TEACHING IN ALASKA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of teachers who relocated to urban fringe areas of Alaska from the lower 48 states. The theories guiding this study are situated learning theory and experiential learning theory. These theories provide the theoretical framework for this study to answer the central research question and sub-questions: (1) How do teachers who moved to Alaska describe their experiences compared to their teaching experience in the lower 48 states? (2) How do teachers describe the challenges they face during their first-year teaching in Alaska? (3) How do teachers describe information needed before making the decision to move to Alaska? (4) How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to stay? (5) How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to leave? Criterion sampling was used in this study to locate teachers who relocated to the second largest school district in Alaska from the lower 48 states. Data were collected through interviews, focus groups, and documents and data were analyzed using Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral. Data analysis revealed common themes for what teachers experienced when relocating to Alaska. Implications of the data were explored along with suggestions for future studies.

Keywords: Alaska, teacher relocation, teacher recruitment, teacher retention

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List of Abbreviations

American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

United States citizens began rushing to Alaska in 1888 in search of gold (Alaska Public Land Information, 2021). Then, in 1898, the United States extended the Homestead Act of 1862 to Alaska for those who wanted to claim 160 acres of land to create their homestead. This resulted in another gold rush from 1897 to 1900, which brought 100,000 more prospectors to Alaska to look for gold. This influx of settlers resulted in a need for more teachers in the area (Mangusso & Haycox, 1996; Protsik, 1996). Through the work of Sheldon Jackson and John Eaton, the government began to take notice of the need for education in Alaska (Smith, 1967). Some research exists on how education was established in Alaska, but relatively little research examines the current differences between teaching in Alaska and teaching in one of the 48 contiguous states. A relatively small amount of research exists on teaching indigenous populations (Torres, 2017; Vincent, et al., 2017; see also Auld et al., 2016; Chain et al., 2017; Mackey, 2017;) and how pre-service teachers in Alaska are immersed in the culture to prepare them for teaching in more remote areas (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019).

This study focuses on narrowing the gap in the literature by studying the phenomenon of teaching in Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states, or the 48 connected states in the United States, through the eyes of teachers who have done just that. These teachers' experiences outline what teachers need to know before making the decision to move to Alaska. This chapter provides background information about the study and how it relates to the researcher. This chapter also provides a problem statement, the general purpose of the study, and its significance. The research question and sub-questions are presented and tied to current literature and learning theories. Relevant terms used in this study are also defined at the end of this chapter.

Background

An adequate amount of research has been conducted on the topics of teaching indigenous populations (Carton, 2018; Chain et al., 2017, Torres, 2017;), school types (Eyles et al., 2016; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019), and the difficulties teachers face when transitioning to a new state to teach (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2015). Little research has examined the challenges and difficulties faced by teachers who move from the lower 48 states to Alaska to teach. According to Kaden et al. (2016), 70% of teachers in Alaska were educated outside of the state, but research only examined educating pre-service teachers in Alaska for teaching in its most remote locations (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Teachers relocating to Alaska are required to take two courses related to teaching in Alaska within their first three years, but these courses are not available to teachers before beginning their new journey as a teacher in Alaska (Alaska DEED, 2021-e) when the information would be most relevant. There are two location types in Alaska, including urban/urban fringe areas and Bush Alaska. Urban/urban fringe areas are much like areas in the lower 48 states; typical stores, restaurants, and other businesses exist. Bush Alaska refers to areas only accessible by boat or plane; these areas are not connected to a road system and do not have businesses found in typical United States cities. The majority of research on teaching in Alaska focuses on those areas in Bush Alaska.

Historical Context

Alaska was purchased from Russia and did not become a state until 1959, but it has been a United States territory since 1912 and has been owned by the United States since 1867 (O'Neill, 2018; Breece, 1997). The United States General Agent of Education first started sending teachers to Alaska in the early 1900s (Breece, 1997). At that time, the teacher was charged with rounding up pupils and teaching all children from the area in a one-room

schoolhouse. These teachers were paid a salary of 90 dollars per month between September and May. These schools were initially created primarily for the Aleutian children since the funding for these schools was allotted for their tribe. All children from the area were welcome in these schools, but many native Alaskans were also sent to the lower 48 states to be educated during this time (Breece, 1997).

By the 1980s, teachers in Alaska earned 170% as much as the national average teaching salary; they earned the highest salary for any state until the early 1990s (Bruno & Robinson, 2003). By 2000, Alaska had dropped to the ninth highest-paid state for teachers. This ranking has remained consistent, ranging between seventh to ninth since that time (NEA Research, 2020). Alaska's economy has not grown as much as other states during this time, which lessened the attraction for teachers moving to Alaska to teach. Bruno and Robinson (2003) reported that other states averaged a growth of approximately 30% in teacher salaries, whereas Alaska averaged about 10% growth. Additionally, they reported that shrinking monetary incentives have increased Alaska's already problematic teacher attraction and retention difficulties. The authors noted that districts try to lure teachers in by emphasizing the beauty of Alaska and the diverse population, but the harsh climate and diverse cultural differences make retention difficult.

Social Context

Alaska is home to 54 of the most ethnically diverse school districts in the country (Carton, 2018). Four of the seven most diverse middle schools, the first and second most diverse high schools, and eight out of the nine most diverse elementary schools are in Alaska (Carton, 2018). This makes teaching in Alaska vastly different than teaching in any other state. Two-thirds of the population of Alaska is White, 14.8% is American Indian or Alaskan Native, 3.6% is African American, 5.4% is Asian, 1% is Pacific Islander, and 7.3% is multiracial according to

the 2010 census data as reported by Carton (2018). This diversity can be a culture shock for some teachers coming from other locations.

Cano et al. (2019) reported that teacher attrition rates ranged from 19% to 36% across Alaska in 2018. The variation depended on school location, with more remote locations seeing the highest turnover. Sixty percent of the turnover rate in Alaska either left the state or left teaching altogether. Cano et al. (2019) also found that teachers educated outside of Alaska were much more likely to leave than those who were prepared in Alaska. This would seem to indicate that those educated outside of Alaska are missing some component that would help them be better prepared to teach in Alaska. Surprisingly, the majority of urban educators were prepared in Alaska (Cano et al., 2019). A lack of knowledge about the culture of indigenous people, arctic temperatures, and high demands for teaching multi-grade level classrooms contribute to low teacher retention rates in rural areas of Alaska (Kaden et al., 2016).

Theoretical Context

Previous studies focused on teaching in Alaska with regard to teaching indigenous populations (Carton, 2018; Chain et al., 2017; Torres, 2017) or in remote areas off of the road systems (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019) and how those factors can increase teacher attrition. However, Maden et al. (2016) found that employees are more likely to stay in a job when they understand their future expectations. These researchers found this to be especially true with experienced employees who have worked for other companies. Unmet job expectations cause low job satisfaction and a lack of willingness for someone to remain in their position (Maden et al., 2016). For these reasons, teachers relocating from the lower 48 states to Alaska need more information about what to expect in this new teaching environment.

Although Maden et al.'s (2016) study was grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory,

in situated learning theory from Lave and Wenger (1991), and in experiential learning theory by Rogers (1951), it is expressed that adults gain information by being in a situation or experience. This would mean that teachers who have taught in the lower 48 states and relocated to Alaska would be the best source of information for portraying future expectations to teachers who could potentially relocate.

This research describes the lived experiences of teachers who relocated from the lower 48 states to Alaska. A transcendental phenomenological research study was conducted using interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Sharing the experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska, in their own words, provides insight into both the recruitment and retention of teachers in Alaska. It may also provide a better understanding of what to expect for those considering relocating to Alaska.

Problem Statement

The problem is that there is not enough information available on the experiences of teaching in Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states. This causes teachers to relocate without adequate background knowledge, leading to higher attrition rates. Alaska has a high percentage of teacher attrition (Cano et al., 2019). Adams (2021) found that only 60% of teachers surveyed in Alaska intended to stay at the same school the following year. According to Cano et al. (2019), Alaska's teachers move to different districts within the state at about the same rate as other states, but teachers leave the state or the profession at a much higher rate. Their study suggested that there are unique factors about teaching in Alaska, such as teaching at multiple schools and holding more than one position, that may cause this high rate of attrition. This attrition rate is even higher for rural schools because much of the attrition in urban districts is accounted for with teachers moving to other urban districts (Cano et al., 2019).

Although Alaska is the largest state in the United States, it has the fewest number of teachers and the seventh-fewest number of students (Cano et al., 2019). Alaska is considered a high-poverty state, with over 70 percent of its schools being designated as Title I schools. Teacher retention costs Alaska's school districts approximately $20 million each year. All of these points brought up by Cano et al. (2019) explain why not providing enough information to prospective teachers from the lower 48 states who choose to teach in Alaska is detrimental to the Alaskan education system.

DeFeo and Tran (2019) found that it is more important for superintendents to find the teachers who possess the traits to succeed in Alaska rather than locating teachers who have the best teaching credentials. This is very different from hiring practices in the lower 48 states and something teachers need to consider before applying for an Alaskan teaching position. Before interviewing, this would require some research on the candidate's part to learn more about the regions they would like to work in.

Adams (2021) found that salary, working conditions, and student connections had the most significant impact on teacher retention in Alaska. Teachers stated that they would be more likely to continue working in Alaska if the salary aligned with the cost of living and the salary schedule and retirement systems were improved. These are factors that teachers need to know about and consider before relocating.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of teachers in Alaska who have previously taught in the lower 48 states. At this stage in the research, teachers who have taught in the lower 48 states will be generally defined as teachers who taught in one or more states before moving to Alaska, where they have taught for at least

one year. The theory guiding this study is Roger's experiential learning theory, as it explains the importance of learning by having experiences (Rogers, 1951). This theory explains that adults learn more about a phenomenon by immersing themselves in the situation rather than by reading about it. Lave's situated learning theory also guided this study. This theory states that learning takes place as a result of situations and relationships (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These theories relate to this study because they explain the importance of having teachers who have experienced teaching in both Alaska and the lower 48 states explain their experiences teaching in Alaska. These teachers have been immersed in both environments and have first-hand experiences that they can convey to others to help give a clearer picture of some of the challenges teachers may face when they relocate to Alaska.

Significance of the Study

Adequate research has been completed with the indigenous populations of Alaska to assess how their learning differs from the learning of other populations (Auld et al., 2016; Chain et al., 2017; Mackey, 2017; Torres, 2017; Vincent et al., 2017). Some research has focused on preparing preservice teachers to work with more diverse indigenous populations like those found in Alaska (Auld et al., 2016; Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019). A few studies have been conducted on different school types in Alaska (Bosetti et al., 2017; Eyles et al., 2016; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). Studies about the retention and attrition of teachers in Alaska (Bazley et al., 2016; Cooper, 2015; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2016) have shed some light on why Alaska has a difficult time keeping teachers, but studies have not been conducted to describe the experiences of teachers in Alaska who began their careers in the lower 48 states. This information is needed to clarify what teaching in Alaska is like after teaching in the lower 48 states to help better prepare teachers contemplating making this decision.

The practical significance of this study is that if Alaskan school districts understand what is most challenging and different for teachers coming from the lower 48 states, they can better prepare teachers for their positions in the future. The districts will also have a better idea of what qualities to look for in a candidate who will remain in their position longer. If the district knows what makes teachers least likely to stay, and it is something within their control, they can improve those conditions. They can also emphasize the positive aspects of teaching in Alaska and accentuate the things that make teachers want to continue teaching in Alaska.

This study could also be a resource for teachers contemplating a move to Alaska. The move would be less intimidating for teachers if they knew what to expect and what significant changes they would face compared to teaching in the lower 48 states. The more information someone has, the better prepared they can be to make decisions or try something new. Teachers need to know about the experiences they should expect with regard to curriculum taught, diversity among students, differing expectations, school types, school locations, and licensure requirements. Teachers can only make informed decisions when presented with all of the information available about the lived experiences of teachers who have made the change previously.

This study expands upon the theoretical ideas of situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and experiential learning theory (Rogers, 1951). These theories explain that people learn by immersing themselves in situations and learning by doing (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogers, 1951). By utilizing these theories for the qualitative study of teachers' lived experiences relocating to Alaska from the lower 48 states, new information about how teachers' experiences, relationships, and situations impact their perceptions can be gained.

Research Questions

Creswell and Poth (2016) assert that research questions help determine the inquiry approach used in qualitative research. These authors recommend five to seven open-ended research questions moving from a broader central question to more specific sub-questions. These questions should not contain jargon, hypotheses, or assumptions and should not create causal or correlational relationships; they should focus on disclosing participants' viewpoints (Johnson, 2017). This study is guided by a central research question and four sub-questions related to the purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of teachers who moved from a lower 48 state teaching position to a similar role in Alaska public schools in an urban fringe area.

Central Research Question

How do teachers who have moved to Alaska describe their experiences compared to their teaching experience in the lower 48 states?

This central question directly relates to the overall focus of this study. The goal of this study is to present the experiences of teachers who moved to Alaska to teach after teaching in the lower 48 states. The aim is to present the differences teachers experienced in Alaskan schools after relocating. Studies have investigated the difficulties teachers face when crossing state borders (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2015) and how local teacher preparation programs can better prepare teachers for the realities of teaching in Alaska (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019). These prior studies do not extend to what teachers new to Alaska should expect; therefore, the query into what differences teachers experience in Alaska is an important one.

Research Sub-Question One

How do teachers describe the challenges they face during their first-year teaching in Alaska?

The research discusses some of the unique characteristics of teaching in Alaska, such as the variety of school types and diversity of learners (Carton, 2018; Chain et al., 2017; Eyles et al., 2016; Torres, 2017; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). The Alaska Department of Education and Early Development website (DEED) (2021-a) also discusses some of the unique curriculum components incorporated into the classroom in Alaska. Some of these topics include teaching social-emotional learning skills (SEL) and Alaskan culture that may not be found in other teaching environments. The literature does not show how these challenges impact a teacher's first year in Alaska after relocating. This question is also grounded in the theoretical framework of this study as it is asking veteran teachers who relocated to describe their experiences during their first-year teaching in Alaska.

Research Sub-Question Two

How do teachers describe what they wish they had known before relocating?

Sub-question two is grounded in situated learning theory and experiential learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogers, 1951). Situated learning theory posits that we learn based on situations and relationships that we immerse ourselves in (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Experiential learning theory asserts that people learn by having experiences (Rogers, 1951). Teachers who have moved to Alaska and made it through their first-year teaching would be able to provide the best insight into the information necessary to make an informed decision. These teachers would be able to provide first-hand accounts of the things that they needed to know before accepting a

position in Alaska. This information would be at the forefront of what teachers were looking for when researching what to expect when teaching in Alaska.

Research Sub-Question Three

How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to stay?

Although teaching in the state of Alaska may present new challenges for teachers from the lower 48 states, it will also present new opportunities (Cooper, 2015; Kaden et al., 2016). Over 70% of teachers in Alaska are not from Alaska (Kaden et al., 2016). This would indicate that there are aspects of teaching in Alaska that are very desirable to outsiders and should be highlighted. Adams (2021) found that most teachers stated they chose to teach in Alaska because they enjoy the outdoors and adventures. The teachers in this study may be able to shed some light on this subject and offer some potential incentives for teachers who are considering moving to Alaska to look forward to.

Research Sub-Question Four

How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to leave?

Teacher attrition is a significant problem in all areas of the country right now, but it is even more of a concern in more remote areas such as Alaska (Cano et al., 2019; Cooper, 2015; Kaden et al., 2016). Kaden et al. (2016) found that retention rates for more rural areas of Alaska are only 77%. That means that each year, these school systems have to hire new staff to fill almost one-fourth of their positions. A better understanding of why teachers may want to leave Alaska could help school systems devise ways to retain the teachers they have or ensure that they are hiring teachers that will remain in Alaska.

Definitions

1. *Alaska native*- Individuals who can prove affiliation with a Native American tribe through their birth mother and/or father with at least one-quarter blood quantum (Langdon, 2016).
2. *Attrition*- Leaving a teaching position in a particular school or district; this can also mean leaving the teaching field entirely (Kaden et al., 2016).
3. *"Bush" Alaska*- Remote Alaskan villages that are not connected to other parts of Alaska via traditional road systems (Bazley et al., 2016). These locations must have supplies flown in, and residents must fly out in order to access many standard American amenities. They are located in the most rural parts of Alaska.
4. *Retention*- Staying in the same teaching setting, such as the same school or district, for more than one year (Cano et al., 2019).
5. *School choice*- Options given to parents about the type of school their child could attend. Options in Alaska include traditional public schools, charter schools, correspondence schools, vocational education schools, alternative schools, and residential schools (Alaska DEED, 2021-c)
6. *Social-emotional competence*- Having the ability to identify and adjust emotions, set and work toward goals, have relationships, care for others, be responsible, and manage social exchanges. This can be categorized into five areas: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and reasonable decision-making (Chain et al., 2017).

Summary

Sufficient studies have investigated the challenges of teaching indigenous populations in locations such as Alaska (Auld et al., 2016; Chain et al., 2017; Mackey, 2017; Torres, 2017;

Vincent et al., 2017) and the hurdles teachers must face to transfer their teaching license to another state (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2015). However, the research has failed to outline the experiences of teachers in Alaska who have also taught in the lower 48 states. This study was designed to give educators who have experienced teaching in both locations the opportunity to convey the challenges and opportunities they faced when relocating to Alaska. The intent of the study is to provide information to teachers who are considering transferring to Alaska to help them make an informed decision. This chapter provided an overview of background information and literature related to this problem. The researcher's relationship to this problem and her experiences were explained, and the problem, purpose, and significance were expounded upon. Research questions and definitions for terms were provided. This qualitative, phenomenological study was created to improve education in Alaska by providing information about the opportunities and challenges those considering relocating to Alaska will face if they choose to make the move.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the array of differences between teaching in Alaska and teaching in the lower 48 states. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, the theories associated with learning to teach in a new state are presented. This is followed by an exploration of the major areas of difference including the differences in school environments, school revenue and expenditures, testing and assessment, curriculum, and teacher recruitment. In the end, a gap in the literature was identified, which presents a practical need for the current study. This is followed by a summary of the findings that resulted from the literature review.

Theoretical Framework

Galvan and Galvan (2017) assert that theories show how variables work together to influence each other. Theoretical frameworks help show how different observations tie together and make sense. Significant theories such as situated learning theory and experiential learning theory have persisted over time and have been applicable to many situations and observations. This section explains how situated learning theory and experiential learning theory help explain how teachers learn new ways of teaching in new environments based on the variables that exist and the other professionals with whom they interact.

Situated Learning Theory

Situated learning theory asserts that learning takes place as a result of relationships and situations (Korthagen, 2010). Teachers work in environments that they must learn from every day. Lave and Wenger (1991) found that Gestalt formation is a process that results from multiple encounters with comparable circumstances in day-to-day life. Teachers must learn about

expectations and how to form relationships with students and other staff members by experiencing those situations. These are not things that can be taught in college coursework. Korthagen (2010) found that teachers do not use most of the information introduced to them in college; experiences help form the background that teachers draw from to shape future practices in teaching.

When embarking on the new endeavor of teaching in a drastically different environment like Alaska, situated learning theory can help explain how teachers acquire the necessary traits and behaviors for being effective in this situation. As teachers learn about their new colleagues, school building, state standards, student population, and other various factors that influence their job, these experiences help mold them into the teachers they must become in order to be successful in this new undertaking. Teachers move from the outer fringe of being a novice in this new environment by learning from other novices and experts until they become the new expert (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential learning is the process of acquiring knowledge by experiencing (Rogers, 1951). Learners must grasp and transform an experience. Kolb and Kolb (2008) describe experiential learning as a cycle that repeats, involving active experimentation, concrete experience, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization. Grasping is achieved in the concrete experience and abstract conceptualization phases, where learners develop their own perception of the experience. Transforming happens in the reflective observation and active experimentation phases, where learners process the experience. This is a repetitive cycle for the learner. According to Rogers (1951), learning should address the wants and needs of the learner and not just consist of memorizing facts. He believed that for the learner to grow, they needed an

environment of empathy, acceptance, and genuineness (Rogers, 1964). Rogers intended for this theory to describe how adults learn from their environments and experiences rather than how children learn.

Adult learners, such as teachers, must feel that what they are learning is meaningful; otherwise it will not be retained (Rogers, 1964). This theory helps describe how the experiences teachers have influence the knowledge they acquire in the field. Teachers cannot gain all of the knowledge they need about teaching in a new state in college or by merely reading about the experience. They must immerse themselves in the experience to fully understand the new expectations and changes in their career. These experiences will stick with them much longer than what they can be told of others' accounts in the field. Teachers can, however, learn from other teachers around them.

