid the summer slide attributed with traditional calendar summer vacations.

Comparing the impact of both calendar structures on student learning revealed teachers' perspective that the traditional school year calendar negative influenced student achievement. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, five revealed that the traditional school year calendar's impact on student learning involved elevated levels of stress, burnout, and the onset of summer slide. Mark's description of the traditional school year calendar's impact on student learning was predicated on observing students "experience burnout" due to the lack of adequate breaks throughout the school year. Kathie shared, "The three-month summer vacation attributed to the traditional calendar is the reason many kids experience a summer slide." Kayla articulated that her students would "come back from summer break forgetting what they learned, causing the first few weeks of the year to be dedicated to reteaching previous material."

Teachers conveyed the perspective that the year-round school year calendar provided a positive impact on student learning through intersessions. All teachers participating in this study indicated that year-round school year calendar intersessions impacted student learning in a positive manner. Susan noted that intersessions allowed her to "strengthen students' knowledge in ordering fractions and value of fractions to make ordering fractions and decimals easier later in the year." Sonia articulated that the intersessions helped her students "in math and reading." Ariyah added that the intersessions impacted "special education students by providing the opportunities to enroll in intervention services as needed."

Year-round school year calendar intersessions were also credited with impacting student learning by providing teachers the opportunity for instructional growth. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, eight revealed that intersessions impacted student learning by providing teachers the opportunity for instructional growth such as planning for subsequent quarters, targeting instruction for specific students, and frontloading information to students for upcoming quarters through remediation and enrichment programs. Susan explained,

I love intersession because we were able to address strands that would be fundamental later during the school year. Also, we were able to frontload content vocabulary for our English language learners. This only strengthens the student experience during the nine weeks and helps facilitate a deeper understanding of concepts taught.

Gloria shared that she used intersessions to “work ahead and plan a week or two” for the upcoming nine weeks. Kathie noted,

and then what was nice, if students needed any extra or if we wanted to preteach any information that could be done during the intersession. So definitely for planning purposes, being able to tell the intersession coordinator who is making the plans, what students needed to go over during intersession to make sure they were ready for the next quarter.

Sonia identified the opportunity intersessions provided to “plan all of my reading and writing plans for the upcoming quarter.”

The analysis of the calendar structure’s impact on student learning revealed that year-round school year calendar intersessions comprehensively impacted student learning. All focus group members conveyed the perspective that intersessions were valuable in multiple ways, such as positively influencing social–emotional health, academic growth, and ESL students’ growth in

English. Mark identified the seriousness of “the summer slide” and how beneficial shortened intersession breaks were to allowing students “to dive back in” upon returning to school. Kayla explained that “teachers and students” benefited from having the opportunity to have time off to “refresh.” Kathie identified the value in allowing students time to take a “break” for “mental health” purposes, while highlighting how “ESL students benefited from the year-round school year calendar by having the opportunity to be immersed in English the entire year.”

The analysis of the calendar structure’s impact on student learning revealed that the addition of intersessions during the year-round school year calendar positively influenced achievement. All focus group members facilitated a description of how the year-round school year calendar provided a more positive impact on student learning. Of the five focus group members, two members identified the year-round school year’s positive influence on student assessment performance. Kayla observed,

an increase in academic success and diminished summer slide because of exposure to instruction more consistently. Browning Elementary did increase from the initial implementation of the year-round school to the next. Our principal talked about how our scores improved and that’s something we celebrated.

Kathie added,

The lack of backslide, again, bringing that full circle, students were able to be exposed to more academics for more amount of their day and then leading into intersession as well. They were surrounded by not just academics, but enrichment courses. I cannot remember our SOL scores off the top of my head, but they did increase from year one.

Research Questions Responses

This study was guided by three research questions:

Research Question One

How do teachers describe their experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Research Question Two

How do teachers describe the school culture in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Research Question Three

How do teachers describe the impact on student learning in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

All study participants described more positive experiences, improved school culture/climate, and a greater impact on student learning with the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. This section provides a summary of the findings for each research question based on the experiential data collected from individual interviews, online questionnaires, a focus group interview, and participant journaling.

RQ1

How do teachers describe their experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Theme 1, traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change, summarized the essence of teachers' experiences within the traditional school year calendar that were characterized by stress, frustration, high levels of burnout, and mentally draining due to the lack of time for teachers to devote to social emotional health. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, five described experiencing and observing elevated levels of stress in students and colleagues due to the lack of balance between instructional days and vacation days structured in

the traditional school year calendar. The essence of the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar was described as a welcomed change because of the two-to-three-week intersessions that provided teachers the time to decompress, rejuvenate, and mentally refocus in preparation of the upcoming quarter. All teachers described their experiences as being more positive within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar due to the incorporation of intersessions at the end of each quarter. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, 13 identified additional instructional opportunities associated with the year-round school year calendar intersessions such as remediation, enrichment, frontloading instructional content for students, reflecting on pedagogical practices and data, and adjusting future practices, planning for the upcoming quarter, and targeting instruction for specific groups. Again, 13 out of 14 teachers indicated that the year-round school year calendar positively influenced the academic growth of students through the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter. Teachers described the opportunity provided for students to receive remediation, enrichment, and targeted instruction to support reading and math growth, including supporting growth of English language learners (ELLs) and special education students. Teachers also observed that students' summer slide diminished because of the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar.

RQ2

How do teachers describe the school culture in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Theme 2, traditionally positive to year-round support, was based on teachers' perspectives that the school culture/climate within the traditional school year calendar at

Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools was positive and family-like in structure. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, 12 communicated that the existing school culture of Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School within the traditional school year calendar was positive. However, two teachers at Browning Elementary School shared that the school culture was negative prior to the implementation of the year-round school year calendar, but explained their perspective was not related to the calendar structure being implemented. Theme 2 also suggests that the essence of the transition to the year-round school year calendar was characterized by a significantly improved school culture/climate at Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary throughout the school year. The two-to-three-week intersessions incorporated at the end of each quarter were credited with providing students and teachers the opportunity to relax, rejuvenate, and invest in their social emotional health. All teachers participating in this study described a more positive school culture/climate within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. The two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter allowed teachers to focus on their social emotional health consistently throughout the school year, contributing to a more positive school culture/climate at both Browning Elementary School and Thompson Elementary School.

RQ3

How do teachers describe the impact on student learning in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

Theme 3, an opportunity for growth, was based on experiential data that described the essence of teachers' experiences as an opportunity for multiple layers of support for social emotional health of students and teachers, instructional growth of teachers, and the academic growth of students. All teachers participating in this study conveyed that the transition from the

traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar provided the opportunity for multiple levels of support for improving the academic growth of students. The two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter were credited with serving as a catalyst for the comprehensive growth of students. Brickwood County Public Schools did not make intersessions mandatory for students. Students were targeted for remediation during intersessions based on achievement data but were not obligated to attend. Brickwood County Public Schools provided teachers with the option to work intersessions for additional compensation through remediation, enrichment, or curriculum planning. Teachers uninterested in working during intersession utilized that time as a teacher holiday. All teachers participating in this study articulated that the impact on student learning was greater within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. Teachers explained that intersessions provided the opportunity for students to relax, rejuvenate, and dedicate time to their social emotional health. The opportunity to devote time to social–emotional health positively influences students’ ability to focus on academic achievement. Teachers also described the opportunities that intersessions provided students to receive remediation, enrichment, and targeted instruction. Of the 14 teachers participating in this study, nine indicated that year-round school year calendar intersessions provided the opportunity to plan, prepare, and frontload information for upcoming quarters, thus strengthening instructional practices. In addition, 13 out of 14 teachers identified the year-round school year calendar’s ability to collectively impact student learning both socially and academically. Teachers described the summer slide being significantly addressed because of the instructional strategies implemented during year-round school year intersessions. The next section is a discussion of this study’s findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Summary

Three themes, including (a) traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change, (b) traditionally positive to year-round support, and (c) an opportunity for growth themes were developed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their experiences in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

RQ2: How do teachers describe the school culture in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

RQ3: How do teachers describe the impact on student learning in the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars?

