

2015

Caring, Advocacy, and Collaboration: A Study of Teacher Empowerment, Effectiveness, and Career Satisfaction

Sylvia Satterfield Hodge
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hodge, S. S.(2015). *Caring, Advocacy, and Collaboration: A Study of Teacher Empowerment, Effectiveness, and Career Satisfaction*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/3184>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

CARING, ADVOCACY, AND COLLABORATION: A STUDY OF TEACHER
EMPOWERMENT, EFFECTIVENESS, AND CAREER SATISFACTION

by

Sylvia Satterfield Hodge

Bachelor of Arts

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1982

Master of Education

University of South Carolina, 1984

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2015

Accepted by:

Rhonda Jeffries, Major Professor

Karen Gavigan, Committee Member

Lynn Harrill, Committee Member

Tambra Jackson, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

© Copyright by Sylvia Satterfield Hodge, 2015
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family; my husband David, and my children, Julia and Matt, whose love and support is unwavering, and who keep my life full, meaningful, and fun. To my brothers, Phillip and Kent Satterfield, who spoiled me when I was a child, and who are inspirational to me now. To the memory of my parents, Cecil and Winnie Satterfield, who taught me to live simply, to be thankful, to work hard, and to treat others with fairness and dignity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work on this terminal degree would not have been possible without the love and support of my family, particularly my husband and best friend, David Hodge; and our children, Julia and Matt. In the early fall of 2010, I was busy with my work as a high school math teacher in Greenville County, South Carolina, but realized that with both of my children in college, I had more free time than I was accustomed to. I happened to mention to David that I was thinking about a doctoral degree, and he was completely excited, stating “you have to do it!” So after a brief search of available programs in South Carolina, I made a call to the School of Education at the University of South Carolina, where I had completed my master’s degree many years earlier. A delightful and encouraging person on the phone, Elna Moses, explained to me that the degree that I seemed to be describing was the Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. She suggested that I contact Dr. Rhonda Jeffries for details about the coursework and the application process.

So after some soul-searching, I decided that I wanted to pursue this degree, beginning my studies during the summer of 2011; around the same time that I celebrated my fiftieth birthday. I realize that I have not been a typical doctoral student; I am certainly older than most, and I have been a classroom teacher for over thirty years. But throughout this study, Dr. Jeffries has been an ever-present source of encouragement. My school principal has also been a great help. During the year when I needed to take

classes on the main campus in Columbia, he arranged my teaching schedule to allow me to leave school by 2:30 p.m. in order for me to make it to class on time. My colleagues and friends at the local high school have been generous in their time in sharing their expertise and their philosophies with me.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how caring and advocating for marginalized students, along with collaboration among colleagues, contributes to teacher retention, empowerment, and job satisfaction. Goals of this research included unraveling ways in which caring teachers contribute to the self-esteem and academic success of students of poverty, particularly students of color; along with investigating how collaboration among teachers affects teacher attitudes toward the profession. This research was conducted through a case study which involved interviews of individuals, a focus group discussion, as well as detailed study of literature on the topics of teacher advocacy, job satisfaction, and empowerment. In order to delve into the rich experiences of the study participants, and given that this research concerned attitudes of educational professionals, a qualitative approach was warranted, and a case study was the most appropriate method. The study found that teachers who care about their students, who advocate for those who are marginalized, and who collaborate with colleagues, find fulfilment in their work and stay in teaching.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH OVERVIEW	1
INTRODUCTION	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	6
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	7
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	9
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	11
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	12
LIMITATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS	13
SUMMARY	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	15
INTRODUCTION	15
TEACHER RETENTION AND COLLABORATION	15
INHERENT DYNAMICS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS	19