Situated learning theory and experiential learning theory help give a foundation for how teachers acquire knowledge when transitioning from one state to another. Due to the lack of research about teaching in Alaska, this is especially true for teachers moving from the lower 48 states, where things are much different. As explained in both of these theories, experiences and relationships help teachers transferring into Alaska school districts learn how to adapt and be successful in this new environment.

These learning theories explain this study in several ways. First, the study seeks to understand the lived experiences of teachers immersed in the phenomenon of relocating to Alaska from the lower 48 states rather than just exploring the literature or talking to teachers in the lower 48 states and teachers in Alaska about their days teaching in their respective states. The research questions, interview questions, and focus group questions are aimed at gathering information about the individual lived experiences of teachers who understand teaching in both

locations. These questions seek to gain a better understanding of what these teachers felt was vital for them to know before choosing to relocate to Alaska because they have the knowledge and experiences that would produce beneficial information for teachers considering making the same transition.

Related Literature

Very little research has been conducted about how teaching in Alaska is different than teaching in the lower 48 states. This is especially true for schools in the urban fringe areas of Alaska. This section presents a synthesis of the existing literature on what research shows regarding teaching in Alaska. The history of education in Alaska, the climate, the different types of schools, revenue and expenditures, testing and assessment, curriculum, and teacher recruitment are explored. Finally, the current gaps in the literature are discussed.

The History of Education in Alaska

Education in Alaska has always been on a different track when compared with the contingent United States. When missionaries began trying to educate indigenous populations in Alaska in the 1870s, many women in the communities decided to work for the missionaries as teachers or translators in schools as a way to help their people prosper (Mangusso & Haycox, 1996). These teachers were required to follow the missionaries' rules and shun some of the practices of their people, such as shamanism. Students learned reading, spelling, geography, writing, and Christianity. Girls were taught domestic work. At the same time, in the contiguous United States, education was being reformed and standardized so that all schools had the same curriculum (Protsik, 1996). Some adults in Alaska also attended classes to learn about Christianity from the missionaries (Mangusso & Haycox, 1996). Students who were converted to Christianity were encouraged by the missionaries to become teachers once they completed

schooling. By the 1880s, missionaries were conducting classes to train teachers for teaching in Alaska (Mangusso & Haycox, 1996). The average teacher in the lower 48 states was unmarried, between 17 and 24 years of age, and untrained (Protsik, 1996).

In the late 1800s, teachers in Alaska had more duties than a typical teacher, made less money, and their day lasted a lot longer than a regular school day (Mangusso & Haycox, 1996; Protsik, 1996). Not only did they teach multiple ages of students, but teachers also served as interpreters between the Native people and the missionaries, taught Sunday school, contributed to school publications, and often had to go out and recruit their own pupils (Breece, 1997; Mangusso & Haycox, 1996). They were expected to be available at all times. The Native teachers did all of this for $250 per year, half of what the White women were paid in Alaska (Mangusso & Haycox, 1996). During this same time period, teachers were paid based on gender, race, and years of experience in the contiguous United States; salaries varied from $600 to $3200 per year (Protsik, 1996).

The two Alaskan gold rushes of 1880 and 1902 significantly increased the state's population (O'Neill, 2018). The state skyrocketed from 32,000 residents in 1890 to 63,000 residents in 1900. This influx of people caused the government to take notice of the state. They established a new capital in Juneau because that was the location of the Klondike Gold Rush of 1902 (O'Neill, 2018). This arrival of Americans to Juneau instigated the building of schools much like those in the rest of the United States (Breece, 1997). From 1884 to 1931, the United States Bureau of Education built schools and other infrastructures in Alaska; the bureau spent more annually on Alaska than all of its other endeavors combined (Smith, 1967). During this time, the federal government stopped relying on religious organizations to help with education as much due to fears of merging church and state along with arguments between different

denominations. During this time, John Eaton, the US commissioner of education who also served on the Bureau of Education, and Reverand Sheldon Jackson, the father of education in Alaska, believed it was most important to teach indigenous populations English, Christianity, and trades that would be suitable for their way of life (Smith, 1967).

In the early 1900s, when the United States government first started sending teachers to schools for the Native Alaskan population in remote areas of Alaska, it was not even a state yet (Breece, 1997; O'Neill, 2018). The government sent teachers from the lower 48 states to teach indigenous populations, while the territorial government was responsible for educating the white population in Alaska (Smith, 1967). Most of these teachers did not last very long and returned to the lower 48 states once the next steamer arrived after they learned about the types of communities they would be working with (Breece, 1997). Smith (1967) reported that many females wanted to go to find a husband and that many teachers returned emotionally broken after their time in Alaska. By this time, salaries had increased to $600 per year (Breece, 1997). Teachers in the lower 48 states were working for equal pay among men and women and moving toward salary schedules, pensions, and teacher certification requirements comparable to what is seen today (Protsik, 1996).

Schools in Alaska consisted of one room where all children were educated together (Breece, 1997). When classes became too large to manage all students at once, groups were split by age so that some students came in the morning and some in the afternoon. By this time, schools in the lower 48 states were divided by age and ability (Protsik, 1996). Russian and Native Alaskan students were educated together, but the schools were primarily funded for the indigenous populations. Unlike in the lower 48 states, where teachers boarded with their students, the schoolhouse also housed the teacher's living quarters in some smaller areas of

Alaska (Breece, 1997; Protsik, 1996). The teacher taught Christianity, sewing, cooking, reading, writing, arithmetic, housekeeping, gardening, carpentry, woodworking, and shoe-making, as well as how to be more civilized (Breece, 1997; Mangusso & Haycox, 1996). Teachers also conducted after-school groups for students to get together in clubs. The schoolhouse became a gathering place for the entire town (Breece, 1997). By the early 1930s the Bureau of Indian Affairs had taken over the Bureau of Education in Alaska (Smith, 1967).

Climate

The climate of Alaska is very different from the rest of the continental United States. Alaska's average temperature is 26.6 degrees Fahrenheit; the next closest state is North Dakota at 40.4 degrees (World Population Review, 2021). The average temperature of the United States as a whole is 51.95 degrees Fahrenheit. Alaska ranks 39th in the area of precipitation, with 22.5 inches annually (Current Results Publishing, 2021). Alaska has the highest average number of snow days of any state, with 144.79 snow days per year (World Media Group, 2021). Two states have zero snow days per year, and those in the middle of the rankings average in the mid-twenties (World Media Group, 2021). These differences could have a significant impact on a teacher's willingness to remain in Alaska.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that occurs during a specific time of the year, typically in the fall and winter (Drew et al., 2021). It affects more than 10,000,000 Americans each year (Peterson, 2020). Women are three to five times more likely to suffer from SAD (Shankar & Williams, 2021). Studies have found that SAD is a result of the loss of daylight during winter, with a higher prevalence in more northern areas like Alaska, where daylight is shorter or nonexistent in winter (Drew et al., 2021). Some of the symptoms of

SAD include sadness, irritability, lack of energy, sleepiness, concentration difficulty, increased appetite and cravings for carbohydrates, and withdrawal from social situations. Drew et al. (2021) found a higher rate of SAD in younger populations, especially those under 40. It also tends to run in families, which would indicate a genetic component (Peterson, 2020). Common treatments for SAD include light therapy, spending more time outdoors, healthy eating, avoiding isolation, and exercising (Peterson, 2020).

School Differences

One of the major differences between teaching in Alaska and teaching in another state was the multitude of public school types available as well as the location of many of the schools. Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (Alaska DEED, 2021-c) reports that public school districts can have typical public schools, correspondence schools, language immersion schools, alternative schools, vocational schools, charter schools, and residential schools. This leads to a plethora of options for parents and students and also to a dynamic that many teachers are not accustomed to. Students in Alaska are only required to attend school between the ages of seven and sixteen (Alaska Bar Association, 2018). Preschool, kindergarten, and other typical early education programs are offered but not required. Alaska's 2018-2019 graduation rate was 80% compared to a national average of 86% (NCES, 2021). School districts are also located in a variety of settings, from the big city of Anchorage to what is often referred to as "Bush Alaska" which is only accessible by aircraft (Kaden et al., 2016). Alaska also tends to get more snow and have a much colder climate than the majority of the United States (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). These differences in school settings make for a culture shock for many teachers transferring to Alaska.

Types of Schools

Before the 1990s, there were not a lot of different types of schools available around the world. Charter schools were first introduced in the United States in 1992 (Eyles et al., 2016). Although the United States allows higher levels of autonomy in schools than most countries, charter schools have higher levels of autonomy than typical public schools. There are also higher expectations for overall performance as compared to public schools. Although charter schools are typically privately owned, they are publicly funded. While charter schools operate independently of public school districts in most of the United States, charter schools are one of the many types of schools available from public education districts in Alaska (Alaska DEED, 2021-c).

Canadian school choice options are very similar to those available in Alaska. Bosetti et al. (2017) report that in Canada, public schools provide choices for families, such as magnet schools, specialist or alternative schools, and online schooling programs. The funding for children follows them to the school their parents choose in both Alaska and Canada (Alaska DEED, 2021-c; Bosetti et al., 2017). Canada offers French immersion schools, whereas Alaska offers Russian and Spanish immersion schools (Alaska DEED, 2021-c; Bosetti et al., 2017). Canada similarly has reservation schools for indigenous students much like those available in Alaska. Like Alaska, Canada allows for boundary exemptions for students wishing to attend schools outside of their zoning; however, parents must provide transportation in these instances (Alaska DEED, 2021-c; Bosetti et al., 2017). Canada offers what they refer to as alternative schools; these are very similar to charter schools in the United States (Bosetti et al., 2017). Alaska also has residential schools for high school students so they can have access to academic and extra-curricular opportunities that are not available in their home district (Alaska DEED,

2021-c). These schools pay transportation costs associated with students coming to the residential school.

Alaska's education system has not been run like the rest of the United States schools, which started out primarily as boarding schools or religious schools focusing on Christianizing Native Alaskans (Breece, 1997; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). In the early 1900s, schools in Alaska were sometimes segregated based on race, where the Secretary of the Interior was charged with formalizing education for Alaskan Natives, but incorporated towns educated children without tribal ties (Breece, 1997; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). Correspondence schools were implemented during the mid-1900s; these would mimic present-day homeschooling programs. Unlike other rural states, in 1959, Alaska was given authority over the education of children (Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019).

Alaska also offers a variety of alternative schools for students (Alaska DEED, 2021-c). For the past 30 years, alternative schools have been used in the United States to give specialized, intense support that is not feasible in the traditional school setting to the most disruptive students (Griffiths et al., 2019). Some of these schools are for general education students who have been expelled from their regular school due to inappropriate or unsafe behaviors. Griffiths et al. (2019) found that aggression, truancy, and disruptive behaviors were the primary reasons students were relocated to alternative schools. Other alternative settings are referred to as day schools for students who receive special education services that are more restrictive than their typical boundary school (Alaska DEED, 2021-c). These schools provide the services and accommodations necessary to keep everyone safe within the school environment. These schools have specialized staff that work in a therapeutic setting on behaviors related to trauma, autism, and other disabilities that cause unsafe behaviors in the school setting. These schools, along with

many other schools in Alaska, are trauma-informed schools that seek to provide a safe setting for all students (Alaska DEED, 2021-c).

Over time, public correspondence schools have evolved and have been financed by the state; the state subsidizes families who choose to homeschool (Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). These schools are currently run by public school districts and the Alaska DEED (Alaska DEED, 2021-c). There are also private homeschool programs available to families. The programs initially came about due to the difficulty reaching all students across the half of a million miles of Alaskan land (Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). Some students participate in certain classes on school campus and complete other coursework at home with a curriculum that has been approved by the school system for reimbursement (Alaska DEED, 2021-c). Other students do virtual homeschooling, where they work on assignments with a teacher who keeps check on their progress through a virtual curriculum adopted by the school system. Additional options take the more traditional route of homeschooling, where parents control where and what their children learn. There are many types of homeschools in Alaska, but it is unknown how many students participate because students who choose to learn from home are exempt from compulsory attendance laws (Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). Much like the rest of the world, much of Alaska moved to remote learning in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic (Kaden, 2020).

School Location

Alaska is home to 54 of the most culturally diverse school districts in the country (Carton, 2018). Although Alaska is the largest of the 50 states, it has the fifth smallest population (Carton, 2018). It is the most sparsely populated state in the United States (Peyton et al., 2021). There are many remote areas in Alaska that result in very small schools with multiple grades in one classroom. These classes may have very small student-to-teacher ratios, but that teacher is

responsible for teaching students at all levels (Bazley et al., 2016). Kaden et al. (2016) found that 69% of teachers in Arctic Alaska taught at least one multi-grade level class. These areas are often referred to as “Bush” Alaska. They make up 53% of the schools in Alaska (Munsch & Boylan, 2018). Some schools have as few as 20 students (Cano et al., 2019). There are typically no roads connecting these communities to other areas of Alaska; the only way to access these villages is by small planes, which transport people and food in and out of the community (Kaden et al., 2016).

A small portion of schools in Alaska are on the road system (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2021-b). Some are large schools like those in Anchorage that can serve thousands of students. Others are in urban areas that serve hundreds of students, much like other schools in small cities in the lower 48 states. There are no urban schools in the North and Southwest regions of Alaska (Cano et al., 2019). Eighty percent of students are located in urban and urban fringe areas of Alaska; 55 percent of those are in urban schools.

Alaska has a very diverse population, with 14.8% of the population considered Native American or Alaskan Native as compared to 2.4% of the population for the United States as a whole (Carton, 2018). Auld et al. (2016) assert the importance of teachers listening to the community in these remote locations in order to better understand their culture and how to teach without damaging their unique way of life. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages indigenous tribes to exert greater control over the education of students in their remote villages (Mackey, 2017).

School Revenue and Expenditures

Alaska is the only state without an individual income tax or a state sales tax (Dagley, 2021). The majority of funding comes from investment earnings, oil revenue, and federal

funding (Dagley, 2021). School revenue comes from federal, state, and local sources. For the 2018-2019 school year, the federal government contributed $14,438 per student to Alaska (NCES, 2021). The state received the most per pupil in the United States in 2020 at $2,996 per student (Hanson, 2020). This is 15.8% of the state's educational funding. The state contributes 62.6%, and local sources contribute 22.1% of funds (United States Census Bureau, 2021-a). Alaska spent $18,394 per pupil in 2019; this is the sixth highest per pupil amount in the United States behind New York, Washington D.C., Connecticut, New Jersey, and Vermont. This amount jumped to $19,017 in 2020 (Hanson, 2020). Alaska is ranked tenth in total expenditures (United States Census Bureau, 2021-a). Alaska is ranked the highest in educational spending as it relates to taxpayer income (Hanson, 2020). Alaska spent more than it received during the 2018-2019 school year (United States Census Bureau, 2021-a) but $171.6 million less than it received during the 2019-2020 school year (Hanson, 2020).

School districts in Alaska spend their revenue on many different areas. The largest expenditure was $877,693,322 spent on instruction in 2019 (Alaska DEED, 2020). Operations and maintenance accounted for $299,365,726 of spending. Student activities cost the school districts $34,170,903. Administration and administration support totaled $179,771,356. Over $77,000,000 was spent on student transportation. Spending audits are due in November of each year to the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (Alaska DEED, 2020). These expenditures total over $2.4 billion annually (Hanson, 2020).

Testing and Assessment

Alaska schools use many different assessments to inform decision-making for students. Students are administered the Alaska Developmental Profile (ADP), a kindergarten entry assessment, before being placed in a kindergarten classroom (ATLAS, 2021; Alaska DEED,

2021-b; Ohle & Harvey, 2019). This assessment has been reported to predict later social-emotional skills, academic achievement, and health and wellness outcomes (Ohle & Harvey, 2019). It focuses on physical well-being, health, motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, cognition and general knowledge, communication, language, and literacy (Alaska DEED, 2021-b). Harvey and Ohle (2018) found that many teachers do not use this assessment to inform instruction and found that it is not developmentally appropriate for rising kindergarteners. The researchers also found that many educators were confused about the purpose of the ADP. Teachers' beliefs about the purpose of the assessment influenced how they used the data gathered from the assessment. Overall, teachers reported a major hindrance to be a lack of training on administering the ADP and its intended purpose (Harvey & Ohle, 2018).

Alaska also administered the Performance Evaluation for Alaska's Schools (PEAKS) through the 2020-2021 school year to meet the requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements (Alaska DEED, 2021-b). Students are assessed in mathematics and language arts in third through ninth grade and in science in fifth, eighth, and tenth grade. Alaska DEED (2021-d) recently announced that they would be partnering with the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) to develop a new assessment for language arts and mathematics in grades three through nine beginning during the 2021-2022 school year. NWEA already provides Measure of Academic Performance (MAP) growth assessments for 49 out of 54 school districts in Alaska in the fall, winter, and spring each year. MAP testing addresses reading, language, and math and shows a student's growth as well as achievement. Alaska DEED (2021-d) reports that this will reduce the number of assessments students are required to take and provide immediate results for teachers. The alternate assessment available from Dynamic Learning Maps is used for

students who are unable to demonstrate skills on the PEAKS assessment due to significant cognitive delays. Alaska schools also participate in national assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which is used for the nation's report card data in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade (NCES, 2021; Alaska DEED, 2021-b).

Curriculum

Alaska was one of the five states that chose not to adopt the common core state standards (CCSS), but the standards are very similar (Alaska DEED, 2021-a). Since 45 of the 50 states adopted CCSS, when teachers transfer to Alaska, they must learn a new set of standards that are not taught in the lower 48 states. Alaska chose not to adopt the CCSS because they wanted to ensure clarity of the standards and to keep standards that would address the unique content and needs of the state (Alaska DEED, 2021-a). Fox (2001) stated that standards-based reform could be beneficial to Native populations because of the push for performance-based assessments. SEL and learning about the cultures of Alaska are two areas where the curriculum diverges greatly from the lower 48 states.

Trauma-Sensitive Schools

Alaska has a higher-than-average referral to child protective services than other states (Austin et al., 2019). In 2019, there were 131.3 allegations per 1000 children as compared to a national average of 32.2 allegations per 1000 children (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Native Alaskans have over twice as many reports of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder as the national average (Doyle et al., 2018). Sparks (2019) found that almost half of all students have been exposed to at least one traumatic event, and 20% have been exposed to more than one. Other measures show a higher rate of two-thirds of children having traumatic experiences (Fondren et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2017). These traumatic experiences

vary significantly with 52.7% peer or sibling victimization, 49.6% physical assault, 30.5% property victimization, 24.8% community violence, 11.1% maltreatment, 6.7% sexual victimization, and 5.1% witnessing of family violence (Martin et al., 2017). These adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can cause long-term negative effects on students, such as smoking, obesity, depression, suicide, alcoholism, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and premature death (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). They also cause problems forming secure attachments and produce subpar financial, educational, and social outcomes for students transitioning to adulthood (Jacobson, 2021).

This high instance of trauma results in a need for trauma-sensitive or trauma-informed, schools. More than a dozen schools have either enacted laws or offered grants for schools to become trauma-informed (Sparks, 2019). Traumatic stress causes problems with memory, attention, health, and emotional stability caused by neurological changes in the brain (Sparks, 2019; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Jacobson (2021) found that ACEs correlate negatively with IQ and reading ability along with language, writing, problem-solving, and goal setting. The brain is able to rewire itself with new neural pathways; this is referred to as neural plasticity (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Teachers must stress the value of following rules and regulating emotions for students with a trauma history (Jacobson, 2021). Traditional schools often make students feel unwelcome and further traumatize them; trauma-sensitive schools seek to make students feel welcome and safe (Jacobson, 2021).

Becoming a trauma-sensitive school is more of a process than a program; it's a cultural shift from discipline to understanding and teaching expectations in a sensitive manner (Sparks, 2019). When schools are making the shift to becoming trauma-sensitive, there are several steps to help them ease into the process. Schools will need to start by looking at the role of school and

district leadership; the professional development needed; the services and supports needed by students, families, and school staff; the academic and nonacademic strategies needed; the school policies that will need to be revised; and how to actively engage families (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). The characteristics of a trauma-informed school are an ability to understand the effects of trauma, to support students in a way that makes them feel safe, the ability to address student needs holistically, to connect students to the school community, to embrace collaboration, and to anticipate and adapt to the needs of students (Jacobson, 2021). There are many barriers present that could potentially hinder the process for schools becoming trauma-sensitive, including a lack of support from administrators and teachers, challenging teacher demands, parent disengagement, the negative connotation surrounding mental health, and culture and language barriers may make it difficult for teachers to recognize trauma responses in students (Martin et al., 2017).