These themes revealed that teachers described the year-round school year calendar intersessions as a catalyst for improving experiences, school culture, and having a greater impact on student learning. In addition, two-to-three-week year-round school year calendar intersessions were credited with providing time to decompress, rejuvenate, improve social–emotional health, remediate, provide enrichment, target instruction, reflect on previous practices, and analyze data, while minimizing extended time out of school attributed to the traditional school year calendar’s summer slide. All teachers participating in this study indicated that revising the instructional calendar provided the opportunity to better calibrate support for students and teachers to improve social emotional health, instructional practices, and academic progress in comparison to the traditional school year calendar.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. Chapter Five consists of the following discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research. The chapter culminates with a synthesis of all data collected in this study.

Discussion

The lived experiences of 14 elementary educators were utilized to examine the instructional environment, compare experiences, school culture, and the impact on student learning between the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar programs at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools. Three themes were developed in response to this study's research questions: (a) traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change, (b) traditionally positive to year-round support, and (c) an opportunity for growth. The subsequent subsections will elaborate on the (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Theme one, (a) traditionally stressed to a year-round welcomed change, characterized the essence of elementary educators' experiences within the traditional school year calendar as stressful and frustrating, with high levels of teacher burnout. The essence of elementary

educators' experiences within the year-round school year calendar were described as rejuvenating, providing the opportunity to decompress and mentally refocus. Theme two, (b) traditionally positive to year-round support was predicated on elementary teachers' perspective that the essence of the school culture within the traditional school year calendar was positive and family-like in structure. The essence of the year-round school year calendar school culture was described as significantly improved from the existing climate within the traditional school year calendar. Theme three, (c) an opportunity for growth, was based on experiential data that identified the opportunity for the comprehensive development of students and teachers through the revision of the instructional calendar. Educators identified social emotional, pedagogical, as well as academic benefits of transitioning from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar. The subsequent section will introduce a series of interpretations significant to this study.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The experiential data collected in this study indicated that all participants believed the year-round school year calendar facilitated more positive experiences, improved school culture, and provided a greater impact on student learning in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. In synthesizing the information gathered, this study's findings indicated five significant interpretations associated with (a) school culture, (b) social emotional health, (c) pedagogical growth, (d) comprehensive student growth, (e) and educator voice.

School Culture. This study's findings indicated educators experienced a significantly improved school culture within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar. A synthesis of the findings was conducted to identify why educators described experiencing a heightened school culture after transitioning from the

traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar. It was recognized that the existing school culture within the traditional school year calendar was positive and supportive, evidenced through experiential data collected from 12 of 14 teachers participating in this study. Two of 14 teachers participating in this study described a negative school culture at Browning Elementary School but articulated their perspective was not connected to the format of the instructional calendar. It was also identified that the building leadership at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools remained consistent prior to and after the transition from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar, ruling out that a change in administration contributed to an improved school culture. Ultimately, teachers indicated that the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter facilitated increased levels of happiness that positively impacted the culture and climate of the building (Karadag et al., 2020; Osturk et al., 2021). The opportunity to decompress and relax consistently throughout the school year was attributed to relieving high levels of stress experienced within the traditional school year calendar, and significantly improving the school culture within the year-round school year calendar (Karadag et al., 2020; Osturk et al., 2021).

Another aspect positively impacting the school culture was associated with Brickwood County Public Schools' comprehensive effort to establish ownership among the faculty and staff of Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary by providing opportunities to participate in the planning processes prior to the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar. Previous research by Osturk et al. (2021) indicated a positive school culture harnesses the differences of their stakeholders and motivates them to collectively move in the same direction. Subsequently, Brickwood County Public Schools established an instructional team, consisting of school administrators and teachers from Browning and

Thompson Elementary to visit schools in Northern Virginia and Wake County, North Carolina currently implementing the year-round school year calendar. Instructional teams were provided the opportunity to observe the facilitation of instruction firsthand, as well as facilitate question and answer sessions with students and teachers. There were also multiple townhall meetings conducted at the school level, allowing Browning and Thompson Elementary teachers the opportunity to ask questions about the revision of the instructional calendar as well as provide feedback to administrators well in advance of the transition from the traditional to the year-round school year calendar. Essentially, Brickwood County Public Schools established a professional learning community (PLC) among the educators at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools to collectively learn about the year-round school year calendar. Previous research by Eshchar-Netz and Vedder-Weiss (2020), Karadag et al. (2020), and Osturk et al. (2021), indicated that providing educators the opportunity to observe, collaborate, reflect, as well as systematically inquire about school processes would establish an environment conducive for pedagogical growth while positively impacting the school culture. Brickwood County Public Schools also provided educators at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools the option to transfer to a traditional school year calendar school within the county if the revision of the instructional calendar was not conducive for them professionally or personally. This strategy ensured that all educators who chose to remain at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools were open to the changes associated with revising the instructional calendar. As a result, this study's findings recognized incorporating educators in the planning process, providing the opportunity to observe the educational initiative firsthand, and affording teachers the option to transfer to another school established a high level of transparency and essentially developed the ownership among the faculty and staff at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools required

for the successful improvement of school culture after transitioning from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar (Gozali et al., 2017; Tallman, 2019).

Intersessions and Social Emotional Health. This study's findings identified a relationship between intersessions within the year-round school year calendar and a positive impact on the social emotional health of teachers. All educators participating in this study articulated their preference for teaching within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar because of the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter. Teachers credited intersessions with providing the opportunity to relax, decompress, and dedicate time to their social emotional health. While the overarching goal of revising the instructional calendar was to balance the academic calendar structure to diminish extensive time out of school attributed to the traditional school year calendar for students at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools, transitioning to the year-round school year calendar produced an unforeseen benefit, providing teachers the consistent opportunity throughout the school year to rejuvenate both personally and professionally. Educators repeatedly credited intersessions for improving staff morale, school culture, and acting as a catalyst for an overall sense of happiness in the building, evidenced by the experiential data provided by all teachers participating in this study.