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CARING.....	21
ADVOCACY FOR MARGINALIZED STUDENTS	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	25
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	25
INTRODUCTION	26
MIXED METHODS: QUALITATIVE DESIGN WITH QUANTITATIVE SUPPORT	27
CONTEXT OF THE STUDY.....	28
RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	29
CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PARTICIPANTS	31
ETHICAL PROTECTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS	32
DATA COLLECTION AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	33
DATA ANALYSIS.....	36
SUMMARY	38
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS	40
INTRODUCTION	40
QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION	42
QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION.....	44

RESEARCH QUESTION #1: HOW DOES ADVOCACY FOR MARGINALIZED STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION?	45
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	45
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	51
SUMMARY	54
RESEARCH QUESTION #2: IN WHAT WAYS CAN WHITE TEACHERS PROVIDE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR SUCH STUDENTS?	55
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	55
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	59
SUMMARY	63
RESEARCH QUESTION #3: TO WHAT EXTENT DOES COLLABORATION AMONG CARING TEACHERS CONTRIBUTE TO CAREER RETENTION?	64
QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS	64
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	68
SUMMARY	71
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION	74
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION	74
INTRODUCTION	74
INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS	76
IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS	78

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	84
SPECULATIONS.....	87
CONCLUSION.....	89
REFERENCES	97
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT	100
APPENDIX B: SURVEY OF VETERAN TEACHERS	111
APPENDIX C: PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	113

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Study Participant Demographics	43
Table 4.2: Research Question #1 Results	51
Table 4.3: Research Question #2 Results	60
Table 4.4: Research Question #3 Results	68

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Introduction

The issue of teacher turnover and a looming teacher shortage has been one of great concern in American education for the past quarter century. Much research has been conducted concerning attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers for K-12 classrooms across the country. As a veteran classroom teacher, I have had a personal interest in this area for many years. For example, in the past eight years at my high school, I have served as a certified mentor for new teachers five times, and of the five teachers that I mentored, only two remain on the faculty of my school. One individual left the profession altogether after one year, another took a teaching position in another state, and the third had a baby and stopped teaching, hopefully for just a few years, to stay at home with her child. Nonetheless, this revolving door of qualified teachers in and out of classrooms has a deleterious effect on the education of the young people of our district, state, and nation. “Employee turnover has especially serious consequences in workplaces that require extensive interaction among participants and that depend on commitment, continuity, and cohesion among employees. From this perspective, the high turnover of teachers in schools does not simply cause staffing problems but may also harm the school environment and student performance” (Ingersoll, R., Smith, T., 2003, p. 31).

It is not enough to attract qualified teachers into K-12 teaching. The educational establishment, including policy makers, administrators, as well as teacher leaders, must work toward helping teachers to be fulfilled in their work, thus encouraging them to stay in teaching. Over the past several years I have had numerous conversations, both formal and informal, with classroom teachers, coaches, and administrators; and the recurring theme appears to be that teachers, who feel that they are able to connect with students and other educators, tend to remain committed to the profession.

In a recent pointed conversation with a colleague who was expressing frustration over extra duties that teachers at our school are expected to perform, I became frustrated with what I considered to be a petty worker mentality, rather than professionalism. I ended the conversation with the statement, “I am here for the kids.” The colleague and I have been friendly for years, but we have disparate views on the roles and responsibilities of teachers.

Having two grown children who have navigated the K-12 educational system with the help of educated, informed, empowered and privileged parents, I am keenly aware that so many children in American schools are at a disadvantage when it comes to education. Apple (2006) stated that “many economic, social, and educational policies when actually put in place tend to benefit those who already have advantages” (p. 30). It is from this perspective that I realize my most significant work as an educator goes beyond concerns about menial duties. When teachers become advocates for marginalized students, the work becomes transformative and powerful for both parties. Our classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, yet our teaching force is slower to change. The typical K-12 classroom teacher in South Carolina is still a middle-class White

female, which points to the need for recruitment of males and teachers of Color in South Carolina public schools. While I cannot change the color of my skin and do not wish to change my gender, I know that I can move away from my traditional role as a classroom teacher, toward a more engaging one of advocacy and empowerment.