Many different frameworks exist for becoming a trauma-sensitive school. Some of these models follow the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model that schools use to help students academically and behaviorally (Fondren et al., 2020). All students receive supports in the first tier, which help develop problem-solving and social-emotional skills. Tier two students are those at-risk for trauma, and they would get instruction in self-regulation along with some group therapy. The third tier of students would be those who have experienced significant trauma; they would receive the services of the first two tiers along with wrap-around services, community-based services, and cognitive behavioral therapy (Fondren et al., 2020). Another model is the Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) model, which emphasizes understanding stress, creating safe environments, building compassionate relationships, fostering SEL, including cultural responsiveness, and empowering and

collaborating (Jacobson, 2021). Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement and Resilience (CLEAR) is another program that focuses on professional development in the areas of physical and emotional safety, predictability, and consistency (Jacobson, 2021).

Jennings (2019) stressed the importance of positive relationships with teachers early on. Students' positive or negative relationships with teachers tend to stay consistent throughout their schooling. Teachers can become confused once they understand the effects of trauma (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). They struggle with teaching or providing mental health services and focusing on the whole class or the struggling student. However, strategies that are beneficial for helping students exposed to trauma feel safe and successful can be helpful for all students (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). Minahan (2019) suggests that teachers expect unexpected responses, have thoughtful interactions, intentionally build relationships, promote consistency and predictability, teach students to change what they are thinking about, give supportive feedback that reduces negative thinking, build in times for students to feel competent, and limit exclusionary practices.

Children who have experienced repeated trauma show symptoms varying from aggression to withdrawal and isolation (Martin et al., 2017). Triggers that result from those experiences differ greatly from sights, smells, sounds, to touch or taste; this makes it very difficult for teachers to know what will elicit a stress response from students (Martin et al., 2017). Jennings (2019) found that three things help predict better outcomes for students who experience trauma: strong child-caregiver relationships, good cognitive skills, and the ability to self-regulate in the areas of emotions, attention, and behavior. She stresses the importance of a calm, predictable, and safe learning environment full of care and respect to help children heal. Despite challenges in implementing trauma-sensitive practices, schools have shown that these

processes can improve graduation rates, test scores, and grades and reduce anxiety, suspensions, and trauma symptoms (Martin et al., 2017).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL instruction has become more prevalent in recent years (Sparks, 2018). More than two-thirds of schools report that they teach SEL skills to students, but only 20 percent of teachers report feeling adequately prepared to teach these skills. Teachers are essential socializers for students, and their beliefs about SEL and emotional intelligence have a positive correlation to how comfortable they are in effectively implementing the SEL curriculum (Poulou et al., 2018). Poulou et al. (2018) found that teachers need more instruction in emotion vocabulary, emotion concepts and preferences, and causes and interpretation of emotions in order to effectively teach SEL to students. No influence was apparent based on teacher culture or ethnicity (Poulou et al., 2018).

Eklund et al. (2018) found that all 50 states have SEL standards for preschool, but only 11 states have separate SEL standards for K-12 students. Many states imbed these concepts in physical education standards. Alaska's state standards include an area referred to as skills for a healthy life (Alaska DEED, 2021-a). These are stand-alone standards that address SEL needs for students and are taught in classrooms across the state. Alaska's standards align with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) standards (Alaska DEED, 2021-a; CASEL, 2021). These standards address self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2021; Ross & Tolan, 2018). Researchers suggest that these skills are just as important for having a successful life as cognitive skills (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

Elias (2019) stated that traumatic experiences result in a need for trauma-informed education and explicit teaching in the area of SEL. He suggested that effective SEL instruction is based on research, is taught in the context of real-life situations, involves family-school-community relationships, is part of a caring school environment, and provides support for students and staff to further develop these skills. The most beneficial SEL programs include sequenced activities, active participation, social skills components, and targeted specific SEL skills (Fondren et al., 2020). Having clearly defined moral expectations for students and school staff helps lead students toward a positive future where they can use their social-emotional skills in a productive manner (Elias, 2019). Poulou et al. (2018) found that preschool-aged children have behavioral difficulties due to anxiety, sadness, social withdrawal, fearfulness, overactivity, poor impulse control, noncompliance, aggression toward peers, and tantrums. These behaviors can predict future adjustment problems, but explicit instruction in SEL skills can work as an early intervention to prevent future issues (Poulou et al., 2018). CASEL (2021) also asserts that SEL instruction increases academic achievement by 11 percent.

Chain et al. (2017) found that SEL was critical for students of Native American or Alaskan Native origins. The authors found that although SEL was important for students of all ethnicities and backgrounds, social emotional skills were a strong predictor of academic achievement for Native populations. This population has disproportionately higher discipline referrals than White students, especially at the high school level (Gion et al., 2018). Teaching social-emotional skills could help narrow achievement gaps found in Native American and Alaskan Native populations (Chain et al., 2017). CASEL (2021) reports positive impacts on academics, conduct problems, emotional distress, and drug use for up to 18 years after SEL instruction.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

SEL curriculum and trauma sensitivity has been embedded in the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for many schools (Eklund et al., 2018; Fondren et al., 2020). MTSS is the retitling of the Response to Intervention Process brought about by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization of 2004 (Jimerson et al., 2016). The emergence of RTI was to serve students who were struggling, help at-risk students, improve achievement, and provide data to help identify students in need of special education services more quickly and accurately (Jimerson et al., 2016). MTSS is a continuum of services created to meet the individual needs of students to determine the appropriate levels of support (Eklund et al., 2018). These services can be in the areas of academics, behavior, and SEL (Eklund et al., 2018).

The RTI/MTSS process has three tiers for student interventions. These tiers include intervention strategies that are matched to student needs in different areas (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). The first tier is for all students to receive high-quality instruction and universal screening (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020). These are considered universal supports for the whole class (McCart & Miller, 2019). The second tier is for some students who need additional support. The third tier is for those few students who need intense additional support. It is essential that this model imbed not only additional supports but also screeners at every level to ensure early identification of students who need extra assistance (McCart & Miller, 2019). These processes were implemented to ensure students are identified early instead of waiting for failure before intervention (Kearney & Graczyk, 2020).

In 2019, the United States Department of Education created the Comprehensive Center Network Program, which assists states in implementing their Every Student Succeeds Act

(ESSA) plans and improves student performance (Region 16 Comprehensive Center, 2021). States were organized into 19 regions; Alaska, Oregon, and Washington are part of region 16. These are the state initiatives to implement RTI or MTSS support initiatives (Jimerson et al., 2016). There are currently two projects through this initiative; one focuses on literacy for kindergarten through third grade, and the other is called AK Rise, which works on improving student and teacher engagement and student outcomes in more isolated areas (Region 16 Comprehensive Center, 2021).

Incorporating Culture

The Alaska DEED website contains standards for culturally responsive schools. These standards emphasize the importance of teaching students about the language, history, culture, and physical environment that they live in to ensure students are informed and able to carry out local traditions (Alaska DEED, 2021-a). Vincent et al. (2017) stated the importance of incorporating culturally relevant material into instruction as well as providing information in a culturally suitable method so as not to isolate Native students. Torres (2017) reported that many people believe standardized assessments are unfair to minority groups, but his findings show that cultural discontinuity actually had a positive correlation to standardized test scores in the area of reading.

The University of Alaska has sponsored many projects to promote teaching Alaskan Native culture. The Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (1998) developed standards for culturally responsive schools that applied to students, educators, curriculum, schools, and communities. The Alaska Native Curriculum Project was created to develop a curriculum for Alaska Native histories and to create resources for educators (Ongtooguk, 2005). The University of Alaska (2006) also created the Alaska Native Knowledge Network as a place to compile

Alaska Native knowledge systems and ways of knowing. The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative was created as an educational reform strategy for rural schools in Alaska (Hill et al., 2006). These projects were created in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but little funding has gone toward these initiatives in the last 10 to 15 years (Ongtooguk, 2005).

The United States government recognizes over 550 tribes and has over half a million students from those tribes enrolled in schools across the country (Riser et al., 2020). Although American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN) students are still a minority, they make up almost 15% of the population in Alaska (Carton, 2018). Riser et al. (2019) report that this population often performs two to three grade levels below their peers. The researchers also report that only one in six Native students is proficient in reading and one in four in math. This is evident as early as kindergarten. AIAN students also have higher absenteeism and dropout rates, as well as unique education placement (Chain et al., 2017; Riser et al., 2019). Home literacy and shared-book reading can help significantly reduce these occurrences (Riser et al., 2019).

Teacher Recruitment

Now, Alaska offers virtual teacher recruitment opportunities as well as job fairs in many of the lower 48 states and Alaska (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2021-a). Forty-five of the 59 districts in Alaska participate in these job fairs to recruit teachers for their district. Superintendents fly down to participate in these recruitment events and find candidates who will fit into their school culture. Adams' (2021) findings suggested that Alaska conduct an independent recruitment audit to review the procedures that are currently in place for recruiting teachers. Part of the recommendations for this review include creating a state-wide recruitment website where potential candidates could apply to multiple school districts with one application. DeFeo and Tran (2019) assert that environmental fit is more important in Alaska than the

credentials found on a resume; this is currently not addressed through online applications and must be evaluated by the hiring administrator. Only 33% of vacancies in Alaska are able to be filled with recent graduates from within the state; therefore, these outside recruitment events are crucial for filling positions in the school systems (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2021-c). Alaska needs to recruit 900-1000 teachers from out of state in order to fill vacancies each year (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2021-b).

Only 7.4% of teachers in Alaska are American Indian/Alaskan Native (NCES, 2021). Students show more gains in achievement when their teacher is of the same ethnicity as they are. They also have lower rates of absenteeism and fewer suspensions (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Indigenous teachers also have a better understanding of student culture and learning styles (Tetpon et al., 2015). In Alaska, 22.78% of students are American Indian/Alaskan Native (NCES, 2021). In rural school districts, this population can be close to 80% of students (Tetpon et al., 2015). Minority teachers are also perceived in a more positive light by all students than White teachers (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). In the ’70s, many initiatives focused on recruiting indigenous teachers, but these efforts never grew the ratio of Alaska Native teachers above 5% (Tetpon et al., 2015). Tetpon et al. (2015) asserted that future efforts to recruit indigenous teachers should include input from elders, parents, and community leaders.

More remote areas of Bush Alaska have offered pre-service teachers the ability to participate in short practice teaching experiences in remote villages as a recruitment opportunity (Boylan & Munsch, 2007; Munsch & Boylan, 2018). These programs allow teachers to understand the culture and climate before committing to a long-term position. Six of the 13 students participating in the Alaska Pacific University program found that they had a more positive perception of teaching in rural villages in Alaska after this experience. Pre-service

teachers are able to become grounded in a contextually applicable understanding of teaching in this environment (Munsch & Boylan, 2018). This is only available to teachers in pre-service education programs in Alaska, but this opportunity could be beneficial to teachers considering relocating to this environment. Some boroughs in Alaska offer teacher mentoring programs for new teachers or new to Alaska teachers, as does the National Education Association of Alaska, but an educator induction program framework committee has been suggested to improve teacher recruitment efforts (Adams, 2021).

Licensure

Teachers are much more likely to find positions within the same state than to move across state lines (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Teachers were four to seven times as likely to relocate within the state as across state borders (Goldhaber et al., 2015). Goldhaber et al. (2017) found that although teaching should be an easily portable career, individual state licensure requirements that are costly to transfer and the inability to move pension plans across state lines make it an unappealing process. Considering the low population and the limited university options for teacher education in Alaska, most teachers would need to transfer their certification from another state to become eligible to teach in Alaska. More than 70% of teachers in Alaska were not educated there (Kaden et al., 2016).

Teachers relocating to Alaska from the lower 48 states must complete several steps in order to transfer their teaching certificate. The first certification received is only valid for one year; to obtain this certification, teachers must submit transcripts, out-of-state certification, an application, an FBI fingerprint card, and $260 (Alaska DEED, 2021-e; NASDTEC, 2021). To extend that certificate after the first year, teachers must pass a basic competency exam and submit results to the Alaska DEED; this is a common requirement for teachers that can often be

transferred from one state to the next (Goldhaber et al., 2015). After completing two years of teaching, teachers must have taken and passed a graduate-level Alaska Multicultural course and an Alaska Studies course to be eligible for a professional certificate. These must be completed during the first two years of teaching in Alaska to renew a teaching certificate for a third year (Alaska DEED, 2021-e; NASDTEC, 2021). After undergoing all of these steps, teachers still do not receive credit for all of their experience in other states; boroughs cap the number of years a - teacher may claim on the salary schedule (Adams, 2021).

Retention

Most teacher education programs do not prepare teachers for the remote teaching areas in parts of Alaska where there are no major businesses or roads connecting them to the outside world (Bazley et al., 2016). Teacher retention rates in these areas are 77% as compared to 94% in urban areas (Kaden et al., 2016). Only about 70% of teachers in Alaska plan to remain in Alaska (Peyton et al., 2021). A lack of knowledge about the culture of indigenous people, arctic temperatures, and high demands for teaching multi-grade level classrooms contribute to low retention rates in rural areas of Alaska (Kaden et al., 2016). Cano et al. (2019) found that a higher percentage of teachers who leave rural communities relocate to different rural communities.

Superintendents of rural districts in Alaska report that teachers leave to be closer to family and amenities; they also want to purchase homes and build equity which is often not possible in more remote areas (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). DeFeo and Tran (2019) also found that teachers found extreme temperatures and extended periods of darkness to reduce the likelihood of retention. In a survey of Alaskan teachers, Adams (2021) found that the following six areas need to be addressed in order to recruit and retain teachers: strengthening working conditions,

developing leadership, restructuring retirement options, enhancing recruitment efforts and opportunities, creating paraprofessional pathways, and streamlining certification and recertification.

Alaskan superintendents and principals have tried various ways to improve teacher retention. New teachers receive an average of 81.7 hours of interviews, training, and orientation (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Superintendents spend an average of 64.8 hours per position for selecting and hiring activities. One key component of this process for superintendents is finding candidates who will be the right fit for their community. Superintendents in rural Alaska encourage new and potential teachers to embrace community connections and develop relationships that will help tie teachers to the village (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). University of Alaska Fairbanks (2021-a) recommends that candidates research school districts before signing contracts and accepting positions to ensure they understand the environment they will be working in. Adams (2021) suggests that superintendents assess the health of their district and implement strategies to improve the school climate to enhance retention rates.

Tenure

When a teacher earns tenure, she cannot be fired or laid off without cause (Hirshberg et al., 2015). Tenure laws were adopted in Alaska before it became a state. Cooper (2015) found that Alaska's teachers are granted tenure after three years. However, Alaska's teachers are protected at the minimal level allowable once achieving tenure; this means that there are still ways to dismiss teachers with minimal cause once they achieve tenure (Cooper, 2015). This is different from many other states that make it very difficult to remove teachers once they have attained tenure. According to Hirshberg et al. (2015), tenured teachers in Alaska can be dismissed for incompetency, immorality, substantial noncompliance, lack of progress on an

improvement plan, or budget cuts. While tenured teachers can take positions of those who are untenured in the event of a reduction in the workforce, tenured teachers can still be laid off during that time (DeFeo et al., 2020). Tenured teachers can be reassigned to different schools or positions and are not promised a specific salary. All states do not currently offer teachers tenure at any level (Goldhaber et al., 2015), so this could be considered an incentive for teachers considering relocating to Alaska. Tenure does not transfer from one state to another or one district to another; however, in Alaska, it only takes two years to gain tenure when moving between districts in Alaska (DeFeo et al., 2020).

Retirement

Teachers in Alaska also have very different retirement outlooks than teachers in other states. Government employees do not contribute to social security in Alaska; therefore, they are unable to receive social security benefits upon retirement (Abashidze et al., 2020; Aldeman, 2019). This is due to the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO) (Franklin, 2018). WEP affects workers who have non-covered public pensions and worked at least ten years in the private sector that are eligible for Social Security benefits due to those earnings. It can reduce Social Security earnings by up to $447.50. GPO can reduce a spouse or survivor's Social Security benefits by two-thirds of the amount of the pension with no maximum (Franklin, 2018).

In 2018, the state of Alaska contributed $111,757 to teacher pensions which constituted 64% of the contributions from the state and school district (Costrell et al., 2020). Alaska also removed its defined benefit pension plans for teachers and changed them to defined contribution plans in 2006 (Aldeman, 2019). Any teacher beginning their career or transitioning to Alaska after this time would be placed on the defined contribution plan, while those who started prior to

the change remain on the defined benefit plan. Aldeman (2019) reported that it would take 23 years for the pension plan in Alaska to exceed Social Security benefits. Teachers who transfer to Alaska from a state where they contributed to Social Security will receive a reduced benefit at their time of retirement (Aldeman, 2019). In Adams' (2021) survey, retirement was ranked as the fourth highest factor teachers consider when determining whether or not to remain in their current position in Alaska. The findings of this study suggest creating a retirement task force that will address ways retention can be increased through restructuring retirement benefits for teachers. These factors need to be considered when deciding whether or not to relocate to Alaska.

Literature Gaps

Pearson et al. (2019) report that research with Alaska Native populations lags behind other populations due to a history of mistrust for research because of previous unethical and harmful research studies. This leads to gaps in the literature with regard to teaching Native populations in Alaska. Community research partners have expressed concern about the lack of specific ethical considerations for Native communities in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). They are unsure about their ability to apply the principles to research they are asked to oversee (Pearson et al., 2019). CITI training was created to ensure ethical research was conducted; the program provides courses and training in ethics, research, meeting regulatory requirements, responsible conduct of research, research administration, and other topics relevant to the needs of member organizations, individual learners, and society (Hodson, 2021). Pearson et al. (2019) suggest developing culturally appropriate standards for conducting research in these communities.

Although many aspects that are different about teaching in Alaska have been covered in various studies and websites, no research brings all of this together to show what a vastly different position it is. Some of the unique types of schools found in Alaska are located in Canada and in some non-public districts in the lower 48 states where they have been researched, but due to the vastly different culture and environment in Alaska, these make for drastically different atmospheres to work in than what has been reported in the literature. Due to these differences, Alaska also provides other assessment options and curriculum. SEL is a mandatory part of the standards in Alaska because of studies like Chain et al. (2017) that have proven that strengths in social and emotional skills correlate to higher academic achievement. Because the cultures in Alaska are different than in other areas, they make sure to incorporate this into the standards to be taught in the classroom. This also leads to different requirements for teachers transferring to Alaska who would not have the necessary information about the culture. Teachers are required to take two courses in Alaska studies before being given a renewable certificate to ensure teachers understand the importance of culture in Alaska (Alaska DEED, 2021-e). All of these differences make the retention of teachers in Alaska very difficult, especially in more remote areas. These areas, in conjunction with perceptions of teachers who made the move to Alaska, need to be studied to help better prepare prospective new teachers to the area to understand how vastly different teaching in Alaska is.

Summary

Situated learning theory and experiential learning theory help explain how experienced teachers must learn by doing when they relocate to Alaska. There are many differences in teaching in Alaska compared to the lower 48 states. Alaskan school districts offer many different types of schools to students: homeschooling options, charter schools, specific language

immersion schools, correspondence schooling, alternative schools, and traditional schooling. Some of these schools are also located in much more remote areas than schools in the contiguous states. Teachers also teach differently in Alaska; they incorporate more information on SEL, the cultural history of indigenous residents, use the MTSS model, and are trauma sensitive. The literature shows that teacher retention and recruitment are difficult in rural areas like Alaska. Teaching license reciprocity, retirement benefits, and adaptation to the harsh winter climate increase difficulties in these areas.

Minimal research has been conducted to learn about the movement across state borders, but it has been determined that teachers are much less likely to seek employment across state lines as compared to other occupations (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Goldhaber et al., 2015). A few studies have investigated pre-service placements in rural areas with indigenous populations to help prepare teachers to work in those areas (Auld et al., 2016; Bazley et al., 2016; Cano et al., 2019; Kaden et al., 2016; Mackey, 2017). These studies do not have longitudinal results to report whether this helped with teacher recruitment and retention in those areas. No research was found to explore the experiences of teachers who teach in Alaska. Researchers have not interviewed teachers who relocated to Alaska to determine their perceptions of teaching in Alaska and the differences they have observed since relocating. By understanding the different experiences teachers have when moving to Alaska, researchers can understand how to better prepare teachers for teaching in such a unique location.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study seeks to provide a voice to teachers who have relocated to Alaska from teaching in the lower 48 states. This research study attempts to describe the experiences of this population and how those experiences influence their perceptions of teaching in Alaska. Previous research focused on teaching Native Alaskan populations (Auld et al., 2016; Chain et al., 2017; Mackey, 2017; Torres, 2017; Vincent et al., 2017) and how pre-service teachers in Alaska are prepared to teach in "Bush" Alaska (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Very little research has been conducted to determine what challenges teachers transferring from the lower 48 states face when they arrive in Alaska. This chapter explains the research design for the study and the rationale for why it was chosen. This chapter also conveys the setting, participants, and procedures used in this study. The data collection and analysis methods, along with the researcher's role, credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability of the study are described. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

Research Design

This is a transcendental phenomenological qualitative study into the lived experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska from the lower 48 states. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenological studies focus on the lived experiences as described by the participants. A qualitative study is the most appropriate design for this study because the purpose of qualitative research is to study the meanings that people attribute to certain phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process allows teachers to convey a deeper account of the experiences they have had in Alaska. Current research on teaching in Alaska focuses on quantitative studies of remote areas off the road systems and how to teach indigenous students

(Auld et al., 2016; Chain et al., 2017; Mackey, 2017; Torres, 2017; Vincent et al., 2017). No studies have looked at the lived experiences of teachers relocating to Alaska. A qualitative method is most appropriate because it allows teachers to explain their experiences rather than being confined to answering closed-ended questions. This study seeks to add to existing literature by following a qualitative approach to gather insight from teachers through interviews, focus groups, and written accounts of teacher experiences.