Previous research by Palaez-Fernandez et al. (2021) and Van Hal et al. (2017) indicated teaching was one of the most emotionally demanding professions, characterized by distress, frustration, and emotional exhaustion. Patulny et al. (2019) shared that the education profession has been associated with high rates of anxiety and frustration. Merritt (2017) added that teaching is more complex now than ever because educators are tasked with curricular reforms and assessments, implementing social emotional learning programs, engaging an increasingly diverse

student population, and participating in continuous professional development. Subsequently, the inability to effectively manage the demands of teaching has been connected to educator attrition (Palaez-Fernandez et al., 2021; Van Hal et al., 2017). Teachers participating in this study described an existing positive school culture within the traditional school year calendar yet experiencing high levels of stress and burnout consistent with the challenges of the profession mentioned in previous research (Merritt, 2017; Palaez-Fernandez et al., 2021; Patulny et al., 2019; Van Hal et al., 2017). Educators at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools described their experiences within the traditional school year calendar as “exhausting, tiring, and draining.” This study’s findings identified the opportunity to address the high levels of stress described in previous research by revising the instructional calendar to provide two-to-three-week intersessions after each nine-week instructional quarter. Educators’ description of their experiences within the year-round school year calendar contrasted their perspective of the traditional school year calendar substantially, characterizing their year-round school year calendar experience as “relaxing, happier, and magical.” As the importance of social emotional health has become increasingly prominent, this study’s findings indicate that revising the instructional calendar is a viable strategy to specifically address the high demands associated with the education profession. According to Patulny et al. (2019), investing in personal happiness and well-being is an essential component of successfully navigating the education profession. Datu et al. (2017) added that happy individuals are likely to have high levels of engagement, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and achievement. According to Jones-Schenk (2019), evidence is growing that social emotional skills are better predictors of academic and career success than intelligence quotient (IQ). Jones-Schenk (2019) further shared that understanding elements of social emotional health was a critical competency for all educators

seeking to foster academic and career success for their students. Previous research examined the instructional calendar's influence on student academic achievement and overcrowding, but this study's findings sheds light on the calendar structure's ability to positively influence the social emotional health of educators (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The concentrated effort to invest in the social emotional health of educators could improve pedagogical growth and development, while subsequently addressing teacher attrition due to the increased demands of the profession.

Intersessions and Pedagogical Growth. This study's findings indicated a correlation between intersessions within the year-round school year calendar and the opportunity for pedagogical growth. Teachers participating in this study identified the lack of adequate time at the culmination of each quarter within the traditional school year calendar to effectively prepare for the upcoming quarter due to finalizing students' grades for report cards and conferencing with parents. According to previous research by Merritt (2017), teachers in today's educational system identified additional planning time as a dire need for pedagogical success. While intersessions were developed to provide a break in normal instruction prior to the start of the next quarter as well as to offer remediation/enrichment activities for a targeted student population, this study's findings highlighted the opportunity intersessions provided for pedagogical growth and development. Eight of the 14 teachers participating in this study credited two-to-three-week intersessions within the year-round school year calendar with providing the time needed to reflect on previous instructional strategies, review student data, plan for the upcoming quarter,

target future instructional strategies based on current data, remediate students, and frontload information to students in preparation for the next quarter.

As this study's findings identified the opportunity two-to-three-week intersessions within the year-round school year calendar provided for individual pedagogical growth, it was also recognized that intersessions could be utilized for the professional development of grade level/content area professional learning communities (PLCs), with an emphasis on developing the ability to analyze student data, reflect on previous instructional practices, and target instruction moving forward. Previous research by Eshchar-Nets and Vedder-Weiss (2020), articulated that PLCs are encouraged to consistently utilize reflective practices coupled with systematic inquiry to improve instructional strategies moving forward. Allotting time for instructional planning throughout the school year during intersessions provided teachers the opportunity to analyze and target instructional strategies according to the fundamental concepts attributed to an effective professional learning community as identified by Eshchar-Nets and Vedder-Weiss (2020). Previous research by Thoma et al. (2017) indicated five characteristics of an effective PLC: sharing a common view of the mission, reflecting on practice, participating in reflective discourse, offering feedback to one another on instruction, and keeping student learning as the central focus. As a result, grade level and content area PLCs could collectively review data, reflect on previous instructional practices, collectively provide feedback , and comprehensively target instruction moving forward according to the best interest of students as indicated by Thoma et al. (2017). While incorporating effective PLC practices could have a positive impact on the pedagogical growth and development of all teachers involved, teachers new to the profession, or new to the district/building could greatly benefit from this practice. An

effective PLC could subsequently develop a culture of reflective practices and ensuring student learning is at the forefront of all instructional decision making (Thoma et al., 2017).

Intersessions and Comprehensive Student Growth. The findings of this study indicated a correlation between intersessions within the year-round school year calendar and a positive impact on student academic growth. All teachers participating in this study articulated that the impact on student learning was greater within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar because of the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter. More specifically, intersessions provided the opportunity for students to participate in remediation and enrichment activities. Teachers participating in this study communicated that within the traditional school year calendar, students would primarily receive the bulk of remediation during summer school. This study's findings identified the opportunity for students to receive remediation throughout the school year within year-round school year intersessions. This allowed students to receive academic support in small groups while the information was still familiar to them. Teachers communicated intersessions were vital in remediating English and math content, supporting ESL students' emersion in the English language throughout the year, addressing the summer slide, and providing opportunities for special education students to enroll in intervention services. Previous research comparing the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars inconsistently found a significant impact on student achievement by revising the instructional calendar (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). In the attempt to identify standardized assessment data to shed additional light on teachers' assertions

that the year-round school year positively impacted student learning, data was obtained from Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Profile, providing student achievement after one year of implementing the year-round school year calendar. At the time of this study Thompson Elementary was unable to complete its first full year within the year-round school year calendar due to the closure of Virginia schools as a result of COVID-19. Browning Elementary's 2018-2019 standardized assessment data was consistent with previous research by Cooper et al. (2008), Cuban (2008), Finnie et al. (2019), Ferguson (2000), French (2013), Graves, (2010, 2011), Johnson & Wagner (2017), McMillen (2010), and McMullen and Rouse (2012) identifying inconsistent academic achievement on English and math state standardized assessments, improving from 87% to 90% in English but decreasing from 91% to 90% in math. Browning Elementary's 2018-2019 standardized assessment data was consistent with previous research by Graves' (2011) that concluded revising the instructional calendar yielded a negative benefit in African American students, exhibiting a decrease from 84% to 80% in English and 94% to 82% in math. On the other hand, Browning Elementary's 2018-2019 standardized assessment data contradicted Graves' (2011) stance that revising the instructional calendar had a negative impact on Hispanic students, demonstrating growth from 90% to 96% in English and 93% to 96% in math. This study's findings indicated that the standardized assessment data supported teachers' perspective that the revision of the instructional calendar positively impacted comprehensive achievement in English but produced negative gains in comprehensive math achievement. In examining data by demographic, the revision of the instructional calendar produced achievement gains in English and math for Hispanic students, while yielding negative gains in African American students.

This study's findings also identified the opportunity intersessions within the year-round school year calendar provided to positively impact the social emotional health of students. Teachers participating in this study indicated observing student burnout and frustration within the traditional school year calendar. Previous research by Jones-Schenk (2019) shared social emotional skills are better predictors of academic success than intelligent quotient (IQ). Datu et al. (2017) added that well-being can be a precursor of academic success. Datu et al.'s (2017) research conveyed happy individuals were likely to have high levels of academic engagement, intrinsic motivation, academic self-efficacy, academic self-regulation, and academic achievement. Teachers participating in this study credited intersessions within the year-round school year calendar with positively impacting students' social emotional health, evidenced by observing more positive interactions with peers and teachers after returning to school from two-to-three-week breaks. Previous research by Lopez-Perez and Fernandez-Castilla (2018) communicated that schools are one of the most influential contexts in students' growth and development, responsible for advancement of academic and social emotional skills. This study's findings indicated the viability of revising the instructional calendar to provide both academic and social emotional support for students. As awareness of the importance of social emotional health becomes increasingly prominent, this study's findings supported Datu et al.'s (2017) perspective of the relationship between personal happiness and academic achievement.