As a Teacher Cadet instructor, a major goal of my program is to attract minority and male students into the teaching profession. I believe that the works of the Teacher Cadet initiative, along with other programs such as Call Me Mister, are beginning to contribute to a more diverse teaching force in South Carolina. I am committed to encouraging diversity among educators, but I believe that the focus of my current research must be on ways to encourage teachers who are already in the classroom, to collaborate and to become advocates for their marginalized students, most of whom are from poverty or are of color, or both.

This study attempted to investigate the association between teacher collaboration and advocacy, and job satisfaction, thus teacher retention. Much work has been done in the area of teacher leadership and the significant roles that administrators play in encouraging teachers in their work, but little research has been conducted in the area of teacher longevity and satisfaction as it relates to collaboration between and among teachers. The problem of teacher turnover in American Schools has been and continues to be an issue of great concern to legislators, educational leaders, and community members. It is not enough to attract qualified teachers into K-12 teaching. The educational establishment, including policy makers, administrators, as well as teacher leaders; must work toward helping teachers to be fulfilled in their work, thus encouraging them to stay in teaching. For simply staffing our nation's classrooms with anyone, rather

than dedicated, enthusiastic teachers, does a disservice to our young people and to society as a whole.

Dedicated, experienced teachers are critical to the educational achievement and success of any school. Kukla-Acevedo (2009), cited Rivkin, Haushek, and Cain (2005), as stating “teachers generally need to acquire 5 years of experience to become fully effective at improving student performance” (p. 443). This statement provides further support of the argument that research is needed in the area of teacher retention of veteran classroom teachers.

More research is also warranted concerning the association between caring and advocating for students, and teacher empowerment and job satisfaction. Noddings (2005) argued that “Many children, especially minority children in urban schools, have been badly served” (p. xxii). Classroom teachers are practitioners. While policy makers and theorists work to create global changes in educational systems, I believe it is the teacher in the classroom who has the best chance at changing the lives of marginalized students, albeit one at a time. Sweeping policy changes do impact thousands, but even with the best-intentioned policies, every child needs at least one adult who cares enough to help them. My own children have my husband and me; so although they had wonderfully intelligent and competent classroom teachers who cared, they had little need for extra help when it came to school success. But there are countless children in South Carolina schools whose parents or caregivers lack the social capital to understand the educational system, much less to be able to advocate for them in terms of course selection, studies, extra help, college applications, and career planning.

During the early fall of last school year, I had an encounter with one of our struggling students which shifted the direction of my research. This particular individual, a female student of color, who was working full time after school to help her family make ends meet, was failing Geometry. One Friday afternoon, she had left her class and was looking for her former Algebra teacher when I found her. I invited her into my empty classroom to talk, and we sat down together. As I listened, she described her life as one of struggle. She told me that she worried that she, her sister, her niece, and their mother were not going to make it; that they had lived on a diet of noodles for extended periods of time; so she felt that she had to work, but she could not keep up with her studies. This student studies Cosmetology at one of our local Career Centers, but she was a serious drop-out risk. I went home and cried that day discussing her situation with my husband. Over that weekend I sent emails to the guidance counselors at my school, asking them to change this student's schedule so that she would be in another Geometry class. After a considerable amount of pressure, our guidance and administration worked with the Career Center to place this student into a Geometry class there, rather than at our high school. She has made a complete turn-around, earning a B average by the end of the first semester. While I cannot change her family's overall living situation, I know that I have used my influence to help this one individual stay in school, which I believe is a step toward her becoming self-sufficient. This particular situation points to my source of satisfaction in my job as an educator. Perhaps I have not changed policy, but I know without doubt that I have cared for and helped this young person.

Through preliminary research, it appeared that teachers who take time to be that giver of care for their students, and who are willing to collaborate with others to advocate

for them; tend to be energized, feel empowered and are more satisfied with their careers than those who focus exclusively on their academic subjects and the details of the job.