Moustakas (1994) explains several aspects that set qualitative research apart from quantitative research: a focus on the wholeness of an experience, a search for essence rather than measurement, obtaining first person accounts through conversations and interviews, understanding that first-hand experiences are crucial in understanding human behavior, formulation of problems and questions that are important to the researcher's interest, and understanding that experience and behavior are a connected relationship between a subject and an object. All of these components are included in this study. The final report includes the voices of the actual participants. The voices of these participants were gained through open-ended questioning that allowed individuals to give descriptive accounts of the phenomenon they experienced (Moustakas, 1994).

A transcendental, or psychological, phenomenological study focuses less on an interpretation of research and more on a description of the experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It focuses on describing the common meaning of a phenomenon for several individuals. Creswell and Poth (2018) go on to describe this type of research as summarizing individual descriptions of an experience into a universal essence. The researcher describes what the individuals experienced and how they experienced it. The information gathered in this study is described by the researcher to convey the experiences of teachers. According to Moustakas

(1994), all knowledge conforms to experiences, and as knowers, there must be a connection between us and the objects we know and depend on. A transcendental phenomenological design is best suited for this study because it allows for rich descriptions of the teachers' experiences and a look at the overall essence and meaning of their lived experiences. Other research designs were not chosen because they would not allow for in-depth descriptions of how teachers experience the transition from the lower 48 states to Alaska or the personal data that can be produced in this type of study to contribute to teachers' understanding of what it is like to teach in Alaska after teaching in the contiguous United States.

Since evidence from phenomenological research comes from first-person reports of their life experiences, the interviews, focus groups, and document analysis that were conducted line up with this type of study (Moustakas, 1994). The participants in this study engaged in a form of communalization due to their ability to shift their perception and conscious experience based on their ability to learn about the experiences of others. The study sought to find the eidos, or pure essence, of the experience of teachers relocating to Alaska. The aim was to find a universal essence of the experience. This study also sought to answer questions with autobiographical and social meaning and significance. Data analysis included epoche, bracketing, coding and clustering along with the ability for participants to review the data collected, also known as member checking, and give feedback to the researcher about whether the information presents a true picture of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study include a central research question and four sub-questions that sought to determine the essence of relocating to Alaska to teach. The following are the research questions:

Central Research Question

How do teachers who have moved to Alaska describe their experiences after relocating from the lower 48 states?

Research Sub-Question One

How do teachers describe the challenges they faced during their first-year teaching in Alaska?

Research Sub-Question Two

How do teachers describe what they wish they had known before relocating?

Research Sub-Question Three

How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to stay?

Research Sub-Question Four

How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to leave?

Setting and Participants

Samples in phenomenological studies are drawn from participants who are experiential experts on the topic being researched (Rudestam et al., 2007). Criterion sampling was utilized to ensure that participants met all of the established criteria for inclusion in this study. The setting and participants for this study were strategically selected to provide an accurate representation of the lived experiences of teachers who relocated from the contiguous United States to one of Alaska's urban-fringe schools. Urban-fringe schools were used because they are the subject of the fewest number of research studies conducted in Alaska's school system.

Setting

Since this study focuses on teachers who have relocated to public school districts in Alaska, urban-fringe public schools in Alaska were the focus for locating participants. Urban fringe, or urban clusters, are areas in Alaska with a population between 2,500 and 49,999 (Alaska Department of Transportation, 2021). This excludes large urban areas such as Anchorage and Fairbanks with populations of 50,000 or more and regions off the road system in Bush Alaska with populations under 2,500. According to Cano et al. (2019), 29,676 of Alaska's 115,888 students were educated in urban fringe areas during the 2017-2018 school year.

The second largest school district in Alaska is located in an urban fringe area and encompasses 46 schools (MSBSD, 2021). This is the district used for this study. The fact that it is the second largest school district, and the largest urban-fringe school district, means that it has a larger population of teachers to choose from to be participants. Of these 46 schools, six are charter schools, three are special mission education schools, 21 are elementary schools, four are middle schools, eight are high schools, and four are K-12 schools. The district is over 24,000 square miles which is larger than the state of West Virginia. It is located just north of Anchorage and has over 105,000 residents. This school district has an enrollment of about 19,000 students and 2,200 employees. Students come from a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and language backgrounds (MSBSD, 2021). Of these students, 76.5% were White, 1.3% were African American, 6.1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.6% were Asian, 0.4% were Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 13.5% had two or more races, and 0.8% were classified as other single race (NCES, 2021). NCES (2021) also reported that there were 988.38 teacher positions in 47 schools during the 2017-2018 school year.

The majority of teachers in Alaska are White. The Schools and Staffing Survey of 2011

reported by NCES (2021) found that 85.7% of teachers are White, 7.4% are Native American/Alaskan Native, and 2.4% are multiracial; the other 4.5% were from other groups with numbers so low that they could not be accurately represented. Teacher demographic information for individual school districts in Alaska was unavailable.

Participants

Participants for this study were teachers who were currently teaching in the second largest school district in Alaska but also taught in at least one other state previously. Criterion sampling was used to select participants for this study. Criterion sampling is used to ensure all participants have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used a screening survey to locate participants who currently taught in a school in Alaska and previously taught in at least one other state. This process for selecting participants was beneficial for this study to gather in-depth data from a particular population of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The screener survey was sent with an explanation of the study being conducted and requirements of participants. The screener survey requested demographic information including age, race, gender, number of years of teaching experience, a list of states previously taught in, number of years teaching in Alaska, current district, and total years of teaching experience.

Since about 70% of teachers in Alaska were educated outside the state, the majority of educators fit the criterion for having taught outside of the state of Alaska prior to their current teaching position in Alaska. Since the bulk of research on teaching in Alaska has been conducted in very remote settings (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019; Kaden et al., 2016), I wanted to gather data from teachers in areas considered to be in the urban fringe. This is where 25% of educators in Alaska are employed (Cano et al., 2019). The initial screening survey was only sent to teachers in this geographic location.

Since this was a qualitative study, a relatively small sample size was used. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend a sample size of three to 10 for phenomenological studies. Vagle (2018) suggests that the larger the phenomenon, the larger the sample size should be. Because one-quarter of teachers in Alaska are potential participants, I sought 12-15 participants for this study. Twelve teachers participated in the study in its entirety. Once screening surveys were returned, I chose teachers who had taught in as many different states as possible in the lower 48 states in an attempt to gain a broader perspective of experiences.

This sample size allowed me to collect data and build meaning but did not require an overwhelming amount of time to analyze data and transcribe interviews. This also allowed for saturation, or addition of all information that can be collected from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This sample size also made it feasible to setup two focus groups to discuss overall findings of the study and come to a consensus on the biggest challenges facing teachers who moved to Alaska.

Researcher Positionality

The initial motivation for me to conduct this research came from the frustrations of not finding enough information about teaching in Alaska once the opportunity was presented to me. In January of 2020, I decided that I needed to change schools after teaching in the same middle school for 12 years. Things had changed so much during that time, and I felt burned out. I searched for other positions in and outside the school systems in Georgia to no avail. I began to search in nearby states, and, as no opportunities presented themselves, I looked farther and farther away. I started seeing postings for multiple school districts in Alaska and decided to apply for a few. The interviews started pouring in, so I felt the need to do some research.

I poured through databases and search engines looking for information about how teaching in Alaska was different than teaching anywhere else. I was extremely disappointed to find only one blog that provided minimal but very disheartening information about teaching in Bush Alaska. Throughout the interview process, I continued asking as many questions as possible to help me make an informed decision. Everyone I talked to had started their careers outside of Alaska but were glad they had taken the opportunity to relocate when it presented itself. In the end, my husband and I decided to make the move.

Once the school year began, I realized just how different teaching in Alaska was. I also realized that the majority of the other teachers in the school were from the lower 48 states and not originally from Alaska. We often talk about how different the life of an educator is in Alaska. I have greatly enjoyed my first years teaching in Alaska even though it is often overwhelming how different it is from teaching in Georgia. As I continued completing coursework toward my dissertation, I realized that this was an area to which research could contribute.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism is the lens that asserts that learning takes place through social interaction (Kalina & Powell, 2009). This study was viewed from a social constructivism paradigm to help me better understand the world in which I work and to better help others understand it (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study followed this assertion through the primary data collection methods. The researcher used social interactions with participants and social interactions among participants to gain insights into their lived experiences teaching in Alaska after teaching in one or more of the lower 48 states. This lens also highlighted why teaching in Alaska might be a different experience than teaching in other states. Vygotsky, the originator of social constructivism, highlighted that social interactions and cultural influences greatly impact

how students learn (Kalina & Powell, 2009). Since Alaska has a diverse student population with some unique cultural backgrounds, social constructivism helped explain the importance of some prominent teaching practices in Alaska.

Philosophical Assumptions

Since this is a phenomenon I have personally experienced, I bring many philosophical assumptions to this study. Philosophical assumptions help promote methodologically sound research designs by providing a conceptually sound basis for those methods (Matta, 2021). It is essential that researchers address their philosophical assumptions and understand how those assumptions impact the research being conducted (Neesham, 2018). Transparency is necessary to frame the research process (Klenke et al., 2016).

Ontological Assumption

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), ontological assumptions are that each individual in this study has their own reality; therefore, I will present the viewpoints of each participant in my research separately. Each teacher will have their own interpretations of the experience of relocating to Alaska based on their teaching background and where they relocated from. This study will seek to highlight those experiences without interference from the researcher's personal experiences. Ontological assumptions also examine how researchers relate to their study (Neesham, 2018). I understand I am situated in the middle of this study as a teacher who relocated to Alaska. This will greatly impact my perceptions and how they relate to other teachers' experiences. My own background, history, and culture influenced my perceptions no matter how hard I tried to separate them from my research (Klenke, 2016). Ontological assumptions help formulate research questions and guide how the study is conducted (Matta, 2021).

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions concern knowledge and how we know what we know (Matta, 2021). Epistemological assumptions need to align with ontological assumptions because epistemology has to do with how we came to know our reality (Klenke, 2016). Since this study is conducted in the context of the Alaskan school district where I work, I was already close to some of the subjects that I was studying. Still, the epistemological assumption is that I will have to minimize the distance between us even more (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The epistemological sphere helped me validate some of my own beliefs (Neesham, 2018). While participants were not experts on teaching in Alaska, they were experts about their experiences. I learned from them and saw things through their eyes to get a thorough understanding of their lived experiences. Based on a social constructivism lens, the meaning was constructed based on participant interactions and practices.

Axiological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2016) assert that axiological assumptions include the value I place on this research and the biases that I have as a member of the community of educators who relocated to Alaska from the lower 48 states. A researcher's values impact the problem choice, guiding theories and frameworks, data collection and analysis, and the presentation of research findings (Klenke, 2016). I place a lot of value in this research since it is information that I would have appreciated before relocating. I had to be aware of my own biases based on my own experiences so that I could bracket those out of the research and not allow them to influence the conclusions of the study and how I coded participant responses. I had to ensure that I was acknowledging the ethical challenges I faced because of the value I place on this research (Neesham, 2018).

Researcher's Role

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the qualitative researcher is a crucial instrument in the study because the researcher collects data themselves by examining documents and interviewing participants. Qualitative researchers develop their own instruments and questions and very rarely rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers. As the instrument in this study, I gathered information from interviews, focus groups, and written documents to gain a better understanding of the experiences of teachers who have relocated to Alaska from the contiguous US. I facilitated the interviews and focus groups by asking initial and follow-up questions to keep the conversation going and explained the instructions for the written portion of the study to participants. I also ensured that participants understood what was being asked of them.

As an educator who relocated from Georgia to Alaska, I needed to remember the biases and assumptions that I brought to the research study. I taught in Georgia for 12 years before moving to Alaska to teach. Because of this, I know the challenges and differences I faced when I began my career in Alaska. I have my own beliefs about why teachers leave Alaska in a relatively short time and what makes them stay. I had to put this aside and not let my own biases and opinions impact the data that was gathered from participants in this study. I also teach in the same district in which I conducted this study. I had to put aside what I thought I knew about teaching in this district to fully embrace what the participants conveyed to me. This was achieved through the epoche process. I understood that each individual came from a different background, teaching position, and state and that my experiences did not align with what the participants experienced. I found that knowing some of the participants of this study beforehand helped them feel comfortable opening up to me and relaying their true feelings about teaching in Alaska.

Procedures

Many vital steps were conducted during this research study. The first step was to locate a chair and committee member for my research. Next, I prepared my dissertation proposal and submitted it to the appropriate committee. Once my proposal had been approved, I applied for IRB approval (see Appendix A). I also applied for IRB approval from the school district. This step ensured that the study followed ethical guidelines (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once approval was obtained, I emailed initial screening surveys to potential participants at schools in the second-largest district in Alaska. I attached informed consent forms to these surveys. Once screeners were returned to me, I sent an invitation to participate to individuals who met the requirements of having previously taught in at least one state in the lower 48. More than 15 individuals were willing to participate in the study and met the study guidelines, but only 12 completed the initial screener survey, the interview, the focus group, and the document for analysis. Only five participants signed up at the initially chosen school site, so I sent invitations to participate out to all teachers in the district. Eighteen teachers completed the initial survey. Seventeen teachers completed the interview process, but only 12 were willing to participate in the focus groups and complete the final document for analysis. Records were kept for qualifying individuals who did not participate in all of the steps in the event that they later volunteered to participate in the final two stages of the process. All individuals who were selected to take part in the study were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews that were audio recorded in person or audio and video recorded through Zoom. Participants then participated in focus groups via video conferencing through Zoom. Recordings were handled in the same manner as interviews. Interviews and focus group dialogue were transcribed from the audio or Zoom recordings by the researcher once the recordings were completed. Participants were then requested to fill out a

form that allowed them to write in specific information about their experiences with curriculum, certification, diversity, climate, workload, types of schools, working with parents and students, and professional development in Alaska. All of this information was analyzed for common themes and universal essences of the phenomenon using Saldaña's coding methods.

Permissions

IRB approval (see Appendix A) was sought from Liberty University and the school district for this study. Because the district I used is large, they have processes in place for requesting approval for various activities. I located the appropriate person at the district office to learn the process for the school district. They granted me permission to conduct my study using district employees. I also gained approval from participants to use their data in my research.

Recruitment Plan

There are 1,017 teachers in the second-largest school district in Alaska (Public School Review, 2021). Based on the fact that 70% of Alaska's teachers are educated outside of Alaska, 712 teachers in the district were educated in another state. During the 2020-2021 school year, 27% of teachers at the primary study site taught in the lower 48 states before transferring to Alaska. Screener surveys were sent out to the staff to determine who qualified for the study and if there was enough interest or if another site needed to be located. Several teachers at the primary school site expressed a willingness to participate in the study. Others were located by requesting participants from other schools around the district by asking for volunteers from the social media page for teachers in the district.

The survey screeners were not analyzed to obtain statistical support but to determine which participants provided the most varied data for the study. Surveys were sorted for participation based on the number of states a teacher previously taught in and the specific states

where their teaching experience was located. Every effort was made to ensure that teachers from different states were chosen. Priority for participation was given to teachers who had taught in multiple previous states due to their ability to provide a broader range of information about how the relocation to Alaska affected them because they will also had information about relocating to other states. In the end, not enough teachers were willing to participate in this study to only select teachers from different states. These surveys also provided participants' demographic data that may have attributed to their lived experiences and their interpretations of those experiences.

Data Collection Plan

I collected data from multiple participants through numerous data collection methods to gain a saturated description of teacher experiences relocating to Alaska from another state. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data collection as a circle that includes “locating a site or an individual, gaining access and making rapport, sampling purposefully, collecting data, recording information, exploring field issues, and storing data” (p. 147). They also assert that the researcher needs to consider all ethical issues in the study, especially those relating to respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. Data were first collected through a screener survey to obtain background information on possible participants. As Moustakas (1994) points out, interviews are the primary method of data collection in phenomenological studies; therefore, participants who qualified for the study then participated in one-on-one interviews. These were followed by focus groups. After the focus groups, participants were asked to complete a written document where they filled in information about different components of their experiences teaching in Alaska.

Individual Interviews

Moustakas (1994) suggests using broad questions in interviews to obtain depth and meaning. These questions or topics need to be mapped out before the interview is conducted. He also recommends engaging in the epoche process before and possibly during the interview process. It is crucial to record the interviews for later transcription. These one-on-one interviews need to focus on a bracketed topic and questions. Moustakas (1994) also asserts that a follow-up interview may be required.

Once participants were selected and consented to participate in the study, one-on-one interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing. Preference for the interview method was left up to the participants to ensure convenience and comfort for them. During interviews, participants answered open-ended questions about their experiences teaching in Alaska and in the lower 48 states. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Individual Interview Questions

The following served as the principal interview questions (see Appendix B):

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Tell me why you chose to relocate to Alaska.
3. What did you know about Alaska before moving?
4. What information do you wish you had before deciding to relocate?
5. Tell me what your typical day is like teaching in Alaska.
6. What challenges did you face during your first-year teaching in Alaska?
7. What were the biggest differences between teaching in Alaska and teaching in the lower 48 states?
8. What do you prefer about teaching in Alaska?

9. What do you prefer about teaching in the lower 48 states?
10. What aspects of teaching in Alaska make you want to stay here?
11. What aspects of teaching in Alaska make you want to leave?
12. How does Alaska's climate impact your willingness to stay?
13. Compare the types of schools in Alaska to where you previously taught.
14. What is the student population like where you teach now in comparison to where you previously taught?
15. What else would you like to tell me about relocating to teach in Alaska?

These questions were used to gather information about the experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska from the lower 48 states. The questions helped to ascertain what participants knew about teaching in Alaska before they moved and what they learned once they arrived and were immersed in the experience. Follow-up questions were added in as necessary for clarification purposes.

Question 1 was an icebreaker question. Moustakas (1994) asserts the importance of beginning with a social conversation in order to help the participant feel relaxed and comfortable with the process. This was accomplished in questions one through three of these interview questions. Questions two and three were used to ascertain the participant's mindset before relocating to Alaska. This helped determine perceptions about what they thought Alaska would be like, which was then compared to what they learned once they arrived. It also helped ease them into the interview process. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the importance of making participants feel as comfortable as possible during the interview process. Question four directly related to sub-question two and helped determine the types of information that need to be made available to teachers who are interested in relocating to Alaska. Rogers (1951) states the

importance of lived experiences in learning. Once teachers had the opportunity to experience teaching in Alaska, they had a better understanding of what teachers need to know before relocating.

Question 5 gave an overview of what a typical day looked like for the participant. This question relates directly to the theoretical framework of experiential learning (Rogers, 1951). By asking questions about participants' experiences, I was able to connect their situations and relationships to the experiences and interpretations of those experiences described by the participant. It also directly relates to the central research question. Questions six and seven also directly relate to the central research question and sub-question one. These questions allowed teachers to describe what it has been like teaching in Alaska and what was different from teaching in their previous state(s). The research discusses some of the unique characteristics of teaching in Alaska that may be challenging for relocating educators, such as the variety of school types and diversity of learners (Carton, 2018; Chain et al., 2017; Eyles et al., 2016; Torres, 2017; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019).

Questions eight, nine, ten, 11, and 12 relate to sub-questions three, four, and five and examine the pros and cons of teaching in Alaska. These questions are also rooted in the theoretical framework of this study because the participants had the experiences necessary to answer these questions (Rogers, 1951; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This information was directly related to current research on attrition and retention in Alaska (Cano et al., 2019; Cooper, 2015; Kaden et al., 2016). These questions helped establish what parts of teaching in Alaska cause high attrition rates and which aspects make teachers want to stay. This information may help teachers contemplating moving to Alaska decide if it is the right step for their families. This information can also help rural fringe districts in Alaska with their recruiting and retention efforts. If districts

know what is most appealing to teachers from the lower 48 states, they can emphasize these aspects of the experience. If the districts are able to change any of the less desirable aspects, then this will give them an opportunity to do so.