Educator Voice. This study's findings shed light on the value of educators' perspectives on educational initiatives and practices based on their experiences within a specific phenomenon according to the fundamental principles of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience. Previous research by Gozali et al. (2017) indicated a shortage of teacher voice in education decision making. Educator voice includes the views, experiences, and perspectives of teachers on

educational policy and practice (Gozali et al., 2017). Brickwood County Public Schools demonstrated the value of its educators' voices by including teachers from Browning and Thompson Elementary in planning processes during the transition from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar. This strategy facilitated a high level of transparency between Brickwood County Public School leaders and its educators, while developing the ownership among teachers required to ensure implementation with fidelity. As a result, the lived experiences of elementary teachers in this study were utilized not only to develop a rich description of the experiences, school culture, impact on student learning, and the instructional environment within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars but to demonstrate the value of educators' voices in planning as well as speaking to the success of an educational initiative or lack thereof. This is significant because previous literature has solely examined success of educational initiatives based on quantitative measures such as student achievement on standardized assessments, failing to provide insight as to why an educational initiative was unsuccessful, including what areas could be revised to achieve success, or identifying the value of educators' perspectives despite their experiences within the educational initiative (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). While the overarching goal of this study was to obtain a greater understanding of the comprehensive impact of revising the instructional calendar, this study's findings identified a correlation between the qualitative insight of elementary teachers on the success of revising the instructional calendar in Brickwood County Public Schools and the quantitative data available from the 2019 School Quality Profile of Browning Elementary School, substantiating educators'

perspectives that the transition from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar successfully impacted experiences, school culture, and student learning.

In utilizing Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as a theoretical framework, this study recognized Dewey's description of educator effectiveness could be paralleled with teachers' ability to accurately describe the impact of revising the instructional calendar. Dewey's (1934) theory of experience is predicated on the concepts of interaction and continuity. The theory of experience articulates educators who interact within a continuous positive and nurturing physical and social environment are better equipped for pedagogical growth and development, including achievement of effectiveness as an educator. Based on Dewey's lens of effective pedagogical growth and development, this study's findings recognized the positive physical and social environment (school culture) within Browning and Thompson Elementary School after revising the instructional calendar, evidenced by all teachers participating in this study identifying a heightened school culture within the year-round school year calendar. As the physical and social environments at Browning and Thompson Elementary were of high quality based on Dewey's (1934) path for pedagogical growth/development and effectiveness as an educator, coupled with Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Profile identifying comprehensive growth schoolwide in English achievement 87% to 90% and specific growth for Hispanic students from 90% to 96% in English and 93% to 96% in math, this study's findings identified the alignment between teachers' description of the success in transitioning to the year-round school year calendar with school achievement data validating teachers' assertions. Ultimately, this study's findings indicated the value of educators' voices in planning, as well as identifying the success of educational initiatives based on their lived experiences within the phenomenon.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The study of the lived experiences of elementary teachers within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars facilitated implications for policymakers, educational leaders, and teachers moving forward. The subsequent subsections will elaborate on (a) implications for policy and (b) implications for practice. The implications for policymakers include an emphasis on (a) social emotional health and (b) educator voice, while the implications for educational leaders focus on (a) school culture and (b) social emotional health. The implications for teachers includes a focus on (a) social emotional health, (b) pedagogical growth, the (c) academic support of students, and (d) educator voice.

Implications for Policy

This study's findings facilitated implications for policymakers in two distinct areas (a) social emotional health and (b) educator voice. As the demands of today's public education system continues to grow, the need for policies and educational initiatives to include a focus on the social emotional health of its students and teachers is more prevalent now than ever. Previous research by Merritt (2017), Palaez-Fernandez et al. (2021), Patulny et al. (2019), and Van Hal et al. (2017), indicated high levels of stress, frustration, and exhaustion associated with being an educator. Teachers participating in this study described experiencing burnout, including observing frustration in their students within the traditional school year calendar. The revision of the instructional calendar was described by teachers in this study as "magical" in identifying the happiness and joy associated with the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter to decompress and invest in social emotional health. Datu et al. (2017) and Patulny et al. (2019) described the importance of investing in personal happiness and well-being to successfully navigate the education profession. Jones-Schenk (2019) and Datu et al. (2017)

indicated the correlation between social emotional health and academic success of students. Lopez-Perez and Fernandez-Castilla (2018) articulated that schools are the most influential contexts in students' growth and development, academically and social emotionally. This study's findings of the correlation between social emotional well-being and success as an educator/student, provides the foundation required for the argument that decision making must include consideration of the impact on the social emotional health of students and teachers to ensure comprehensive success moving forward.

This study's findings also indicate the value in educators' voices in planning processes as well as examining the impact of educational initiatives. Previous research by Gozali et al. (2017) indicated a need to incorporate educator voice in educational policy and practice. Teachers participating in this study described Brickwood County Public Schools inclusion of educator voice by developing a team of educators to visit year-round school year calendar schools in Northern Virginia and Wake County, North Carolina. Townhall meetings were held at the school level to provide a platform to disseminate information about the transition from the traditional school year calendar, as well as obtain feedback from educators at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools. Identifying the importance of educator voice in this situation, developed a high level of transparency as well as a positive school culture that developed ownership among teachers supporting the implementation of the year-round school year calendar with fidelity. This study's findings also identified a correlation between the success described by elementary teachers participating in this study and the assessment data available from Browning Elementary School's 2019 School Quality Report. The parallel between the qualitative data from teachers participating in this study and the standardized assessment data from the school quality report supported the view that the perspectives of educators could hold value in providing feedback on

the success of educational initiatives. While previous literature examined during this study has examined the success of an educational initiative solely on its impact on standardized assessment data and overcrowding, the value of this study's findings of the importance of educators' voices is predicated on the ability to obtain insight into why an educational initiative was unsuccessful or not, including what areas could be revised to achieve success (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The successful incorporation of educator voice by Brickwood County Schools served as a tangible example of the importance of providing a platform for educators and policymakers to collectively examine policy and educational initiatives moving forward. Including educators' voices could provide policymakers insight from the very individuals tasked with implementing educational initiatives, while developing the ownership required to ensure implementation with fidelity.

Implications for Practice

This study's findings indicated implications for educational leaders and teachers to consider for practice. The implications for educational leaders are associated with (a) school culture and (b) social emotional health. The study of elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year identified the importance of developing a positive school culture. Six of eight teachers from Browning Elementary School and all six teachers from Thompson Elementary School indicated an existing positive school culture within the traditional school year calendar, characterized as supportive and family-like in structure. All teachers described an elevated positive school culture after transitioning to the year-round school year calendar. In examining why school culture was heightened after revising

the instructional calendar, it was recognized that Brickwood County Public Schools included Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary School teachers in the planning processes while transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar. The development of a committee of teachers from each school to observe the implementation of a new educational initiative firsthand, coupled with the ability to ask questions, and provide feedback to educational leaders established ownership in the transition to the year-round school year calendar, as well as ensured implementation was conducted with fidelity. As a result, this study's findings implicated to educational leaders the importance of developing a school culture and climate that is positive, supportive, and conducive for pedagogical growth by ensuring decision making at the school level is shared with teachers when the opportunity presents itself. Osturk et al. (2021) articulated the importance of harnessing the differences of stakeholders to motivate them to move in the same direction and develop a positive school culture. Previous research by Eshchar-Netz and Vedder-Weiss (2020), Karadag et al. (2020), and Osturk et al. (2021), confirmed that providing educators the opportunity to observe, collaborate, reflect, as well as systematically inquire about school processes would establish an environment conducive for pedagogical growth while positively impacting the school culture. The inclusion of teachers in the planning processes could help educational leaders to obtain multiple perspectives to decision making that ensures all variables are considered while demonstrating the value of educator voice in their building. As teachers recognize their educational leaders value educators' perspectives in schoolwide decision making, the ownership required to support implementation of initiatives with fidelity will develop.

This study's findings also provide educational leaders with implications for social emotional health. All teachers participating in this study indicated experiencing happiness and

joy after the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter for teachers to decompress and dedicate time to their social emotional health. While the structure of the instructional calendar may vary from school to school, the importance of supporting the social emotional health of students and teachers is an important concept that could positively impact the success of educational leaders. Datu et al. (2017) shared happy individuals are likely to have high levels of engagement, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and achievement. Patulny et al. (2019) articulated that personal happiness and well-being is an essential component of successfully navigating the education profession. Educational leaders that support the social emotional health of their students and teachers could essentially motivate them to be more productive academically and professionally, which could serve as a catalyst for comprehensive growth and development schoolwide.

The implications for teachers are predicated on (a) social emotional health, (b) pedagogical growth, the (c) academic support of students, and (d) educator voice. This study's findings identified that elementary teachers with experience within both the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar described the ability to dedicate more time to social emotional health within the year-round school year calendar. Elementary teachers described elevated stress levels within the traditional school year calendar because of the lack of time to complete grading, parent teacher conferences, and prepare for the upcoming quarter. The incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter provided additional time to complete end of quarter responsibilities and decompress in preparation for the next marking period. Teachers also described experiencing elevated feelings of happiness after returning from intersessions, including observing their students exhibit improved behaviors. This study's findings indicated that intersessions provided teachers the consistent opportunity to

rejuvenate throughout the school year. Teachers participating in this study communicated that they used intersessions to spend time with loved ones, relax, travel, and allocate additional time to their children. While the term year-round school year calendar could be misconstrued to imply that school is in session throughout the calendar year without a break, essentially the year-round school year calendar refers to the balancing of the instructional calendar to spread the normal distribution of 180 days evenly throughout the year. As a result, this study's findings implicated that the revision of the instructional calendar could allow teachers additional opportunities to invest in their personal happiness and well-being, which is an essential aspect of successfully navigating the education profession (Datu et al., 2017).

This study's findings provided implications for the pedagogical growth of teachers. Elementary teachers described the relationship between intersessions within the year-round school year calendar and the opportunity to engage in pedagogical growth and development. Two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter were credited with providing teachers the opportunity to reflect on previous instructional strategies, analyze student data, plan for the subsequent quarter, and target instruction specifically according to the data. Previous research by Merritt (2017) identified the correlation between obtaining additional planning time and pedagogical success. The additional time afforded by intersessions also implicated the opportunity to strengthen pedagogical practices collectively as a content area/grade level by engaging in reflection, analyzing data, and planning for targeted instruction as a PLC. Utilizing intersessions to collectively reflect on and align instructional practices moving forward could help PLCs develop a culture that ensures student growth is at the forefront of all academic decision making (Thoma et al., 2017).

This study's findings also identified implications for the academic growth of students. Elementary teachers with experience within both the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar articulated a greater impact on student learning within the year-round school year calendar in comparison to the traditional school year calendar due to the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions. While teachers described opportunities for students to receive remediation and enrichment during summer school within the traditional school year calendar, this study's findings indicated that year-round school year intersessions afforded students to receive support at the end of each quarter while the information was fresh as opposed to waiting to the culmination of the school year. Elementary teachers credited intersessions with providing students the opportunity to receive remediation in English and math content, supporting ESL students' emersion in the English language throughout the year, addressing the summer slide, and providing opportunities for special education students to enroll in intervention services. While previous research inconsistently identified success after revising the instructional calendar, this study's findings indicated the opportunity for teachers to positively impact the academic growth of their students through intersessions (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

The findings from this study provided implications for the value of educator voice. The study of elementary teachers lived experiences within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs identified the alignment between the experiences described by teachers and the results provided by Browning Elementary Schools' 2019 School Quality Report. As previous studies examined the success facilitated by revising the instructional calendar by

student performance on standard achievement or addressing overpopulation, this study implicated the value of educator voice through the opportunity to obtain details as to why the educational initiative was successful or not (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The theoretical framework of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience was utilized to exhibit the value of the teachers' perspectives from Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary by identifying the quality of their continuous interactions within a social and physical environment that was positive and conducive to pedagogical growth. The significance of this study's implication of the value in educator voice is predicated on the ability to hold educators' perspectives with the same credibility as standardized assessment data. While this study does not seek to discount quantitative data, it implicated the value of looking through the lens of the individuals that have implemented an educational initiative based on their ability to provide details explaining viability moving forward or areas in need of improvement (Gozali et al., 2017).

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study's findings provided theoretical implications for (a) expanding the literature utilizing Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as well as (b) using Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as a theoretical framework for identifying the value of educators' perspectives on educational initiatives. Previous research has incorporated Dewey's (1934) theory of experience as a framework for establishing pedagogical effectiveness as a music teacher as well as a preservice teacher (Bassey, 2010; Mayer, 2015; Hutchinson, 2015; Schmidt, 2010; Stark, 2020). This study's use of the theory of experience to examine the lived experiences of teachers within

the traditional school year and year-round school year calendars expands upon the available literature incorporating Dewey's (1934) framework to include elementary educators. This study utilized Dewey's perspective of continuous physical and social interactions within a quality environment as the prerequisite for exhibiting effectiveness as an educator. Based on teachers' descriptions of a positive school culture within the traditional school year and year-round school year calendar programs at Browning and Thompson Elementary, this study framed the perspective that both schools possessed the quality physical and social environment identified by Dewey's (1934) framework conducive for the effective pedagogical growth and development of the teachers participating in this study. The fundamental concepts of the theory of experience grounded the view that there was value in teachers' perspectives of an educational initiative based on their continuous interactions within a quality physical and social environment in that phenomenon as identified by Dewey (1934). This study established a correlation between elementary school teachers' descriptions of the successful impact of revising the instructional calendar and Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report. Based on the alignment of elementary teachers' descriptions of the successful impact of revising the instructional calendar and Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report, this study established a parallel between teachers' descriptions of the positive impact of transitioning to the year-round school year calendar and the standardized assessment data available identifying cumulative student growth in English and student growth in English and math by Hispanic students at Browning Elementary School. As a result, exhibiting the possibility that teachers' descriptions of their experiences within an educational initiative could be valued in the same manner as standardized assessment data is utilized to describe the success of an educational initiative or lack thereof. This perspective could be riveting as previous research on the instructional calendar has

predominantly determined success based on student performance on standardized assessments and addressing overcrowding (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). The critical aspect of this implication is that utilizing educators' voices extends the insight of an educational initiative beyond success or failure to answering why success was achieved or not, and recommendations for improvement moving forward.