Questions 13 and 14 address some of the differences in ethnicity and school types discussed in the literature (Auld et al., 2016; Chain et al., 2017; Eyles et al., 2016; Mackey, 2017; Torres, 2017; Vincent et al., 2017; Wilkens & Kalenda, 2019). These questions helped connect this study to the literature. They also helped determine if past research has focused on the best areas for assisting teachers in Alaska and those considering teaching in Alaska or if future research needs to look in another direction. Question 15 allowed participants to discuss anything that was not previously asked. This question was intended to open the door to other thoughts or experiences that participants wanted to share.

Moustakas (1994) asserts that participants in phenomenological studies can help guide extended interviews in other directions. They can bring about more questions and provide more answers than the researcher had initially been constructed. For this reason, question 14 led to other questions and answers that were not originally intended to be part of the interview process.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data analysis as a spiral. Data management and organization is the first loop in that spiral. They argue that this step may be the most important step in the spiral because how data are organized may hinder or ease the process later when the researcher retrieves the information for comparison. The following step is reading and memoing ideas. Next is describing and classifying codes into themes which leads to developing and assessing interpretations. The final loop is representing and visualizing the data.

Before and after collecting all of the data, I performed the epoche. This was the process of getting rid of assumptions and judgments and elevating knowledge. I then performed phenomenological reduction where I bracketed the questions, created horizontalizations, delimited the horizons and meanings, ensured the themes did not overlap, and created individual and composite textural descriptions. This required me to consider each experience individually. The experiences were described completely without influence from my experiences or the experiences of other participants (Moustakas, 1994).

I also looked at a phenomenon with imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). This means that the phenomenon was viewed from all vantage points with all variations considered. I created a list of the qualities of the experience and developed those qualities into themes. Structural descriptions were considered. A synthesis of the phenomenon included composite textural and structural descriptions of the experience with regard to the noesis and noema, where better ideas and judgments were determined (Moustakas, 1994).

Qualitative research often employs various forms of coding, writing down short words or phrases that symbolically assign attributes to the data gathered (Saldaña, 2013). Advantages of coding include acquiring deep insight into data, making the data easily accessible, structuring data, ensuring transparency and validity, and giving a voice to participants (Skjott, Linneberg, & Korsgaard, 2019). I began by coding for patterns, looking for the same or very similar data that appeared more than once (Saldaña, 2013). I used this data for inductive coding: developing codes using phrases generated by the participants of the study (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This allowed me to create very precise codes from my data and do my best not to base codes on my personal beliefs. I began with open coding, or initial coding, in which I looked at the major categories of information to help answer my research questions (Saldaña, 2013). I then moved to

axial coding, which allowed me to create categories around the central theme (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Saldaña (2013) recommends the use of diagrams during this phase of coding. Finally, I employed selective coding, or theoretical coding, which allowed me to connect the categories to create a hypothesis and story around the central themes of teachers' lived experiences relocating to Alaska to teach (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña (2013) asserts that theoretical coding can be used to move an analytic story in a theoretical direction.

Focus Groups

Unlike interviews, the focus groups allowed for individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon to interact with one another (Morgan, 1997). One advantage of this is that similarities and differences can be observed and discussed. Focus groups should have six to ten strangers per group, with an average of four groups. The format for these groups can include structured open-ended questions or generic topics of discussion. Morgan (1997) asserts that this level of flexibility requires a lot of preparation before the focus groups are conducted.

Moustakas (1994) states that focus groups can be used at any point in the research process. For this study, the focus groups were used to generate more discussion after interviews were complete about the experience of teaching in Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states. As Moustakas (1994) stated, focus groups can allow the researcher to learn about conflicting ideas or for participants to discuss ideas they did not think about on their own. The data collected from the focus groups helped to ensure the saturation of data. These focus groups took place via video conferencing due to how spread out all participants were. Two focus groups were conducted due to the availability of participants. Focus groups were recorded and later transcribed.

Focus Group Questions

The following constituted the topics of discussion for the focus groups (see Appendix C):

1. Describe your experience teaching in Alaska during your first year.
2. Explain how you acclimated to teaching in Alaska.
3. Compare your thoughts on teaching in Alaska now to when you first relocated.
4. Describe what you could have done to better prepare yourself for teaching in Alaska.
5. What are your future plans with regards to teaching in Alaska?
6. What else would you like to share with the group about teaching in Alaska that has not been discussed?

These questions allowed participants to hear the points of view of their peers. The purpose of these questions was to ensure clarity of understanding for the researcher after the initial interviews. Questions were not added after the interview findings but were added as needed for clarity during the focus groups. These questions allowed for discussions among participants where they could agree, disagree, and compare their experiences with others. The intention was for this to open up new avenues of discussion for participants and help them remember aspects of relocating that they may not have remembered during their interviews.

Question 1 began the discussion in a way that did not put parameters on what was discussed during the group. Participants were encouraged to open up about any aspect of teaching in Alaska that they would like to discuss. Participants had the opportunity to relate their experiences to others with similar or different experiences within the same phenomenon. Questions two and three focused more on how teachers adapted to teaching in Alaska to help gain a better understanding of what teachers new to the state should expect. Mrkva and Van Boven (2020) indicate that repeated exposure to something makes it stand out and increases someone's propensity to like something. This question determined if participants have become

more enamored with Alaska the longer they have been here.

Question four allowed teachers to think about what they could have done before moving to Alaska that may have made them more comfortable. Experiential learning theory asserts that people learn by having experiences (Rogers, 1951). Once educators had experienced teaching in Alaska, they were better able to determine what they wished they had known beforehand. This directly related to research sub-question two. Question five looked at future plans for teachers and possible attrition or retention rates for the group as compared to current literature on the topic (Cano et al., 2019; Cooper, 2015; Kaden et al., 2016). Question six gave participants the opportunity to discuss anything that was not previously asked. The intent was for this question to open the door to other thoughts or experiences that participants wanted to share.

All six questions were rooted in the theoretical framework of this study. The questions all sought to get at the lived experiences of teachers who had experienced the phenomenon of relocating to Alaska and who were situated within the context of the second-largest Alaskan school system (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogers, 1951).

Focus Groups Data Analysis Plan

Focus group data were analyzed in the same way that interview data was analyzed. The researcher transcribed all recordings verbatim. Information was then coded based on themes and categories to glean information and create an overall picture of data gathered during the focus groups. Focus group data is built upon the data collected throughout the interview process.

Document Analysis

Bhattacharya (2017) offers many examples of documents that can be collected in qualitative research studies, such as lesson plans, journals, letters, or photos. For this process, she suggests making a list of all of the documents you will need first and why you need them. Then

the researcher must discuss these documents with the participant and ask if there are other relevant documents that could be helpful. Bhattacharya (2017) also asserts the importance of remaining open to possible sources, protecting the identities of individuals, connecting these documents to other data collection methods, and reflecting on how the information gathered relates to theoretical perspectives and the literature review.

Upon completion of the focus group, each participant was asked to fill in a chart about teaching in Alaska with regards to curriculum and assessment, teacher certification, diversity, climate, workload, types of schools, working with parents and students, and professional development (see Appendix D). The purpose of this chart was to allow participants to discuss aspects of teaching in Alaska that may not have been brought up during interviews or focus groups. Participants were given minimal direction with this document to allow for more individualization of ideas. Some documents were typed while others were handwritten at the participants' discretion.

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

The documents were analyzed for any new information that could be gathered to understand the experiences of teaching in Alaska after relocating from the contiguous United States. This information was based on specific areas identified for more in-depth data collection. This was used as a personal artifact document to develop a more comprehensive description of the participants' lived experiences with relocating to Alaska. Coding was used in this analysis, just like in the interview and focus group analysis.

Data Synthesis

I then created a description of the phenomenon experienced by participants. This description included precise quotes from participants' accounts obtained through interviews,

focus groups, and document analyses. I then described how the phenomenon occurred based on participants descriptions of their lived experiences. These descriptions were then summarized to find the essence of the phenomenon of teachers relocating to teach in Alaska. Participants were given the opportunity to read through the statements and descriptions derived from the study to ensure agreement on the essence of their experiences through member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Within the last 20 years, proponents of qualitative research have done much to increase the trustworthiness of their preferred research method (Shento, 2004). Pickard (2013) asserts that trustworthiness in qualitative studies comprises credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Vagle (2018) states that this has been an area of contention in qualitative research studies and that there is no single way to ensure validity in this type of research. He goes on to state that in phenomenological research, trustworthiness has to do with the researcher's ability to sustain engagement with the phenomenon and the participants. He states that the researcher must be open and sensitive to the phenomenon being researched.

Credibility

"Credibility in qualitative research is demonstrated by prolonged engagement with the research participants, persistent observation of those participants, triangulation of the techniques used to study those participants and their contexts, peer debriefing and member checks" (Pickard, 2013, p. 21). Credibility was established in several ways in this study. Shento (2004) states that the opportunity to decline to participate in a study is one way to ensure credibility. By allowing potential participants to opt-out of a study, the researcher ensures that only those willing to participate will offer accurate data freely. Several participants opted not to continue

with this study after the initial interview. Triangulation of data is achieved by gathering information from participants through multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since I conducted interviews and focus groups and analyzed participant documents, I achieved triangulation. Another way to increase credibility is through member checking. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), member checking is seeking participant feedback. The researcher asks participants to review the findings to ensure that she accurately portrays their experiences. Member checking was utilized in this study as another way to ensure credibility.

Transferability

According to Pickard (2018), transferability is the ability to apply the results of a research study from one situation to another similar situation. Creswell and Poth (2018) assert that this can be achieved by providing detailed, thick descriptions with specific details about the setting and participants. Transferability was increased in this study by ensuring that participants had taught in a variety of other states before relocating to Alaska. Rich, thick descriptions of participants' lived experiences were also provided using quotes from the transcribed interviews and focus groups. These detailed descriptions will help the reader fully understand the context of the study as well as the phenomenon.

Shento (2004) also recommends including several elements to aid with transferability. These elements include the number of organizations in the study and their location, restrictions on the type of participants used, the number of participants involved, the data collection methods, how many data collection samples were included and how long they lasted, and the time period where data was collected. All six of these elements were included in this study to help determine transferability.

Dependability

Researchers show dependability by showing that findings are consistent and repeatable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Steps undertaken in this study were thoroughly described to ensure that other researchers can repeat the study. An inquiry audit was conducted by the dissertation committee and qualitative research director at Liberty University. This included a review of the processes and products of the research.

Confirmability

Creswell and Poth (2018) claim that both dependability and confirmability are formed by inspecting the research process. Pickard (2018) also asserts that confirmability is the degree to which findings in a study can be triangulated from multiple data points. Since multiple data points were used in this study, confirmability and dependability were achieved. All data was saved and transcribed verbatim, and direct quotes from participants were used in the final manuscript. Next, I had participants review my findings to ensure that I stayed true to their descriptions of their lived experiences and did not interpret results and descriptions through my own biases; this is called member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Shento (2004) also encourages the researcher to admit their beliefs and assumptions and to recognize the study's shortcomings. These sections are included in this study to increase confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations that I made during this research study. I began by obtaining IRB approval (see Appendix A) from Liberty University before I began collecting data. Participants were also provided with informed consent forms where I described their role in the study and any possible adverse outcomes of participating in the study. This form explained the process for the interview, focus group, and document creation for this study. Participants were informed that they could leave the study at any time if they no longer wanted to participate.

I maintained confidentiality in this study by using pseudonyms for participants and sites at all times. I also maintained password-protected files for all recordings and documents collected electronically. Paper copies of documents submitted to me were kept in a locked drawer. Documents will be retained for three years after the completion of my doctoral degree, and then electronic files will be deleted, and hard copies will be shredded.

Summary

This research study sought to explain the experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska from the lower 48 states. The study was conducted to help narrow a gap in the literature to show the experiences of teachers relocating to Alaska. Narrowing this gap will help potential future Alaskan teachers determine if they should pursue this career choice. Transcendental phenomenological data collection methods were used to gather data from Alaskan teachers to understand their experiences. I analyzed data to ensure trustworthiness. I completed each step of the process ethically and limited potential harm to participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states. Chapter Four offers a description of the participants, findings from the data analysis, and answers to the study's research questions. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings.

Data were collected from participants using interviews, focus groups, and a document that participants were asked to fill in discussing their experiences with certain aspects of teaching in Alaska. The interviews were conducted using Zoom, an online platform for face-to-face meetings, and in person. Zoom was helpful since the district in which this study was conducted is the size of West Virginia, and there were still Covid-19 pandemic concerns in 2022 when these interviews occurred. Twelve teachers participated in individual interviews that lasted 25 minutes to an hour and a half. The interviews were conducted one-on-one and audio recorded with participant permission. Interviews were then transcribed by the researcher and reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy and validity. Two focus groups were conducted via Zoom. The first focus group had seven participants, and the second had five. These were recorded with the participant's permission and transcribed by the researcher. Participants were asked to fill in a table with their experiences in Alaska with regard to curriculum and assessment, teacher certification, diversity, climate, workload, types of schools, working with parents and students, and professional development (see Appendix D).

Participants

The participant group consisted of 12 teachers who relocated to Alaska from the lower 48 states and currently teach in the MS School District (pseudonym). Each participant was assigned

a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. Participants were between the ages of 28 and 62; all 12 participants were White, and one had a Hispanic heritage. There were 11 female participants and one male participant. Relatively homogenous race and gender characteristics were expected because they reflect the demographics of most teachers in Alaska. Table 1 represents the name, age, previous states teachers taught in and for how long, and how long they have been teaching in Alaska.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Previous States and Number of Years	Number of Years in Alaska
Cally	36	Female	Arizona-3	7
Dawn	62	Female	Maine-5	18
Janet	59	Female	Michigan- 12	10
Joe	45	Male	Georgia-5	10
Karen	43	Female	New Mexico- 14	2
Leslie	40	Female	Delaware-4	7
Lauren	53	Female	California-3	3
Mary	28	Female	Idaho-3	2
Sally	39	Female	Missouri-5 Colorado-5	2

Stella	38	Female	Oregon-6	8
Sheila	52	Female	Oregon-6	8
Sophia	60	Female	California-6	24

Cally

Cally is a 36-year-old female teacher. She has been teaching for 10 years; the first three of those years were in Arizona. She was a middle and high school science teacher and is now a teacher on special assignment in Alaska. She currently works at the district office as a teacher on special assignment. She moved to Alaska because that is where her husband is from.

Dawn

Dawn is a 62-year-old female special educator who relocated to Alaska from Maine after teaching there for five years. She started out in Alaska teaching in the bush and moved to the road system. She has been teaching in Alaska for 18 years. She relocated to Alaska because she wanted to help children who didn't have all of the benefits that other students in the United States may have. She teaches in a remote K-12 school in the district that only has approximately 35 students.

Janet

Janet is a 59-year-old female elementary school teacher who has taught for 22 years. The first twelve years were in Michigan. She moved to Alaska in 2012 because her family decided they needed a change. She teaches in a traditional elementary school. She has taught in the same school the entire 10 years she has been in Alaska.

Joe

Joe is a 45-year-old male special educator and English teacher. He taught for five years in Georgia in mostly special education at all grade levels from pre-k to twelfth grade and has taught for 10 years in Alaska. He started out in the bush in K-12 schools before moving to the road system. He relocated to Alaska because his wife was having a hard time finding a job in Georgia and because they wanted to be missionary teachers. He currently teaches in a charter Spanish immersion school at the elementary level.

Karen

Karen is a 43-year-old female elementary school teacher who taught in New Mexico for 14 years. She has taught in a traditional elementary school in Alaska for two years. Her family decided to relocate because her husband had worked in Alaska before they got married and always wanted to go back. They decided after a really hot summer in New Mexico that it was time to give Alaska a try.

Leslie

Leslie is a 40-year-old female who taught in Delaware for four years before moving to Alaska. She has been teaching in Alaska for seven years and now has her counseling degree as well. She grew up in Alaska and moved away because she married someone in the military. She came back because her dad was sick. She was a secondary teacher and is now a counselor for two schools in the district; one is a traditional elementary school, and the other is an alternative high school.

Lauren

Lauren is a 53-year-old white Hispanic female from California. She taught in California for three years before choosing to relocate to Alaska. She had visited her daughter in Alaska and fell in love with the state. Then there was a fire in her town, so she chose to move relocate then.

She has now taught in Alaska for three years. She is an elementary school teacher in a traditional school in the district.

Mary

Mary is a 28-year-old female looping kindergarten and first grade teacher from Idaho. She taught there for three years before choosing to relocate to Alaska because it was beautiful, and she felt that she was in a toxic environment in Idaho. She has taught in Alaska for two years. She teaches in a traditional school setting.

Sally

Sally is a 39-year-old female who taught in Japan, Colorado, and Missouri before moving to Alaska. She taught in Colorado and Missouri for five years each and in Japan for three years. She has been in Alaska for 2 years. She relocated to Alaska because her fiancé was stationed here in the military and because Colorado was a very expensive place to live. She previously taught special education preschool and is now a general education elementary school teacher in a typical school setting.

Stella

Stella is a 38-year-old female who previously taught in Oregon. She taught there for six years and has been in Alaska for eight years. She met her husband in Alaska and they moved to Oregon. They came back to Alaska when he had a job opportunity here. She teaches middle school in a traditional school setting.

Sheila

Sheila is a 52-year-old female who grew up in Alaska. She moved to Oregon to go to college and got married and ended up teaching there for six years. When her husband's son graduated high school, they moved back to Alaska and their family ended up following them.

She has now been teaching in Alaska for 16 years. She teaches special education preschool in a traditional school setting.

Sophia

Sophia is a 60-year-old female who previously taught in California for six years. She chose to relocate to Alaska because it was the most spectacular place she had ever visited, and she felt comfortable and safe walking around by herself. She has taught a total of 24 years in Alaska. She started in a traditional school setting for the district in elementary and then middle school. She retired two years ago but has taken a part-time teaching position at a charter school for the district.

Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explain the lived experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states. The data for this study were collected through one-on-one qualitative interviews, focus groups, and analysis of a table participants filled in. Trustworthiness and participant validation was ensured by asking each of the 12 participants to review their interview transcripts for accuracy. Research participants verified the validity of their transcripts through member checking. Table 2 is a presentation of themes and codes from interview data.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes	Research Question Answered
Finances	Pay, Retirement, Cost of living	CRQ, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4

Culture	Family structure, social rules, diversity, subsistence	CRQ, SQ1, SQ2
Support	Administrative, parent, valued, informed	CRQ, SQ3
Climate	Dark, cold, ice, wind, seasons	CRQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4
Students	ACEs, behavior, poverty	CRQ, SQ1, SQ2
Resources	Shipping, location, staff, curriculum, professional development	CRQ, SQ1, SQ4
Opportunity	Field trips, outdoors, "Only in Alaska"	CRQ, SQ3
Delayed	Students; school policy, processes, and trends	CRQ, SQ1
Autonomy	Freedom and flexibility, trusted, less stress	CRQ, SQ3

Finances

Many of the teachers in this study mentioned that the initial offer of pay they were given helped make relocating to Alaska seem like a wise choice. Many of the participants also noted that this pay could be deceptive once other factors were considered. As Sally said, "I saw the pay raise, so I doubled my salary coming from Colorado to come here and the cost of living is

slightly lower, but all these other things like I panicked when I first found out how much I'd have to be paying out of my paycheck. I didn't realize that."

Pay

Several participants noted that they made more money in Alaska than in their previous state. They mentioned this as a reason to stay in Alaska and a reason they relocated initially. Leslie, who previously worked in Delaware noted, "So pay here is way better than there. I mean I guess that would be a factor." Many found out later that this pay increase did not necessarily cover the cost-of-living increase, health insurance costs, or other factors that they had not done their research on.

Retirement

Retirement was a major focus for 11 out of 12 participants. Teachers who moved to Alaska since 2006 have a defined contribution retirement rather than a defined benefit retirement. Due to the Windfall Elimination Provision, these teachers are unable to collect their social security, or their spouse's social security, as well. This was a major topic of conversation during many interviews as well as the first focus group. Even though she has been in Alaska long enough to qualify for a defined benefit retirement, Sophia knew the most about this topic. She stated, "Teaching is, here's my soapbox again, typically a female job, so it's a second income to many families and so they punish teachers if they marry someone who works outside of the profession and dies on them. You aren't entitled to what everyone else in the country is entitled to which is your spouse's social security benefits. It's called the windfall elimination provision (WEP) and it's criminal that it's an issue for Alaskans, especially Alaska women." The majority of teachers didn't know that this was an area that they needed to research before moving. Lauren stated that, "I just thought, hey they're paying so well I assumed all teachers get retirement. And

I assumed all people get unemployment, um I mean social security, unless you're a teacher, so you get retirement. And then I come here and find out oh you don't get either." This was one of the most common reasons teachers discussed leaving Alaska and information they wished they had known before relocating.