This study's findings also identified empirical implications associated with (a) expanding upon the literature examining the revision of the instructional calendar, (b) school culture, (c) social emotional health of teachers, (d) pedagogical growth, (e) comprehensive growth of students, and (f) educator voice. Previous research on the instructional calendar primarily revolved around findings that it could effectively address overpopulation, but inconsistently impact student achievement on standardized assessments (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). Elementary teachers participating in this study described improved experiences, school culture, and a greater impact on student learning after the revision of the instructional calendar, differing from the findings of previous studies (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019). This study also incorporated Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report in

the attempt to examine available standardized assessment data to confirm teachers' assertions of the positive impact on standardized assessments at Browning Elementary School. Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report identified cumulative growth in English, while diminishing in cumulative math achievement schoolwide. In examining achievement by demographic, Hispanic students demonstrated growth in English and math, while African American student achievement diminished in English and math. Elementary teachers participating in this study described a positive impact on social emotional health, pedagogical growth, comprehensive student growth, and educator voice after transitioning from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar. Thus, expanding upon the scope of previous literature examining the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar to include recent research that moves beyond the focus of the impact on standardized assessments and overpopulation to the influence on social emotional health, pedagogical growth, comprehensive student growth, and educator voice (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

This study provided empirical implications associated with the importance of school culture. Previous research of the instructional calendar has primarily revolved around the impact on student performance on standardized assessments or addressing overcrowding (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). This study of the instructional calendar revealed the importance of a positive school culture to the

successful revision of the instructional calendar. Elementary teachers participating in this study described an existing positive school culture within Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools, coupled with Brickwood County Public Schools inclusion of educators in the planning processes of transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar. As a result, this study identified a concentrated effort by Brickwood County Public Schools to ensure transparency among its teachers, which contributed to developing the ownership required to transition from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar with fidelity. Osturk et al. (2021) indicated that a positive school culture embraced the differences of educators and encouraged the collective movement in the same direction. This study supported previous research by Osturk et al.'s (2021) describing the essential role positive school culture plays in collectively motivating teachers towards the facilitation of educational success.

An unexpected implication of this study was the overwhelming support for the revision of the instructional calendar based on its positive impact on the social emotional health of teachers. All educators participating in this study described experiencing high levels of stress and frustration within the traditional school year calendar, confirming previous research by Merritt (2017), Palaez-Fernandez et al. (2021), Patulny et al. (2019), and Van Hal et al. (2017) identifying the increasing demand associated with the education profession. All elementary educators also described elevated feelings of happiness because of the incorporation of two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter. While the study of the academic calendar structure was focused on examining the impact on the instructional environment, elementary teachers implicated the viability of revising the instructional calendar to positively impact their social emotional health. This was critical as this study expands the lens examining the

instructional calendar to include being an educational initiative that could possibly be utilized to positively support the mental health of educators. With the increasing awareness of the importance of social emotional health, this study supported the importance of investing in personal happiness as an essential aspect of successfully navigating the education profession moving forward (Merritt, 2017; Palaez-Fernandez et al., 2021, Patulny et al., 2019; Van Hal et al., 2017).

Another aspect of this study that provided empirical implications moving forward was associated with pedagogical growth. Previous research by Merritt (2017) identified additional planning time as necessary for pedagogical success. This study implicated the opportunity two-to-three-week intersessions incorporated into the instructional calendar at the end of each quarter provided teachers to reflect on previous instructional strategies, review student data, plan for the upcoming quarter, target future instructional strategies based on current data, remediate students, and frontload information to students in preparation for the next quarter. While elementary teachers provided insight into the individual opportunities for professional development during intersessions, this study also identified the opportunity for grade level/content area PLCs to collectively analyze student data, reflect on previous instructional practices, and target instruction moving forward. Previous research by Eshcar-Nets and Vedder-Weiss (2020) identified the importance of utilizing reflective practices to improve instructional planning within PLCs. This study confirmed Eshcar-Nets and Vedder-Weiss' (2020) perspective of the importance in utilizing reflective practices to develop pedagogical practices moving forward. This study also expanded upon the previous literature on the revision of the instructional calendar to include the opportunity to positively impact pedagogical growth (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard,

2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005).

Comprehensive student growth was an additional aspect of this study that provided empirical implications moving forward. Previous research on the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar has primarily focused on the impact on standardized assessments and overcrowding (Cooper et al., 2003; Cuban, 2008; Depro & Rouse, 2015; Ferguson, 2000; Finnie et al., 2019; French, 2013; Gerard, 2007; Graves, 2010, 2011; Johnson & Wagner, 2017; Magana et al., 2017; McMillen, 2010; McMullen & Rouse, 2012; McMullen et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2019; Winter, 2005). This study's findings identified the opportunity revising the instructional calendar provided to comprehensively impact student growth, academically and social emotionally. Academically, elementary teachers participating in this study described how the transition to the year-round school year calendar provided the opportunity for students to receive remediation and enrichment throughout the school year, as opposed to waiting until the summer months as in the traditional school year calendar. Elementary teachers articulated that year-round school year intersessions were critical to remediating English and math content, supporting ESL students' emersion in the English language throughout the year, addressing the summer slide, and providing opportunities for special education students to enroll in intervention services. Browning Elementary School teachers' assertions were supported by its 2019 School Quality Profile, identifying comprehensive growth in English schoolwide, as well as improvement in math and English by Hispanic students.

Previous research by McMullen and Rouse (2012) indicated that transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar failed to impact student

learning in third through eighth grade students, evidenced through reading and math achievement scores. Findings from this study differed from McMullen and Rouse's (2012) findings, evidenced through Browning Elementary School teachers' description of being praised by their principal for observed improvement in Virginia SOL scores. Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report supported teachers' assertions of improvement in Virginia SOL scores after transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar, evidenced by growing from 87% to 90% in English schoolwide. Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report identified a decrease from 91% to 90% in math, substantiating McMullen and Rouse's (2012) findings that transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar failed to impact student math achievement. The standardized assessment data obtained during this study, although limited supported the findings of Cooper et al. (2008), Cuban (2008), Finnie et al. (2019), Ferguson (2000), French (2013), Graves, (2010, 2011), Johnson & Wagner (2017), and McMillen (2010) identifying inconsistent academic achievement performance within the year-round school year calendar. The evidence of academic achievement growth in English at Browning Elementary provides a segue for taking a closer look at the dynamics of transitioning from the traditional school year to the year-round school year to determine why English performance improved, but math performance diminished, while considering the social emotional benefits described by teachers participating in this study.

Graves' (2011) previous research indicated that the year-round school year calendar negatively influenced academic achievement on standardized reading and math assessments in low socioeconomic, limited English proficiency, African American, and Hispanic students. Findings from this study differed from Graves' (2011) findings, evidenced by teachers'

perspective of the year-round school year calendar's positive influence on academic achievement at Browning Elementary School, which is a Title I school that serves a predominantly low socioeconomic, limited English proficiency, African American and Hispanic population. Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report provided data in support of Graves' (2011) findings, evidenced by diminishing from 84% to 80% in English and 94% to 88% in math among African American students. An outlier in Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report was an increase in third grade math achievement from 63% to 67% among African American students. Graves' (2011) previous findings were examined alongside Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Report of English and math assessment data among Hispanic students. Browning Elementary teachers' description of their students' academic growth within the year-round school year calendar, coupled with their 2019 School Quality Report differed from Graves' (2011) findings that transitioning from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar failed to impact student achievement in Hispanic students, evidenced by demonstrating growth from 90% to 96% in English and 93% to 96% in math among Hispanic students.

This study's findings also indicated the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar positively impacted students' social emotional health. Elementary teachers described observing diminished student burnout and frustration because of year-round school year intersessions. Previous research by Datu et al. (2017) and Jones-Schenk (2019) articulated the correlation between social emotional health and academic success. While previous research on the revision of the instructional calendar has primarily focused on academic growth and overpopulation, this study implicated the opportunity the year-round school year calendar provided to support the mental health of students. As previous

research by Lopez-Perez and Fernandez-Castilla (2018) communicated schools are one of the most influential contexts in students' development, responsible for advancement of academic and social emotional skills, this study's findings identified the possibility of revising the instructional calendar to comprehensively support the growth of students. As the need to effectively address academic and social emotional needs of students could become more prevalent moving forward, revising the instructional calendar could provide the opportunity to comprehensively address the positive growth and development of children within one educational initiative, confirming the relationship between social emotional health and academic success (Datu et al., 2017; Jones-Schenk, 2019; Lopez-Perez and Fernandez-Castilla, 2018).

This study identified empirical implications associated with educator voice moving forward. Previous research by Gozali et al. (2017) indicated a shortage of educator voice in decision making processes. Previous research involving the instructional calendar has not focused on the importance of teachers' perspectives on educational policy and practice. This study implicated a correlation between elementary teachers' perspectives from Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools and standardized assessment data available from Browning Elementary's 2019 School Quality Profile. Elementary teachers participating in this study described observing a positive impact on students' academic and social emotional growth after transitioning from the traditional school year to the year-round school year calendar. While Thompson Elementary School did not have assessment data available due to COVID-19 interrupting standardized assessments, Browning Elementary's 2018-2019 assessment data demonstrated comprehensive growth in English achievement schoolwide, as well as English and math growth by Hispanic students. As a result, this study identified alignment between teachers' perspectives and standardized assessment data available, indicating value in the educators'

voices' participating in this study. Coupling these findings with the fundamental concepts of Dewey's (1934) theory of experience developed a foundation for the perspective that the quality physical and social environments at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools contributed to the accurate description of the impact of revising the instructional calendar. This was a critical implication as it exhibits value in teachers' ability to speak to the success or lack thereof of an educational initiative based on their experiences within that phenomenon, while supporting Gozali et al.'s (2017) perspective of the need to increase the incorporation of educators' voices in planning processes moving forward.

Limitations and Delimitations

The limitations of this study were primarily related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the scope of this study was to interview teachers with prior experience within the traditional school year and currently teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Thompson Elementary School or Browning Elementary School, the Brickwood County Public School System decided to suspend implementation of the year-round school year calendar for the 2020-2021 school year. Brickwood County Public School System's decision to revert to the traditional school year calendar compelled the researcher to direct participants to frame their responses to individual and focus group interview questions based on their experiences within the year-round school year calendar during the 2019-2020 school year. As the 2019-2020 year-round school year culminated in March 2020, some teachers articulated challenges with recalling specific information associated with answering interview questions. Additionally, individual and focus group interviews were transitioned from an in-person to a virtual format via the Google Meet platform. This was essential to maintain compliance with social distancing guidelines and ensuring the safety and security of all participants. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

caused some of the Virginia SOL assessments to be cancelled, thus preventing participants from supporting descriptions of their lived experiences with quantitative data such as district-wide assessments (i.e., Northwest Evaluation Association Measures of Academic Progress [NWEA MAP]) and statewide assessments (Virginia SOL).

The delimitations of this study were associated with identifying participants with the necessary experience as well as the prior knowledge required to adequately answer individual and focus group interview questions. Participants were kindergarten through fifth grade teachers with previous experience within the traditional and year-round school year calendars at Browning Elementary School or Thompson Elementary School within Brickwood County Public School System. The rationale behind the decision to define the scope and focus of the study in this manner was to ensure that participants possessed teaching experiences within the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar at the same school. Additionally, this was essential to participants' ability to discuss the school culture/climate of their building and grade level or content area teams within both calendar structures. Elementary teachers were chosen as the sample for this study because the year-round school year program was only being implemented at the elementary level in Brickwood County Public Schools. Another notable delimitation was that both Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools are Title I schools. Finally, Browning Elementary and Thompson Elementary Schools were chosen for this study because they were the only schools in Brickwood County Public School System utilizing the year-round school year calendar.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and delimitations, there are multiple recommendations for future research. Future studies examining the revision of the instructional

calendar could utilize a mixed methods approach to align the qualitative data (e.g., teachers' perspective of the impact of the year-round school year calendar on social-emotional health and student learning) with quantitative data (e.g., student behavior data, student attendance data, and academic achievement data from the NWEA MAP and Virginia SOL; teacher attendance data, teacher turnover ratio, teacher transfer data, employee assistance program participation). Another recommendation is that future studies utilize a comparative qualitative approach. Future studies could also expand the participant sample of the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar to involve school administrators, school counselors, attendance team members, coordinators of assessment and remediation, and behavior interventionists at the elementary, middle, and high school level. Expanding the participant sample could provide a more comprehensive perspective into the full impact of the instructional calendar on various aspects of educational processes. Additional comparisons of both calendar structures could include quantitative data such as teacher attendance summaries, student attendance reports, results of student-teacher culture/climate studies, teacher turnover rates, frequency of employee usage of the employee assistance program, and student discipline data.

Conclusion

The study of elementary teachers' lived experiences within the traditional school year and the year-round school year calendars provided insight into the experiences, school culture, and student learning within both programs. The elementary teachers participating in this study described improved experiences, school culture, and a greater impact on student learning within the year-round school year calendar. Two-to-three-week intersessions at the end of each quarter were credited with allocating time for teachers relax and invest in their social emotional. Intersessions were also attributed with providing the opportunity for pedagogical growth by

affording time to reflect on instructional strategies, analyze data, and plan for targeted instruction moving forward. Elementary teachers articulated that students benefited from the incorporation of intersessions through social emotional health, remediation/enrichment in English and math, ESL emersion in the English language, and targeted interventions for Special Education students.

This study's findings implicated two takeaways, (a) the importance of a positive school culture and (b) the impact of supporting the social emotional health of students and teachers. Brickwood County Public Schools and the educational leaders at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools facilitated a positive culture that was predicated on shared decision making and inclusion of educator voice in the planning processes of revising the instructional calendar. These strategies developed the ownership among teachers necessary to ensure implementation of the educational initiative was done so with fidelity. This study's findings also implicated the importance of being aware of the impact of social emotional health. While the revision of the instructional calendar was implemented to improve the impact on student learning, all elementary teachers participating in this study described their preference for the year-round school year calendar because of the opportunity to decompress and rejuvenate at the culmination of each quarter. As the education profession becomes increasingly demanding, this study's findings encourage policy makers and educational leaders to ensure decision making moving forward focuses on ensuring a positive and supportive school culture in its buildings and a concentrated effort to support the social emotional health of students and teachers.

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APPENDIX A**IRB APPROVAL LETTER****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 21, 2020

Michael Teasley
Vonda Beavers

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-41 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE TRADITIONAL AND YEAR-
ROUND SCHOOL YEAR CALENDARS

Dear Michael Teasley, Vonda Beavers:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) 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 the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). 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 at least one of the following criteria is met:

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).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of

continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications 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

APPENDIX B
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH LETTER

July 21, 2020

[REDACTED]

I am a Dean of Students at Thompson Middle School, as well as a doctoral student at Liberty University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctorate degree in education, I am currently researching “The Year-Round School Year Calendar.” More specifically, the title of my dissertation is “A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Teachers’ Lived Experiences in the Traditional and Year-Round School Year Calendars.” As a result, I would like to request permission to interview teachers at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools who have experience teaching within both the traditional and year-round school year calendars.

The overarching goal of my study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. My research will be predicated on utilizing teachers’ experiences in both calendar formats as a lens for comparing the traditional calendar to the year-round calendar and identifying the opportunity for growth moving forward. I plan to use pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of participating teachers, their school assignments, as well as our school division.