Cost of Living

Cally commented that, "Coming from Arizona, it was a huge pay raise to move up here to Alaska. That doesn't account for that vegetables are like four times as much. And there goes your pay increase." Joe also remarked that when living in the Bush, "We come up and we were paying $180 for 10 gigs of internet. You couldn't do pictures. You couldn't do anything." Many of the amenities that are taken for granted in the lower 48 states, cost outrageous amounts for Alaska residents. The price of housing, insurance, internet, and vegetables were just a few of the items mentioned by participants.

Culture

While the school district participants in this study worked for did not have as large of a Native Alaskan population as other districts, there were several teachers who mentioned how little they knew about their culture. Two Alaska studies are required withing the first three years of teaching in Alaska, but many teachers believed those courses were not soon enough and did not offer enough knowledge about teaching Native Alaskan students.

Family Structure

Sheila grew up in Alaska and still did not have a complete understanding of the Native Alaskan family structure. She revealed, "They'll give a kid up to their sister but have another kid and keep it. There's not a rhyme or reason. It's not like I'm dysfunctional and can't parent, but it was like here you take this kid, but I'm keeping the next one. It's odd sometimes. It doesn't

make sense to me, so I wish I understood that a little bit more." Sophia noted that her family did this as well when relocating to Alaska. She reported that she told her child's counselor once, "We adopt family members here, and so learning to do that I think is really important and to reach out to others and get to know members of your community." This can be very confusing in the classroom when trying to learn the family dynamics of students.

Social Rules

Several teachers noted the different social rules that impact the classroom in Alaska. Native Alaskan students are taught that it is disrespectful to make eye contact with others and that they should not be the first to speak up. Stella noted that, "In their culture, they're told to wait. You wait for others to present ideas before you do. You don't just jump in and do all of that. It's a different mentality and it's a different way of engaging in the world." She had a counselor who was Native Alaskan in the first school she taught in in Alaska who helped her navigate these differences, but she said that she still did not feel prepared for it. Cally also brought up, "We had to take the Alaska studies and the multicultural classes, but they did not prepare me for the cultural or I guess norms that like not making eye contact or just the way in which you interact."

Diversity

Many teachers remarked about the lack of diversity in their schools or the fact that there was less diversity than anticipated. Leslie started in one of the most diverse middle schools in the country in Alaska, but when discussing where she currently works, she stated, "We're not as you know ethnically diverse as the other schools I've taught at before." Lauren also remarked, "I actually expected it to be more diverse here." And then followed up with, "When I came here, I expected to see more Natives, I think. You know but it's predominantly White and you get a

couple of native students, so that's something I've noticed." So, while the family structures and cultural differences of Native Alaskan students is very different, these students do not make up a large population of the students seen in the classroom.

Subsistence

Stella noted her confusion about the subsistence lifestyle in the following remark: "The subsistence, like I had no idea. I got emails my first week saying these kids are gonna be gone for subsistence hunting and fishing and I was like excuse me? I didn't know what that meant, so I had to go ask some people what that meant." Many Native families still live a subsistence lifestyle where they leave for weeks at a time to go hunting and fishing to feed their families. Joe noted that when he worked in the Bush, they taught subsistence activities at school. "We also did a lot of subsistence activities. We took our kids hunting when hunting… we took an hour of our day, and we piled up in a school truck and we would look for birds. We did moose camp with the kids. We for a week we would go hunting. We did fish camp. We did a trap line." This is very different than what is expected in the lower 48 states where leaving school for weeks at a time would be a truancy issue. Leslie noted, "Attendance. There is literally nothing we can do about attendance."

Support

Several teachers discussed the amount of support they received during their interviews and during focus groups. Most discussed support in a positive manner as something that made them want to stay in Alaska, but there were a couple of teachers who noted a lack of support in the area of student behavior which made things challenging during their first years teaching in Alaska. Karen noted, "I feel like I'm very much more informed here than what I was in my

hometown. Very much more supported- admin support, parent support, even student motivation seems much better here in the valley than it was where I came from."

Administrative

Many teachers noted that administrators are more flexible in Alaska and also a lot more supportive than what they experienced in the lower 48 states. Karen stated that "because of parental support and admin support, it's made this profession a lot easier than what I was experiencing." She also stated that she has "felt more support from administration in my school than I have felt in a long time. I was actually pretty close to saying I didn't want to be a teacher whenever I came up here, and I kind of remembered why I loved teaching in the first place." Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found a lack of administrative support to be a key factor in teacher turnover rates. Administrative support was noted as a key factor for staying in Alaska by teachers in this study.

Family

Many participants mentioned how family-centered schools in Alaska are. Joe described how in the lower 48 he was expected to come off of paternity leave early because a sub could not be found. "Here it's like you take care of your family," he remarked. He was able to take off work when he had family emergencies that he did not feel would have been allowed if he were in the contiguous US. "Then three years later we moved and my son that just opened the door, his appendix ruptured. And we're in a community where there's a hospital but they don't do surgeries." So, he called his principal, "I'm like hey, I don't have sub plans. And he said 'who cares? Get on a plane and go.' He was like we'll cover for you." This was the opposite of his personal experiences before moving.

Valued

Karen noted that in Alaska that she "felt like I found my groove and felt welcomed in the school and the district and valued as a teacher." Other teachers who had taught in other parts of Alaska also noted that this school district made them feel more valued than the larger school districts in the state. Will (2019) found that teachers around the world do not feel like they are valued. This would be noted as a positive aspect of teaching in this school district and could help with teacher recruitment efforts.

Informed

One of the focus groups concentrated on how much more informed everyone felt in their current school district than they had in previous states and districts. Leslie stated," I feel like my concerns get closer to the top than they did." Sheila expounded upon that to say, "I feel like it might be size related, but just echoing all of that I feel like I have more access. I feel like I know who to talk to. I know where they're at. I also feel like I know what's going on around the district and we have a huge district size wise even though our population isn't as dense, but I still feel like I have a good idea of what's going on throughout the district." This was a common theme of how most teachers in that focus group described their experience.

Climate

The climate of Alaska was also a big part of the discussion. Some people hate it and want to leave for the winter and do "the snowbird thing" when they get older. As Cally noted "We might keep a summer home, but I don't want to live here um as I get older because it hurts to fall." Many participants also discussed how much they loved how beautiful everything in Alaska is no matter whether it's snowy or sunny.

Dark

The darkness was a common challenge people faced during their first year in Alaska. Stella indicated, “Uh you get up and it’s dark and you start teaching and it’s dark. And when you’re done teaching, it’s dark. I mean I feel like that’s the one thing that always stood out to me.” She also emphasized the importance of a SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) light if there was not a time during the day that people could get outside to absorb what little sunlight is available in the winter. To take that a step further, Lauren stated, “And noticing how the children really change in January and just kind of having to have grace with them and with myself because everyone gets a little crazy and a little different in January in Alaska.”

Cold

Many participants mentioned that they knew it was going to be cold before they moved to Alaska. Lauren mentioned, “I knew that it’s definitely colder, and I knew that kids played in the snow at like 10 below and stuff like that.” Many other teachers noted that they did not go to recess if it was below 30 or 40 degrees in the state they previously taught in, so going outside at ten below was pretty shocking. There were some unexpected challenges with the cold though. Cally noted, “It was definitely an adjustment um I’m a hands-on science teacher. It was so cold. I remember taking my kiddos to do bottle rocket launches and the water froze.” She had to adjust her teaching topics to ensure that she could do outdoor experiments when it wasn’t freezing.

Ice

The winter before the interviews and focus groups in this study were conducted was very cold, icy, and windy. Several teachers noted this when discussing how the climate impacted them and their willingness to stay. When asked about the climate, Sheila responded, “Um it didn’t bother me when I was younger, but I found this winter it was hard. The cold and the dark and the

windstorms and ice storms, but my life situation has changed too." Cally noted that she thought it was funny when she got an email from the district offering her ice cleats her first year in Alaska, "And then I slipped going out to my car, and I was like oh I see why they… and then every year I'm like put on my ice cleats. I learned quickly. But it was just so funny because I was so oblivious to the ice."

Wind

The January before this study had a major windstorm with over 100 mile per hour winds. This caused a lot of damage in the area and closed schools for a week. Sally mentioned how hard it was to get outside and be active this year; "The ice and the wind; it was just one disaster after another." The winds were extremely loud and caused power outages for the majority of the borough. Dawn stated, "I know a lot of people didn't sleep well this year because it's hard to sleep with that wind blowing, and it comes and goes, and I don't even notice it anymore. Getting used to that was I remember going through my first real hurricane out in the bush and it ripped off all the roofing on my house." While the wind is a very challenging part of living in Alaska, it seems that it gets easier to cope with the longer someone lives in the state.

Seasons

Most participants mentioned how much they love the summers in Alaska. Mary believes "summers are great, and I think that's kinda what holds me here." Joe offered, "obviously break up time is rough." Break up happens in the springtime in Alaska when all of the snow and ice start to thaw. Everything is wet and brown. The drastic changes between seasons also causes its own problems. As Leslie noted, "I feel like the seasonal effects on students in Alaska is a lot more dramatic. So, during different times of year, like now, everything is thawing out it seems like and students and even us are antsy to be outside." There were also positive notes on all of

the changes between seasons. Lauren observed, “I find that we really appreciate those next seasons and so that’s really nice.”

Students

Karen and Janet noted how their students really keep them in the profession because they want what is best for them. Several other teachers also discussed how school was the only place some of their students were able to go to have their needs met. As Cally stated, “They show up early you know in Alaska because some of them don’t have heat at home or a home with food.” This makes schools an important part of students’ lives. Janet found this to be a challenging aspect of teaching in Alaska. She pointed out, “I wasn’t prepared for kids not having running water, and food, and toilets, and things like that. And needing to shower at school.”

ACEs

Many of the schools in Alaska are noted to be trauma sensitive or trauma informed schools. This is due to the fact that many students in Alaska have high rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Sparks (2019) discovered that almost 50 percent of all Alaskan students have experienced at least one traumatic event and 20 percent have been part of more than one. Joe noted the importance of being trauma informed, “The trauma, being trauma informed. When every kid in your class is living in poverty and is living around alcohol abuse and physical abuse. Knowing and understanding that trauma informed, which was huge.” Cally also noted that this makes teaching more rewarding when she stated, “You have no idea what’s going on in that kiddo’s life. Yeah, so that’s a big change and kind of a scary one when you know it’s like all that trauma, the ACES, and how do I build resilience in my classroom on top of what I’m already doing. It’s also the most rewarding.”

Many teachers also explained how the Office of Children's Services was so overwhelmed that they did not help in many situations. They also noted that the culture and society view abuse differently. Dawn explained, "The cruelty that you see to children. What we would think of as abuse is culturally accepted in a lot of instances. You will no help from troopers. You will get no help from OCS." Joe tried to come from a more understanding point of view, "The things that are normal out here are not normal in an urban or even southern rural environment. OCS would tell you you gotta call every time a kid tells you they can't sleep because their parents are drinking or something. You're like, so I'm gonna call you every day? So, there's a lot of that, but at the same time you've just gotta understand that things you think are not normal are normal and it doesn't mean it's bad, it's just different."

Behavior

Several teachers noted that student behavior was more severe in Alaska than in the state they came from. Mary noted this challenge in her interview, "The amount of behaviors in the classroom were definitely different. I didn't have those behaviors in Idaho. The last year in Idaho was when I had my first behavior kiddo um and that's one thing I noticed is this year um last year they have like doubled so dealing with behaviors for sure." Janet also mentioned one of her biggest challenges was "The support that I got for behavior kids. I don't know why the behavior kids were different here. I don't know if it was a time thing like 10 years ago life was just different. It's a struggle. I don't feel as supported and maybe the problems weren't there." Leslie also reiterated this when she stated, "A typical day hum well since I've been in Alaska, I don't know what it is, but I have gotten a lot of behaviors probably more behaviors than I think I encountered in California." Espelage et al. (2021) noted that trauma can cause adverse behaviors

in students. The high rate of trauma in Alaska could be the cause of the increase in behaviors that teachers see.

Poverty

While the United States Census Bureau (2020) shows that less than ten percent of Alaskans live in poverty and that this is much lower than the majority of the United States, many teachers felt that they had a large number of students living in poverty. As noted previously, many students in Alaska do not have running water or a way to stay warm. Many teachers also stated that the area they came from had high rates of poverty, but Joe found it to be significantly different, “When every kid in your class is living in poverty and is living around alcohol abuse and physical abuse.” He found this to be an important reason for Alaska’s teachers to be trauma informed.

Resources

Several participants discussed the difficulty getting resources they needed for their classroom. These resources ranged from staffing basic classroom supplies. Joe noted that the resources that were available his first-year teaching in Alaska were very outdated. On the other hand, multiple participants remarked that the school district was not lacking in funding and would have resources that more wealthy districts in the lower 48 did not have access to such as interactive panels in every classroom. These varying resources were noted as things teachers wish they had known, things that make them stay in Alaska, and challenges faced during their first year after relocating.

Shipping

Several teachers noted how much harder it was to get resources shipped to Alaska. Cally noted the lack of shipping for somethings when she commented, “I know that sounds so funny,

but I order so many supplies for my lab. Even like dry erase markers, they just don't ship and I'm like oh gosh." Stella reiterated that when she said, "I mean if you want resources for a science lab, you need to think ahead because they're not gonna get here tomorrow. Amazon isn't next day up here." Many companies only include free shipping or expedited shipping to the contiguous United States which can make it difficult to get supplies in a timely manner. Prime shipping in Alaska can take anywhere from a few days to a month. As Cally mention, there are many things that simply will not ship to Alaska. These were big challenges for teachers who recently relocated that were accustomed to ordering supplies for their classrooms and receiving them within one to two days.

Location

Many teachers also remarked how the location made resources limited or difficult. Stella commented that her first year in Alaska there were only three options for shopping for clothing and that she would often come to work wearing the same things as her students, "and so then you're like well oh crap and the kids don't come prepared with extra clothes and so then it was like I have to start having extra clothes at school and then I just always had a change of clothes at school because I was never sure if I was gonna be wearing the same thing as a kid." The location she was in made it difficult to drive for other clothing options. Cally also discussed how location impacted field trips. "You know we took our kids to Homer and that was a 7-hour drive and then we had to get on a boat to go to Kasitsna Bay. So yeah, proximity to things." Since Alaska is the largest state in the United States, there are often large distances between towns, and it can take hours to get to places of interest. This makes it difficult to obtain resources and explore locations for trips with students.

Staff

Several teachers also noted how staffing shortages constituted a lack of resources. Three weeks into the 2022-2023 school year, there were still 44 vacancies within the school district, primarily support staff (MSBSD, 2021). When discussing behavior students, Leslie noted, “I don’t know if it’s the school, just the way school is run. I don’t know if it’s lack of bodies. That ok we can’t push this person through BSP because there’s not enough people to watch.” Since teacher retention percentages are in the 70s (Peyton et al., 2021), it is often difficult for districts to find enough staff to fill necessary positions at the schools. Joe and Leslie also discussed how staff is often moved year after year or even in the middle of the year. Joe commented, “So I was used to being shuffled, but it was still kind of within the same. In my second school district here, in three years, I had four different jobs. Literally two weeks into the school year my job got changed. Part of that was because I’m flexible, but part of that was because you just couldn’t find anybody.” Staffing shortages can lead to teachers feeling less supported and more overwhelmed.

Curriculum

The school district adopts new curriculum in mathematics and language arts every six years (MSBSD, 2021). Some participants found this to be a positive thing while others felt that it was too often. Sally felt like it was too frequent, “Even in Pre-k I feel like I’m on my third or fourth curriculum since I moved here and have been doing preschool. It feels like they can’t just settle on something it’s like what’s the new best thing.” Leslie felt like they were just trying to find the best curriculum to help students advance and catch up with the lower 48 states. Karen commented that she would like a science and social studies curriculum which is not currently

offered for elementary schools. Stella also thought it was important to point out that while Alaska did not adopt the common core standards, the Alaskan standards are very similar.

Professional Development

Cally is the professional development coordinator for the district, so she had a very positive outlook on what the district offers, especially before school starts and after school is out. Many other participants also liked the opportunities for professional development that were presented before and after the school year. Multiple participants also noted that there are less opportunities for professional development than in the states they previously worked. Several participants stated that this was because of the inability to simply drive to a nearby state to attend conferences like they were able to do in the lower 48 states. Sheila contributed that "When I was in Oregon another thing I got to do a lot or was privileged to do, I could go to Washington for a conference or I could go to I went to a really good linguists systems conference down in California and that's just Oregon, Washington, and California. I went to a reading conference in Texas too. Those really were doable from Oregon. They're really not doable from up here."

Opportunity

Many participants discussed the unique opportunities that they had due to relocating to teach in Alaska. Sheila stated, "I feel like we have some unique opportunities up here. Like I know I don't know if anybody on here has taken the class where you can go stay in the bush with people for a week or two and camp and hunt with them. It's a cultural immersion program for teachers." This was just one program noted as an opportunity for teachers to explore other ways of life in Alaska. Sally also commented that "I think there's a lot of opportunity and potential here. I think there's a lot of things to do. I think there's a lot of different ways to become active

on many different levels." Many discussions about opportunities in Alaska focused on field trips and the outdoors along with things that you only hear or see in Alaska.

Field Trips

Some participants discussed the unique field trip opportunities available to students in Alaska. "I mean we had students go on a train ride to Talkeetna. I've never heard of a field trip like that where a teacher could take them on a train ride to those places," discussed Karen. She noted that in New Mexico they were asked to stay close to their school for field trips. Joe had a once in a lifetime field trip, "When we were in the village, the bison that were released on the Innoko River, we got to do a field trip and National Geographic was filming it and KKTU and all that." He continued with, "Who else jumps on the snow machine in -20 weather to watch Bison get off an airplane to be released into the wild?" Leslie went on to express, "The field trip we went on today, like omg. Like we would not do that in California. I'm just like a bear, there could be a bear." Others also discussed how they were able to go to reindeer and musk ox farms where they were able to feed a moose.

Outdoors

Various participants articulated that they were outdoorsy and loved the beauty of the outdoors in Alaska. Joe revealed, "It's beautiful. There you go. I used to live in Hawaii. I would rather live here than Hawaii. And I hate the cold. It's just something majestic and raw and organic I guess." Stella noted how important it is to teach our students about the beauty of the outdoors in Alaska, "We've got a gorgeous state. It's beautiful. There's no reason we shouldn't be taking kids outside to enjoy it. I think if kids are exposed to nature and see the importance of it, then they will want to preserve it and take care of it for the future." Karen also discussed how the school she works for has a nature trail that she can take students on that ends at a dock on the

lake. Teachers also verbalized all of the outdoor opportunities available during all seasons in Alaska. In the winter they discussed activities like skiing and snowshoeing; during the summer they discussed beautiful hikes and fishing.

"Only in Alaska"

A few participants discussed things that have happened that they considered "Only in Alaska" moments. Joe disclosed, "You know like when I took my kids hunting, we had a policy they could bring their shotguns, their 22s, and they could check it in with us. You know whereas the lower 48 you don't bring a firearm anywhere near a school and here kids are bringing guns to school, and we go lock them up in the office and we take them hunting. Only in Alaska." Other teachers discussed announcements in their school about how there was a moose in the parking lot or on the playground and to be careful and let their colleagues know. Sally imparted, "you know some of those like Alaska life moments or like the recess monitor came in because she helps with math, and she was like yeah don't take your kids out for extra recess because there's an aggressive moose that's taken over the field and won't move." The participants believed that these were things that could not be experienced if they lived anywhere else.

Delayed

Many teachers discussed different aspects of teaching in Alaska that were behind the contiguous United States. Some teachers did not feel like this was necessarily a bad thing in all areas. Joe pointed out in his interview, "There are a lot of issues in Alaska that aren't as prevalent on the road and as we moved to the road, we learned it's more traditional, but it's still a little bit behind. In some ways it's better. I feel like there's not such a high-pressure testing." He expounded upon that during the focus group when he mentioned, "It's Alaska and to me the schools, even though they're behind academically in some ways, in some ways we're light years

ahead of our lower 48 peers in things we can do and the flexibility we have." Most participants mentioned something in Alaska that was four to five years delayed in comparison to what the lower 48 states were experiencing whether that was new educational movements, new technology, or how far behind their students were.

Students

Most teachers felt like students in Alaska tend to be academically behind their lower 48 state peers by several years. Dawn noted that in one village she taught in students went through the fourth grade twice; they completed kindergarten through fourth grade in their native language and then completed another fourth grade in English. They continued the rest of their school career in English. Sophia also observed, "When I got here, I noticed that the kids' reading level was so much lower than California even though Socio economic level was about the same for the two groups. I was very surprised at the lack of ability to read by fourth grade with my kids." Joe felt like when he taught in the bush his advanced readers were still four years behind where they should be. Even though students seem to be behind their typical peers from the rest of the United States, Karen noted that they seemed much more excited about learning and going to school.