A copy of individual interview questions and focus group questions will be provided for your review. If granted permission to conduct research in Brickwood County Public Schools, I will also provide a copy of my finished dissertation as soon as it is completed to ensure complete transparency. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience at [REDACTED]

Sincerely

Michael Teasley, Ed.S
Dean of Students
Thompson Middle School

APPENDIX C

FACULTY EMAIL AND PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Greetings Thompson/Browning Elementary families!

I hope all is well with you and your loved ones! My name is Michael Teasley and I am a Dean of Students at Thompson Middle School, as well as a doctoral student at Liberty University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership, I am currently researching “The Year-Round School Year Calendar.” More specifically, the title of my dissertation is “A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Teachers’ Lived Experiences in the Traditional and Year-Round School Year Calendars.” As a result, I am in search of teachers from Thompson/Browning Elementary Schools who have experience teaching within both the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs. Participants will be asked to complete a virtual or phone interview, a virtual or phone focus group interview and a post focus group journal. Additionally, participants will be provided the alternative of completing an online questionnaire in lieu of the virtual/phone individual and focus group interviews.

The overarching goal of my study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs. My research will be predicated on utilizing teachers’ experiences in both calendar formats as a lens for comparing the traditional calendar to the year-round calendar and identifying the opportunity for growth moving forward. I plan to use pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of participating teachers, their school assignments, as well as our school division.

If you are interested in participating in this study, consent information is provided at the following link: Participant Consent Form. Please type your name and the date into the google form to indicate that you have read the consent information and wish to participate. If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact me directly at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Michael Teasley, Ed.S
Dean of Students
Thompson Middle School

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Teachers' Lived Experiences in the Traditional and Year-Round School Year Calendars

Principal Investigator: Michael Teasley, EdS, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must have acted in the capacity as a K-5 teacher at Thompson Elementary School/Browning Elementary School during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 school years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to interpret the lived experiences of elementary teachers within a traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar while developing a description of the essence of the instructional environment in both programs

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Audio/Video recorded individual interview. 25-30 minutes. (All participants)
 - 1a. Online questionnaire provided as an alternative to the recorded individual interview. 10-15 minutes.
2. Audio/Video recorded focus group interview. 30-35 minutes. (5-8 participants)
 - 2a. Online questionnaire provided as an alternative to the recorded focus group interview. 10-15 minutes
3. Participant journaling after culmination of the focus group interview. 5-10 minutes. (5-8 participants)
 - 3a. Online questionnaire provided as an alternative to the focus group interview prompt. 5-10 minutes

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit by participating in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews/focus groups 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.

- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Brickwood County Public Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study (online questionnaires), please exit the questionnaire and close your internet browser and inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation. Your responses will not be recorded or included in 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 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study Michael Teasley. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's dissertation chair, Dr. Vonda Beavers, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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

Your Consent

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

I 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-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX D
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another.
2. Please explain your prior experiences as a teacher.
3. What do you enjoy the most about being a teacher?
4. Why did you choose to teach at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School?
5. Please share your feelings about the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School.
6. Please explain the difference between the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School and traditional elementary schools in your district if any.
7. Describe the school culture/climate at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School.
8. Please identify the grade level that you currently teach and describe the climate of your grade level team.
9. Please identify and explain the professional development opportunities received in preparation for teaching in the year-round school year calendar.
10. In what ways can the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School be improved?
11. Describe how the redistribution of the academic calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School affects instruction, if any.

12. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to have this conversation. I really appreciate it. One last question: What else do you think is important for me to know about teaching in the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What aspects of the year-round school year calendar set it apart from the traditional school year calendar, if any?
2. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School valuable, if any?
3. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School challenging, if any?
4. In what ways is teaching in the traditional school year calendar different than teaching in the year-round school year calendar, if any?
5. Describe the culture/climate at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School.
6. Describe the various types of professional development opportunities that were administered prior to the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar.
7. Describe the various types of professional development opportunities that were administered after the transition from the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar.
8. Describe your perspective of how the redistribution of the academic calendar at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School influences instruction, if at all.
9. Describe your perspective of how the year-round school year calendar can be improved, if at all.

10. Describe your perspective of instructional practices that are being implemented by the year-round school year calendar program at Browning Elementary School/Thompson Elementary School that could be beneficial in the traditional school year calendar programs in the county, if any.
11. Describe your perspective of the traditional school year calendar's impact on student learning.
12. Describe your perspective of the year-round school year calendar's impact on student learning.
13. Describe your perception of the difference in the impact on student learning between the traditional school year calendar and the year-round school year calendar, if any.

APPENDIX F

THEME DEVELOPMENT

Research Questions	Individual Interview Questions	Focus Group Questions	Themes
(RQ1) How do teachers compare their experiences in the traditional school year calendar to their experiences in the year-round school year calendar?	<p>5. Please share your feelings about the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School.</p> <p>6. Please explain the difference between the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School and other elementary schools in your district, if any.</p>	<p>1. What aspects of the year-round school year calendar set it apart from the traditional school year calendar, if any?</p> <p>2. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School valuable, if any?</p> <p>3. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School challenging, if any?</p> <p>4. In what ways was teaching in the traditional school year calendar and year-round school year calendar different, if any?</p>	Traditionally Stressed to A Year-Round Welcomed Change
(RQ2) How do teachers compare the school culture in the traditional school year calendar to the school culture in the year-round school year calendar?	<p>7. Describe the school climate at Thompson/Browning Elementary School.</p> <p>8. Please identify the grade level that you currently teach</p>	5. Describe the culture/climate at Thompson/Browning Elementary School.	Traditionally Stressed to Year-Round Support

	and describe the climate of your grade level team.		
(RQ3) How do teachers compare the impact on student learning in the traditional school year calendar to the year-round school year calendar?	6. Please explain the difference between the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School and other elementary schools in your district, if any.	<p>2. In what ways was teaching within the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary School valuable, if any?</p> <p>8. Describe your perspective of how the redistribution of the academic calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary influences instruction, if at all.</p> <p>10. Describe your perspective of instructional practices that are being implemented by the year-round school year calendar at Thompson/Browning Elementary that could be beneficial in the traditional school year calendar programs in the county, if any.</p>	An Opportunity for Growth

APPENDIX G

AUDIT TRAIL

Date	Action
Sunday, July 19, 2020	Electronically submitted a request with Brickwood County Public Schools for permission to conduct research at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools.
Wednesday, September 30, 2020	Received permission from the research department of Brickwood County Public Schools to begin data collection at Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools.
Tuesday, October 6, 2020	Emailed Browning and Thompson Elementary School Principals to obtain permission to interview educators with experience teaching within the traditional and year-round school year calendar programs. The participant consent form was linked into the emails to both principals.
Wednesday, October 7, 2020	Begin receiving electronically completed participant consent forms from Browning and Thompson Elementary School teachers.
Thursday, October 8, 2020 – Wednesday, November 18, 2020	Conducted virtual individual interviews with teachers from Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools
Thursday, November 19, 2020 – Tuesday, December 8, 2020	Repeatedly read and analyzed individual interviews.
Wednesday, December 9, 2020	Conducted a focus group interview with teachers from Browning and Thompson Elementary Schools based on commonalities identified from individual interview analysis.
Thursday, December 10, 2020 – Sunday, December 20, 2020	Repeatedly read and analyzed individual and focus group interview transcripts.
Friday, November 19, 2021	Completed member check