School Policy, Processes, and Trends

Cally felt, "Well Alaska is always like four or five years behind the trend of like everything it feels like." This statement summarizes the overall feeling of many of the participants in this study. Cally went on to discuss how Alaska became one to one for devices with students after the lower 48 states had done it for a while, and teachers in Alaska started having learning management systems like Google Classrooms and Canvas several years after she experienced it in Arizona. One focus group centered around the differences in special education processes and how they are behind where they previously taught. Sally summed this up when she

explained, “Alaska sometimes, when you’ve been in the lower 48, can seem like it’s 10, 20 years behind other states, and I got confused when I came here especially because the MTSS/RTI process was very different.” Some teachers preferred the Alaskan special education processes while others thought they were not as effective. Teachers also discussed the fact that they would not have thought to research how the policies, processes, and trends in Alaskan education were implemented. Leslie also noted, “A lot of our rules in Alaska don’t have any teeth behind them.”

Autonomy

The majority of teachers interviewed explained that the autonomy they were given while teaching in Alaska was a big reason they intended to stay. Some discussed the ability to use the provided curriculum and adapt it or use their own curriculum, while others talked about the lack of high stakes testing. They did not feel the pressure they did in the lower 48 states to make sure all of their test scores were within the expected range. Joe felt that student growth is looked at differently in Alaska, “Kids are not numbers and in lower 48 we look at them like data points I felt like. I’ve had administrators that look at them as data points. And I’m like look this kid’s made growth. ‘No, they haven’t.’ They’re still like a MAP score. They’re still negative. Well, yeah, but they were like negative 15 and now they’re negative 6. That’s growth.” He went on to say, “Growth is when a parent tells you, ‘Hey, my son took his allowance, and he bought a book, and he’s never done that’ or ‘Hey, my son finished the book you assigned. They’ve never finished a book.’ And you know and that’s what I like; it’s not just about a data point. It’s what kind of growth are we seeing.” Teachers expressed positive sentiments about their ability to look at growth in different ways.

Freedom and Flexibility

Teachers also expressed positive thoughts on the freedom they have as teachers in Alaska. Dawn explained, “I feel so much freedom to actually do what a special ed teacher is supposed to do which is teach to a specific student. Not necessarily teach to any trend or any required curriculum but getting the student what they need in order to move ahead.” This statement appropriately summarizes the overall sentiment of the bulk of the participants in this study. Teachers appreciate not having explicit rules that tell them how to manage each aspect of their day. Sheila went on to say, “I feel like I have more freedom to individual instruction and put my personality into my classroom and to interact with kids and parents in a less structured or just with less rules, which feels more natural to me.” Teachers appreciate the freedom they have to do things their own way in Alaska. As Cally said, “There’s just flexibility, that freedom, where in Arizona it was like we were very regimented and didn’t have that same freedom there.”

Trusted

Teachers also stated that they felt more trusted by administration and parents in Alaska. Lauren described, “Oh, like lock the building up when you leave. It’s like oh ok. I think I feel like it’s more of a home. It has just more of that welcoming. You’re trusted. This is your home you know.” Teachers are trusted to lock up the building and set alarms; many said they had not experienced that in previous states. They are also trusted to know if they’re students are making progress without having to prove it constantly. As Dawn stated earlier, she feels trusted to teach her special education students in the manner that she feels best meets their needs instead of based on current trends in education.

Less Stress

Ramberg et al., (2020) found that teaching was a high stress profession. Their article also suggested that counteracting stress for teachers would not only help with their physical and mental health but also a better perception of teachers by students and more satisfaction. Karen pronounced, “I was actually pretty close to saying I didn’t want to be a teacher whenever I came up here, and I kind of remembered why I loved teaching in the first place. This atmosphere in general has been a lot more, I don’t want to say relaxing because it’s not relaxing there’s still days I cry and stress, and I worry about each one of ‘em.” This statement shows how reduced stress makes teachers want to teach in Alaska. They feel less stress about testing data and making sure every step is followed the way the district expects. Teachers feel like they can do the important work of meeting kids’ needs. Joe reiterated, “I hope that we don’t ever get to that point where you’re stressing about testing so much that you’re shutting school down because of testing.”

Outlier Data and Findings

There was one outlier noted by several participants that did not particularly relate to the research questions or codes found in this study. Numerous teachers noted that the certification process for switching to Alaska was very cumbersome and confusing. Some participants stated getting conflicting answers from different individuals at the Department of Education and Early Development in Alaska about the steps they needed to complete to renew their certificate after the first, second or third year. It was also noted that it was a very expensive process. While this was a process that was easily researched by contributors to this study, many participants felt like this could have been a more streamlined procedure that required fewer steps and less expenses on their part. Rather than just having to apply for an initial certificate and then a professional

certificate three years later, teachers had to renew their certificate with different steps during each of those three years.

Research Question Responses

This study had five research questions that guided the study. There was a central research question and four sub-questions. These questions were answered through individual interviews, focus groups, and the analysis of a document completed by participants. These research questions sought to get at the essence of the experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska after teaching in the contiguous United States. The themes and codes that were previously discussed reinforced the responses obtained to the research questions of this study that will be expounded upon in the next section.

Central Research Question

The central research question of this study was, "How do teachers who have moved to Alaska describe their experiences after relocating from the lower 48 states?" Participants articulated that relocating to Alaska caused them to have to be adaptable. Contributors felt that the actions of teaching in Alaska were very similar to teaching in the lower 48 states, but the other factors that impacted their life as an educator varied greatly.

The themes discussed previously all depicted the experiences of teachers relocating to Alaska from the contiguous United States. The finances involved with teaching could be deceptive on paper because those numbers did not show how much would be deducted from a teacher's paycheck or the cost of living in Alaska. Many participants also did not consider or understand the lack of retirement when relocating to Alaska. Teachers found these factors to have a great impact on their likelihood of remaining in Alaska.

The culture of Native Alaskan students and families were unexpected by some contributors as well. Family structures were different than teachers had previously experienced in the lower 48 states. These families and students also had different social norms than the White population. While there was not as much diversity as participants expected before relocating, the cultural differences experienced were noticeable, especially when students were absent for long periods due to subsistence lifestyles.

Teachers also found the level of support to be very different in Alaska. The majority of teachers felt that they had increased administrative and parental support since they relocated. They also felt more valued as a teacher. Participants felt like they were more informed about what was going on within their school and the school district than anywhere they had previously taught. Similarly, they believed that they knew more about who to go to when they needed information or advice or just wanted to make suggestions.

The climate was a drawback for many of the participants in this study. They experienced wind and ice storms during the most recent winter that made this a more prevalent topic than normal. The darkness was something participants experienced throughout the winter months. Many found that it made them want to hibernate and some needed a SAD light in order to function in the winter. The seasons were drastically different than in the lower 48 states for most participants.

The students were a big part of the experience for relocating teachers. The amount of trauma students had experienced really impacted participants. It also impacted a lot of the behaviors experienced by teachers in the classroom. Student behaviors were the only area that teachers felt they did not receive sufficient support. The amount of poverty students experienced

was also shocking for some teachers, especially for students who did not have running water or heat at home.

Another area that impacted teacher experiences was the number of resources. Participants struggled with how difficult it was to get classroom resources shipped to them in a timely manner. The remote locations made this an even more challenging problem since they could not just drive to multiple stores to look for items. The location also made recruiting adequate staff more difficult which led to not getting all of the help needed in the classroom. The setting also made it difficult to attend some professional development because teachers cannot easily travel across state lines. Curriculum was the area that participants felt like they had ample resources for.

Participants felt like they were given many unique opportunities while they taught in Alaska. The field trips they were able to take students on were incomparable to the field trips of the lower 48 states. Teachers also enjoy the unique opportunities they have for taking students outdoors to learn about their surroundings. Teachers also enjoyed the "Only in Alaska" moments that they were able to experience after relocating.

While many participants felt like Alaska was delayed compared to the rest of the United States in many ways, they did not necessarily feel like this was a bad thing. Some teachers appreciated the fact that they were able to focus on students instead of processes, policies, and trends that are common in the contiguous United States. Students were often perceived to be four to five years behind their lower 48 state peers, but many teachers felt like the school district was doing everything they could to help pupils catch up.

Teachers really appreciated the autonomy that they experienced teaching in Alaska. Participants felt like they had the freedom and flexibility to do what they knew was best for

students and to approach education in a manner that reflects their own preferences and personalities. Teachers also felt more trusted by the school district and administration than they had previously. Educators also felt like there was less stress teaching in Alaska than elsewhere. They felt like there was not as much focus on high stakes testing and more focus on individual growth in multiple areas.

Sub-Question One

The first guiding question of the study was, "How do teachers describe the challenges they face during their first-year teaching in Alaska?" The themes of culture, climate, students, resources, and delayed described the challenges these relocators felt. Six of the teachers interviewed believed that culture was a big challenge they experienced due to the different social norms and cultural differences of the Native Alaskan students they taught and their families. Stella described:

> I was up in North Pole during my first year. I hadn't taken my Alaska classes yet, like the multicultural class or the Alaska history class. So, I didn't have a really good understanding of um like native populations and how their like their timing is a little bit different and social cues are different and things like that. So, I remember being challenged myself to not fall into the stereotypes so much but also be aware of their cultural differences and not uh pushing through boundaries that I shouldn't be pushing through. Like eye contact. They don't always make eye contact because in many native cultures it is considered disrespectful to make eye contact with an elder. Well growing up in Iowa, which is where I'm from, if you don't make eye contact with an elder, you're in trouble. Like it's the exact opposite. And so, I think that like I wasn't prepared for that. My school did a great job, one of our counselors was an Alaska native and so he made

> sure that those of us that were new to teaching in Alaska that we had a quick like crash course at the start of the year.

These struggles were common throughout many participants. Some mentioned that they wish there had been a requirement before school started that they learn about Native courses or that they take the required classes during the first semester of teaching in Alaska.

Eight of the participants felt like climate was one of the biggest challenges they faced when relocating to Alaska. It prevented them from being active outside in the winter. Many also commented about it being harder as they got older. They considered doing the snowbird thing as they aged and having another home somewhere in the lower 48 states that they could go to in the winter. Sally noted:

> I do miss sunshine like it's really bad. I don't really care that it's dark. I don't care that it's cold. I grew up in North Dakota. But I swore when I left North Dakota that I would never move anywhere without sunshine, and somehow, I missed that about Alaska. Like that it's basically Seattle. And now that it's I have these sunny days, I get like manic like I got so much done in like the last week and half, but like winter I can't function. Like I'm a very light dependent person. I'm hoping it'll get better, um but I stay active, and this year was hard with all the avalanches because it was like where am I supposed to go? And then the ice and the wind. It was just one disaster after another.

Most participants had more concerns with the darkness than with the cold. A lot of teachers also commented about how bad this previous winter had been which made them have more of a negative outlook about the climate in Alaska.

Six participants felt like students were their biggest challenge. This challenge encompassed student home lives of trauma and poverty. Students did not have the modern amenities that teachers were accustomed to in the lower 48 states. Jane explained,

> I wasn't prepared for kids not having running water, and food, and toilets, and things like that. And needing to shower at school. And that was kind of shocking to me because I do consider this more or less a city. It's a small city, but it's not rural, rural in my eyes. So, I struggled with like just wrapping my head around that the kids were living like this.

Student behaviors were also a part of this challenge. Some of this was due to trauma and dysfunctional home lives that impacted the classroom. Leslie noted,

> Um I had a student, what I have found that is crazy is I seem to get these students that teachers have said to me oh how did you get him? Why is he with that kid? Why are they together? They were supposed to be separated. I've had this happen to me the first year and this year.

Three teachers noted how much worse student behavior was in Alaska than in the state they previously taught. All three came from different states.

Five participants felt like a lack of resources were a challenge the first year they taught in Alaska. They also felt the frustration of not being able to easily have the things they needed shipped to them due to extended shipping times and increased shipping costs. Sheila discussed the lack of resources for families with special needs students,

> I think so of those I don't know what kinds of things like that are available up here because a lot of those low incidence disabilities people move out of the state because services are down in the states. So, I feel like there was a lot more information about those low incidence disabilities when I had kids like that, not just more information but

> there were more resources. And more resources for families in general. A lot of times up here I have a hard time directing my families to resources because they're just, especially out here in the valley, but even in Anchorage, there just aren't it's hard for parents whose kids have those low frequency disabilities to get medical and services if they need it if they're really severe.

The lack of resources also extends to staffing. Many schools are understaffed and have to juggle teachers around to cover many positions. Joe and Dawn noted that they had been in schools where they had to cover general and special education positions at the same time in schools with multiple grades in one classroom.

The theme of being delayed presented in several interviews and focus groups as well. This applied to both students and the processes and policies of the school districts. Several participants discussed how students were four to five years behind their peers in the lower 48 states. Dawn noted a personal experience,

> Every sophomore in high school had to take it and they had to be able to pass it to continue on in high school. It was just what it said, high school qualifying. You should have enough knowledge. I think I had to proctor it. When I proctored it, I realized I think the reading portion was the same fifth grade level test reading passage, questions, everything I was teaching my special education kids in Maine that I just came from. Yeah, and I thought this is a little shocking. Everything was I dare say, dumbed down a little bit to make sure kids passed it. You know yeah it is um that was shocking.

Many participants noted that they felt like they had to "dumb things down" to reach their students.

Sub-Question Two

The second guiding question of the study was, “How do teachers describe what they wish they had known before relocating?” The themes of finance, culture, climate, and students summarized the aspects participants wish they had known before relocating. Many discussions about finances discussed retirement and cost of living in Alaska. Some teachers noted that they wished they had known more about the financial aspects of teaching in Alaska before they chose to relocate. Sally summed up her experience,

> And the teacher retirement thing is an issue here. And I doubled how much I pay for health insurance. You know there’s just I saw the pay raise, so I doubled my salary coming from Colorado to come here, and the cost of living is slightly lower, but all these other things like I panicked when I first found out how much I’d have to be paying out of my paycheck. I didn’t realize that.

The biggest shock for most teachers was the lack of retirement or pension for teachers in Alaska. As Lauren discussed,

> I didn’t do my research. I came up here and there was no retirement, but I was attracted to that bigger, you know you get paid more. But I had no idea there was no retirement. I thought all teachers had retirement, so that was something I didn’t research.

Some teachers stated they were unsure if they would have relocated if they had known about the lack of social security and pensions for teachers in Alaska.

Culture was another area that many participants wish they had known more about. They felt that this was an area that would have helped them be more successful in the classroom. It would have helped them to better understand their students and how they behaved in the classroom. Sheila explained,

> I think what I really wish I would've known was about, even though I was raised here, I didn't know a lot about the native culture and how they communicate, like with their eyebrows or just how looking people in the eye is not part of their culture, like looking down or looking away. Um especially because a lot of the kids I work with don't talk, and so a lot of those little subtle non-verbal cues um I didn't really understand. They can look like noncompliance or defiance or disrespect.

Even after having the Alaskan studies courses, many teachers felt like they needed more on the social interactions and family dynamics of students instead of the discussion of history given in those classes.

Climate was another area that participants wished they had known more about before moving to Alaska. Leslie commented about how important it was to be informed about the climate before relocating, "We just actually helped someone move up, and it's just being very frank about the environmental like the physical environment and what that's like and the toll that takes on mental health is really important for people to realize." Cally wished she had known about the winds in Alaska. There are many aspects of climate in Alaska that can be shocking when someone relocates. Some common threads were the darkness, ice, wind, and coldness.

Students were another common theme that participants wished they knew more about before relocating. Many wish they had known more about the level of trauma experienced by students and what their home lives were like. Others wished they had known how far behind their students would be. Joe stated,

> I almost felt like every kid would've been special ed in a traditional school system. And I'm the special ed teacher and you're sitting there like wow, how do I do this? Eventually

> I learned about fetal alcohol. There are a lot of issues in Alaska that aren't as prevalent on the road and as we moved to the road, we learned it's more traditional.

The teachers felt great concern for their students and wished they had been more prepared to meet their needs when they arrived in Alaska.

Sub-Question Three

The third guiding question of the study was, "How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to stay?" The themes of finances, support, climate, opportunity, and autonomy positively impacted teachers' willingness to stay in Alaska. Teachers appreciated the fact that they had a higher salary in Alaska than in other states. When asked what made her want to stay in Alaska, Lauren noted, "I make more money. I mean monthly I make more money." Stella reiterated this saying,

> Well, the pay is nice. I can't say that that's a bad thing. I definitely get paid more here than I do in the lower 48. Kids are still iffy and obviously the retirement is crappy, but the pay is great.

So, while the retirement was a drawback, teachers still cherished the pay raise they received when relocating.

A lot of the participants really value the amount of support they receive from parents and administration. Several teachers stated that the welcoming environment they experienced in the schools in Alaska really made them want to continue here until they retire. Some felt like the students were more excited about learning because they heard that positive support for teachers at home. Teachers also felt supported by colleagues. Lauren felt like colleagues helped support her students well, she explained,

> I just love the teacher friends I've made. I really feel a nice connection with them, and I wouldn't want to trade that for anything. Because you really need that support. You need teacher support in this profession. And I have that here. I've made some really good friends. I do think you guys probably support more in academically.

Feeling supported, valued, and informed made teachers want to stay in Alaska for the long haul because they felt less supported in previous states.

While the climate was a challenge for many of the teachers when they relocated, a lot of them have learned to love it. They enjoyed all of the outdoor activities they were able to participate in and how close they felt to nature. Dawn noted a strange reason for enjoying the climate in Alaska,

> I really did just fall in love with Alaska. I like being here. I like the challenges of living here sometimes. Especially on the coast, sometimes people don't realize you know how many hurricanes actually hit the hurricanes hit the coast in a year. I mean just dealing with the weather and all that. So, I like that kind of challenge.

Participants loved the opportunities they had while teaching in Alaska. They appreciated all of the unique field trips they were able to experience along with just the unique culture of Alaska. Teachers really love the opportunity to experience those "Only in Alaska" moments when teaching. Sally remarked,

> Um the funniest thing that I ever heard over the intercom was um the principal coming over the intercom at 11 am going "everybody needs to stop putting their tongues on the poles on the playground." And then the moose announcement the other day. There's a moose in the parking lot, so text your colleagues.

These types of announcements become common place, especially in the winter. These opportunities help solidify that teachers made the right choice when choosing to relocate to Alaska.

Participants are grateful for the amount of autonomy they are given over their classrooms. They explained how they preferred how much more relaxed everything in Alaska is. They do not feel the pressure of high stakes testing and being judged on how well students are performing. They are able to show growth in other areas besides standardized testing. They are also appreciative of the flexibility they are allowed with the district provided curriculum. They do not feel forced to implement all aspects of the curriculum and feel comfortable supplementing as needed. Sheila stated,

> I prefer the looser structure of rules and stuff. I feel like it's easy to overregulate a school. And I feel like I have more freedom to individual instruction and put my personality into my classroom and to interact with kids and parents in a less structured or just with less rules, which feels more natural to me.

Teachers felt that when they were able to do what they felt was best, they were able to better meet the needs of students. This also made them want to stay in Alaska.

Sub-Question Four

The final guiding question of the study was, "How do teachers explain the characteristics of teaching in Alaska that make them want to leave?" There were a handful of participants who stated that there was nothing about teaching in Alaska that made them want to leave. Some stated that they planned to stay regardless of the negatives. However, the themes of finances, climate, and resources negatively impacted teachers' willingness to stay in Alaska. One of the main reasons teachers discussed leaving Alaska was due to the lack of retirement and social security.

Cally commented, “We don’t have a pension, so I always say this ‘I’m gonna teach until I’m done teaching but to say that I’m gonna retire is like a joke.’” This was a very upsetting topic of conversation for many of the participants. Sophia explained why Alaskan teachers do not get social security,

> The windfall elimination provision. It is a federal program that Alaska is involved in that years ago they kept saying oh you have such a great retirement. You don’t need to pay into social security. We don’t pay into social security. Alaska has always tried to cut their budget and all of that. So, the windfall elimination provision prevents you from collecting your social security against your um pension and you can’t collect your husband’s social security or your spouse’s social security if you’re a teacher in Alaska. It’s in my opinion, it’s a very harmful thing directed solely at women as second careers and dependent upon their spouse.

Joe agreed with her analysis of the situation and felt like this would not have been an issue if teaching was not a primarily female profession.

The climate was one of the most common reasons people discussed leaving Alaska. Some discussed only leaving in the winter and having a home in two places. When asked what made her want to leave Alaska, Mary replied,

> Um the weather. I honestly think that’s the only thing. You know we always joke because I’m not a cold person, but I moved to the coldest place I could. Yeah, so that’s the only thing that ever makes me want to leave. Lots of inside recess then that’s cause for chaos.

Many commented about the fact that they could not endure many winters like the most recent one. Several participants also commented that they did not like the cold, wind, and ice.

The lack of resources was another reason that teachers discussed leaving the state. When asked about what she preferred teaching in the lower 48 states, Cally responded with, “Shipping. I know that sounds so funny, but I order so many supplies for my lab. Even like dry erase markers, they just don’t ship and I’m like oh gosh. So funny things like that and just the proximity.” Stella also responded,

> Access to resources. Not wearing the same clothes as my kids. Oh yea, that happened my first year. The only places to shop in Fairbanks were the same places my kids shopped to get their clothes from. So, I had a change of clothes in my classroom for when I showed up at school wearing the same outfit as a child. And I never thought that that would be a thing that I would have to worry about, and it happened more than once.

Making resources more readily available to teachers in the form of support staff and classroom supplies may help teachers choose to stay in Alaska.

Summary

This chapter presented details concerning the results of this study after data analysis was completed. The results were given in through theme and code development as well as research question findings. Personal responses from participants described their interaction with the phenomenon of relocating to teach in Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states. Participants were described with regard to their personal teaching histories and demographic information. Nine themes were derived from this study which supported the five research questions. The nine themes identified during data analysis were finances, culture, support, climate, students, resources, opportunity, delayed, and autonomy. All nine themes helped answer the central research question and sub-questions. The themes of culture, climate, students, resources, and delayed provided answers to the first sub-question. The themes of finances, culture, climate, and

students provided information on the second sub-question. Finances, support, climate, opportunity, and autonomy were the themes that aided in answering the third sub-question. Sub-question four was developed through the themes of finances, climate, and resources. Overall, research question answers helped to provide an understanding of the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of teachers who chose to relocate to Alaska from the lower 48 states. This chapter is organized into a discussion of the findings, a discussion of the interpretation of the findings, a discussion of the implications for the findings, a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies. A summary of the study concludes this section.

Discussion

Through this phenomenological study, the essence of the lived experiences of 12 teachers who relocated to Alaska after teaching in the contiguous United States. Of the 12 participants, one was male and eleven were female. All participants identified as White; One was of Hispanic descent. One participant was in her 20s, three were in their 30s, three were in their 40s, three were in their 50s, and two were in their 60s. To focus on the contributors' lived experiences, a transcendental method was chosen for research. The findings of the experiences of teachers who started teaching in the lower 48 states and relocated to begin teaching in Alaska contribute to the knowledge base regarding teaching in Alaska. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory and Rogers' (1951) experiential learning theory guided this study.

Interpretation of Findings

Overall, participants were happy with their choice to relocate to Alaska. Most participants reported a love of Alaska and the autonomy they had for teaching in the classroom. Data were collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents completed by participants. Data were analyzed through coding, and nine themes were identified and

interpreted. These themes are supported below comprising implications for policy or practice along with theoretical and empirical implications.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Nine themes were identified during the data analysis phase of this study to include: finances, culture, support, climate, students, resources, opportunity, behind, and autonomy. Each of these themes help explain the lived experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of teaching in Alaska. Below, five interpretations of these themes are identified and expounded upon to further explain the experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska.

Climate is a double-edged sword. Many of the participants in this study discussed the positive and negative aspects of the climate in Alaska. It was both a reason to stay and a reason to leave. It was also challenging to learn to adapt to during their first year. Alaska has more snow days than any other state in the United States (World Media Group, 2021). Some participants used these snow days to find new hobbies and enjoy different times of the year. Others focused on how difficult it was to get around during snow and ice days. It was all about perspective. All participants discussed how beautiful Alaska was regardless of the season or the weather. Almost all participants discussed how much they love the summer months in Alaska because the weather is warm, and they are able to get outside and take their classes outside to enjoy and learn about nature.

Drew et al., (2021) discussed how the weather and darkness can cause SAD in some individuals. This means that they become more depressed during the seasons of fall and winter when there is less daylight. Many participants discussed how much the darkness in winter impacted their ability to function normally in Alaska. They stated that it made them want to

hibernate and feel like they could not leave their home since it was dark outside. Some participants found that sitting in front of a SAD light for 15 minutes each day helped alleviate these feelings while others found it hard to sleep in the summer because it never gets dark.

Retirement is important. Almost every participant expressed frustration with the lack of retirement options for teachers in Alaska. Teachers in Alaska are not eligible for a typical teacher pension or social security. Aldeman (2019) reported that it would take 23 years for the teacher retirement plan in Alaska to exceed social security benefits. This is significant for those teachers who relocated to Alaska later in their career and did not plan to teach for another 23 years. The majority of teachers in this study ranged in age from their 30s to 60s. This means that they are not in the very beginning years of their teaching career. Participants expressed uncertainty about their future due to the fact that they would not have a definite retirement when they finished teaching.

Cultural awareness is vital. Native Alaskans comprise 14.8% of the population in Alaska (Carton, 2018). Many teachers knew that they were expected to teach Native Alaskan history to students and incorporate culturally responsive teaching standards, but they did not feel prepared to actually implement that into their classrooms. Several participants felt that the school district should supply a social studies curriculum so that they were more prepared to teach those standards.

Teachers also felt unprepared for the cultural norms of Alaska Native students in their classroom. They were unaware that it was considered rude to make eye contact or answer questions before others. There was also some confusion surrounding family structures and relationships. This information is not readily available to those researching teaching in Alaska. While the Alaska studies classes are beneficial, they did not give teachers some of the more

relevant information for teaching Alaska Native students. They also did not have to be completed until teachers renewed for a professional teaching certificate at three years. This was after most participants had figured out some of the more critical differences in social norms through personal experience.

Resources are essential. Finding resources was another challenging and eye-opening topic of discussion in this study. Buying food and supplies is different in Alaska (University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2021-b). There are not overnight shipping or two-day shipping options to get school supplies to teachers quickly. It takes time to get resources if they can be delivered to Alaska at all. Many companies that offer shipping options denote that it is only for the contiguous United States.

The vast differences of Alaska make having staffing resources difficult as well. There are teacher and staff positions still needing to be filled each year in schools in Alaska. Some participants also discussed working with people who left in the middle of the year because they could not handle the dissimilarities that make Alaska unique.

Trauma has a ripple effect. Many teachers knew that students in Alaska had a high number of adverse childhood experiences, but they did not realize how much that would impact their teaching. Some teachers did not realize how overwhelmed child protective services was and that there was a higher-than-average referral rate (Austin et al., 2019). Referrals were over four times higher per 1,000 children in Alaska than the United States average (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Teachers expressed that they went home worried about whether or not their students were safe and had what they needed at home.

As Espelage et al. (2021) noted, trauma can cause extreme behaviors in children. The trauma that students experience also influences their behavior. Teachers expressed how much

more significant student behaviors were in Alaska than in the lower 48 states where they previously taught. This makes it difficult to manage a classroom and ensure that all students are getting what they need.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings of this study expound upon the experiences of teachers who relocated to Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states. Following are implications for policy and practice. Both the positive and negative aspects of their experiences were highlighted through this study. The Alaska DEED, school boards, superintendents, principals, and teachers considering relocating to Alaska may use the results of this study to inform their decisions.

Implications for Policy

This study has implications that could apply to policies for teaching in Alaska that would make this a more desirable move for teachers from the lower 48 states. By seeking to describe what was experienced by teachers relocating to Alaska after teaching in the lower 48 states and how it was experienced, these findings may be helpful to school districts in Alaska, along with the DEED, in implementing policies to help ease the transition for teachers from the lower 48 states to Alaska. Likewise, these findings can help everyone better understand the difficulties experienced by those choosing to relocate. Policies can be changed to alleviate some of the challenges faced by those in this study. Teachers would appreciate a more streamlined and less expensive process for obtaining their professional teaching license in Alaska. They would also like to be able to complete their Alaska studies training before relocating so that they have the necessary information when they first have Alaska Native students and not after they have already been immersed in the differences for two to three years. The current policies on pensions and social security for Alaskan teachers need to be reviewed to help provide a sense of financial

security for those teachers who began teaching in Alaska after 2006. These findings are crucial for districts in Alaska that are looking to recruit and retain teachers from the lower 48 states.

Implications for Practice

Several practical implications were discovered through this study. Peyton et al., (2021) found that only about 70 percent of teachers in Alaska plan to continue teaching in Alaska. This study explored some of the challenges that teachers faced and what they wished they had known before choosing to relocate. These are areas that could be addressed to help retain the teachers currently employed in Alaska. This assists in providing those in charge of recruiting teachers to Alaska with information that they need to highlight during recruitment efforts. Topics such as finances and culture could be emphasized during pre-screening interviews or underscored on job postings so that candidates are not surprised after they arrive. A more complete overview of the climate of the area in Alaska that a teacher is considering would also be beneficial so that they can come prepared for the challenges they will face based on the climate.

The study also underscored some of the positive aspects of teaching in Alaska that made teachers want to stay. This is another area that recruiters could emphasize to help give potential candidates a complete picture of what teaching in Alaska is like. Participants from this study loved the natural beauty that surrounded them in Alaska along with the support that they felt from administration and parents. Teachers also appreciated the autonomy they were afforded to teach in a manner that they knew was beneficial to their students instead of following the latest trend, process, or policy. These are areas that could help encourage teachers to make the move to Alaska and to be successful.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The findings from this study address a gap in the literature that exists with regards to teaching in Alaska in an urban fringe area after relocating from the contiguous United States. The study provides both theoretical and empirical implications. The study supports situated learning theory and experiential learning theory. It also points out gaps in the current literature on teaching in Alaska. The study provides areas for additional empirical research as well as support for some current research.

Theoretical

The shared lived experiences of the 12 participants reinforced Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory and Rogers' (1951) experiential learning theory. The participants were able to provide information for future teachers considering relocating to Alaska due to the experiences they had learning from being in the situation. The lived experiences of these 12 participants shed light on the information that should be made available to others. The challenges they faced being a teacher in Alaska without the knowledge they needed available helped to create a knowledge bank of information that needs to be further studied and explained to future candidates. Without having been situated in their positions and having experienced the change firsthand, they would not have been able to provide information that could be beneficial for future teachers considering relocating to Alaska.

Empirical

Many studies examined teaching in Alaska with regards to teaching indigenous populations (Carton, 2018; Chain et al., 2017; Torres, 2017) or teaching in remote areas off of the road systems (Bazley et al., 2016; DeFeo & Tran, 2019). The participants of this study highlighted their personal experiences relocating to Alaska after teaching in the contiguous

United States. Studies did not examine teaching in urban fringe areas, the challenges relocating teachers faced, the aspects of teaching in Alaska that make teachers want to stay or leave, or many of the topics teachers wished they had known more about before deciding to relocate to Alaska. The findings from this study both support and supplement the existing empirical research on teaching in Alaska.

While there was a lot of research on teaching indigenous populations, a lot of practical information about social norms was not readily available. Information about dropout rates of Alaska Native students along with their high rates of absenteeism was studied (Chain et al., 2017; Riser et al., 2019). More information was obtained through Alaska Studies courses teachers were required to take, but they still did not feel like it encompassed the information they really needed. Topics such as the fact that in Alaskan Native culture it is rude to make eye contact or be the first person to answer a question was unknown by teachers until they had experiences where students were not following classroom norms made it apparent. Literature also did not discuss family dynamics of Alaskan Natives. It is common practice for parents to adopt their children out to siblings or to have extended family under one roof, which it not a common practice in the lower 48 states.

Teacher certification was an area where teachers were aware of what to expect because certification steps were posted online. They knew that there was a $260 fee, fingerprinting, Alaska Studies course requirements, competency exams, and transcript requirements (Alaska DEED, 2021-e). Teachers, however, did not realize that they would get conflicting information from certification specialists that they spoke with. They did not understand the amount of time and money that it would take to gain access to all of the items required. Teachers were required

to pay for the college courses they were required to take to meet the Alaska Studies course requirements and requesting transcripts and exam results can add up over time.

Retirement was another area that had information readily available, but teachers were not aware that they needed to research it because they believed all teachers were eligible for pensions and social security. Abashidze et al. (2020) and Aldeman (2019) discussed the Windfall Elimination Provision that allows certain groups of professionals to avoid paying into social security since they have pensions available. This has not been revisited since teacher retirement moved from defined benefit to defined contribution in Alaska. Adams' (2021) research found that retirement, or lack thereof, was one of the major reasons teachers considered leaving the teaching profession in Alaska. This study reiterated the importance of addressing the retirement issue in Alaska in order to retain teachers.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations exist in all research studies. Limitations are possible weaknesses of a study that are not easily controlled (Creswell & Poth, 2018). On the other hand, delimitations are intentional decisions made to constrict or define the boundaries of the study. Limitations and delimitations of this research study will be discussed in this section.

Limitations

Multiple limitations were encountered while conducting this research study. The first limitation was the small sample size. Twelve participants were involved in this study. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the study to other locations in Alaska or even some of the unrepresented schools within that district. The school district has over 40 schools, but teachers only represented seven of those schools.

A second limitation of this study was that only participants willing to voluntarily participate were included. These teachers had experiences they were willing to share with others. Those who relocated to Alaska from another state but did not feel comfortable sharing their stories were not included and therefore, may have different experiences that do not align with the findings of this study.

Another limitation was the geographic location of the study. All twelve participants were from the same school district in Alaska; therefore, this study may not generalize to other locations in the state. The study was conducted in a large urban fringe school district. This study would probably not generalize or transfer to teachers who relocate to large urban school districts or remote villages.

The fourth limitation of this study was the demographics of the participants in the study. All 12 participants were Caucasian, and 11 of the 12 participants were female. Populations of teachers with different races and ethnicities may have different experiences that cannot be summarized by the findings of this study.

The final limitation of this study was that only participants who relocated to Alaska from the contiguous United States were considered. Findings may not generalize to teachers relocating from Hawaii or other countries. Teachers who have always taught in Alaska may have different experiences that could contribute as well. The findings of this study may not generalize to that population either.

Delimitations

The major delimitation in this study was that the contributors were bound by certain requirements to participate. They had to have taught in another state prior to teaching in Alaska, they had to have taught at least one year in Alaska, and they had to be currently teaching in the

specified school district. By limiting the study to these confines, the researcher was able to ensure that all participants had the shared experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Recommendations for Future Research

The literature found prior to this study did not discuss the resources and opportunities available to teachers, how far behind many aspects of teaching are, or the amount of autonomy teachers in Alaska have. These were all major themes found in this research study. This is information that needs to be researched and made available to teachers to help them make informed decisions. About relocating to Alaska to teach. Future researchers should conduct similar studies to confirm or deny the findings of this study.

Information on how to obtain resources or the resources that are difficult or impossible to obtain in Alaska needs to be more widely known. Future researchers should conduct both quantitative and qualitative studies that delve into the information teachers need about resources. Recommendations could then be made for what teachers need to bring with them before choosing to relocate to Alaska.

Many teachers discussed the opportunities that they were presented with teaching in Alaska. Future qualitative studies should conduct case studies with individuals about the unique opportunities they have experienced teaching in Alaska. These could include one of a kind field trips, experiences with the cultural immersion Rose Urban class, or just day to day life and the challenges it presents in Alaska. Not only would these be informative studies for teachers considering relocation to Alaska but also for teachers considering a different location within Alaska.

Future quantitative and qualitative studies should also investigate the findings from this study that students and schools are so far behind the rest of the United States. Testing data is

available to show that students in Alaska are not on the same academic level as their peers, but future studies could investigate the causes behind the lower academic levels. Many participants expressed that school trends were also four to five years behind the states they relocated from. Future studies should address whether this is the case for all of Alaska or unique to the school district addressed in this study. Studies should consider whether this is because Alaska waits to determine the success of new trends before implementing them or if there is another cause for why things are implemented many years later.

The autonomy that teachers felt in this study was a major reason many expressed a desire to stay in Alaska. Future studies should investigate if this is unique to the selected school district or if it can be generalized to all school districts in Alaska. Researchers should also explore whether this level of autonomy is as beneficial to students as teachers perceive it to be.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers who relocated from the lower 48 states to teach in Alaska. Twelve participants were involved in this study. Nine themes emerged from analysis of data collected through interviews, focus groups, and documents completed by participants: (a) finances, (b) culture, (c) support, (d) climate, (e) students, (f) resources, (g) opportunity, (h) behind, and (i) autonomy.

Some policy and practice changes were addressed to reduce the attrition rate of teachers in Alaska. Recruitment efforts need to provide more information on the challenges faced by teachers relocating to Alaska, the things teachers need to know before relocating, and the reasons teachers stay or leave Alaska. Making this information readily available will help ensure that the most appropriate candidates are recruited so that new candidates are not needed each year. This

information should specifically discuss the cost of living in Alaska, retirement and social security for teachers in Alaska, what teachers need to know when working with Native Alaskan students, what the climate is like during each month in that particular school district, the impacts of trauma on students, what resources are needed and what is available to prospective teachers, the opportunities they will have within the school district, how far behind students and policies or processes are within that school district, and the level of autonomy that teachers will have within their classroom.

Relocating to Alaska from another state can be a difficult process, especially if teachers are unaware of the challenges they will face. However, all of the participants in this study found a love for Alaska that has kept them in Alaska or made them want to stay for many more years. This is not the case for all teachers though. Readily available information for potential Alaskan teachers can help ensure that the correct teachers are chosen for teaching positions in Alaska so that teachers transitioning from the lower 48 states can do so with greater success.

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APPENDIX A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 15, 2022

Tabitha Hill

Grania Holman

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-576 TEACHING IN ALASKA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Tabitha Hill, Grania Holman,

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 46:104(d):

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(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) 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 atirb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Recipient:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of teachers in Alaska who have previously taught in the lower 48 states, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be certified teachers who taught in another state for at least one year and are teachers in the MSBSD. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview, a one-to-two-hour focus group, and fill out a document about your experiences teaching in Alaska which should take approximately 30 minutes. Member checking will occur upon completion of the study to ensure your information is portrayed as intended. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please complete the attached survey and return it by handing it to me or placing it in the envelope in my mailbox.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the [button/link] to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Hill
PhD candidate at Liberty University
[redacted]

APPENDIX C

Consent

Title of the Project: TEACHING IN ALASKA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
Principal Investigator: Tabitha Hill, PhD candidate at Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a certified teacher in the MSBSD who has previously taught at least one year in one of the contiguous 48 states. 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.

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

The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of teachers who have relocated to Alaska from the lower 48. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of what it is like to teach in Alaska after teaching in another state.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Individual interview: This will be an audio recorded interview either face-to-face or via Zoom that will last approximately one hour.
2. Focus group: This will be an audio recorded group discussion on teaching in Alaska. This will be an audio recorded face-to-face or Zoom session that will last approximately one to two hours.
3. Informational table: You will be provided an electronic or paper table to fill out discussing your teaching experiences in Alaska and the other state(s) you've taught in.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include more information readily available to teachers considering relocating to Alaska. This could result in teachers who are better prepared to teach in Alaska.

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. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

[Include the following in this section:

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes. 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 and 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 or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Tabitha Hill. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Grania Gothard Holman, 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.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

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 me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX D

Screener Survey

Screener Survey for Participation in Doctoral Research Study on Teaching in Alaska after Teaching in the Lower 48

Name_____

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not to Say

Race_____

Age_____

Email Address_____

Phone Number _____

Please list previous state(s) taught in as a K-12 public school teacher, and how long:

How many years have you taught in Alaska?_____

Preferred Method of Contact

- Phone
- Email
- Text

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Tell me why you chose to relocate to Alaska.
3. What did you know about Alaska before moving?
4. What information do you wish you had before choosing to relocate?
5. Tell me what your typical day is like teaching in Alaska.
6. What challenges did you face during your first-year teaching in Alaska?
7. What were the biggest differences between teaching in Alaska and teaching in the lower 48?
8. What do you prefer about teaching in Alaska?
9. What do you prefer about teaching in the lower 48?
10. What aspects of teaching in Alaska make you want to stay here?
11. What aspects of teaching in Alaska make you want to leave?
12. How does Alaska's climate impact your willingness to stay?
13. Compare the types of schools in Alaska to where you previously taught.
14. What is the student population like where you teach now in comparison to where you previously taught?
15. What else would you like to tell me about relocating to teach in Alaska?

APPENDIX F

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your experience teaching in Alaska during your first year.
2. Explain how you acclimated to teaching in Alaska.
3. Compare your thoughts on teaching in Alaska now to when you first relocated.
4. Describe what you could have done to better prepare yourself for teaching in Alaska.
5. What are your future plans with regards to teaching in Alaska?
6. What else would you like to share with the group about teaching in Alaska that has not been discussed?

APPENDIX G

Fill in the chart below with any information that you would like to provide on each topic listed as it relates to teaching in Alaska.

	Experiences in Alaska
Curriculum and Assessment	
Certification	
Diversity	
Climate	

Workload	
Types of Schools	
Working with parents and students	
Professional Development	