Statement of the Problem

The American system of education has changed little during my career as a professional educator. I began teaching in January 1983, just after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which ushered in an era of accountability in education that continues today. From *A Nation at Risk*, through *No Child Left Behind*, to the highly touted *Common Core Standards*, classroom teachers have been tasked with navigating a results-oriented landscape which emphasizes a subject-centered curriculum rather than one that is student-centered. Although traditionally viewed as a helping profession, teaching has become a competitive, “win at all costs,” job which for many neophyte teachers is simply too difficult. The challenges outweigh the rewards for many young teachers, and the exodus from American classrooms has been documented for years.

If classroom teaching is difficult for many, schooling remains an arena of dichotomies, where middle class, predominantly White students have advantages over other students simply because the educational system is imbued with White middle class underpinnings. For many students of color and those of poverty, navigating this unfamiliar system is difficult at best. But when predominantly White teachers become the caring adults for these marginalized students, both groups of individuals appear to benefit. So the problem this research attempted to address is how to empower teachers to

advocate for their students, thus contributing to their own career satisfaction, while simultaneously improving the academic success and social capital of these young people.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how teacher collaboration and advocacy for underserved students, energizes teachers and contributes to career satisfaction and longevity. Specifically the research attempted to address the following questions:

- 1) How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?
- 2) In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?
- 3) To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?

In my own professional life, I have found that collaborations with colleagues, whether they be at my school; in my department, serving on the School Improvement Council, serving on the Staff Development Committee, or at the district level; serving as past-Vice President for GCCTM (Greenville County Council of Teachers of Mathematics), or serving on the committee for high school math department chairs, or at the state and national level; serving on a textbook adoption committee for the South Carolina Department of Education, or simply participating as a member of such organizations as NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) and ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), has been invaluable to my

career satisfaction. One of the most difficult aspects of teaching that I had not anticipated prior to entering the classroom as a middle school teacher in January, 1983, was how lonely the job can be. This isolation seems impossible, given that every hour of the day; the classroom is filled with young people needing guidance and help. Apparently I was not alone in the unexpected solitude of classroom teaching. Research suggested that “the isolation of teachers should be of primary concern to policymakers for at least two reasons. First, past research indicates that isolation is a widespread characteristic of professional life in schools. Second, because isolation restricts opportunities for professional growth, it represents a potential barrier to the implementation of reform initiatives” (Flinders, 1988). I found the isolation to be the worst part of my teaching experience during those first few years. In the early 1980s mentoring programs did not exist in South Carolina schools, and the fact that I had graduated from college just weeks before I took over for a teacher who was moving out of state at the semester break, meant that I was thrust into this new environment with little support. So survival became the order of the day for the first several years of my teaching career.

I believed strongly that although I felt a calling to help young people, the career was too difficult, the challenges too large, and the path was simply too lonely for me to navigate. And I almost left the profession entirely after just two and a half years of teaching. But I held on, and after about five years in the classroom, I realized that I could find joy and satisfaction in the profession, as long as I made it a point to collaborate with other teachers on an ongoing basis. It was through this collaboration that I found my own personal voice as well as my strength and energy as a classroom teacher. When I engaged in discourse with other professionals, I was able to return to my classroom with

new ideas, and a renewed motivation to teach and encourage the young people in my charge.

My return to academia, which began during the summer, 2011, opened my eyes to issues of privilege and marginalization in education that I had never really noticed before. Obviously I could see that my Advanced Placement classes were predominantly White, middle class young people, but the situation did not nag at me as it does now. I had always attempted to help and encourage all of my students, but the Curriculum Studies coursework, particularly the Diversity courses, revealed my naiveté. The past four years of study have awakened in me a new dedication to advocacy, not only for underserved students, but for faculty who are interested in and willing to be the caring adults in the lives of marginalized students. This paradigm shift in terms of my own view of my role as a classroom teacher contributed to my own empowerment as an educator. It was through this lens of advocacy and collaboration that I believed further study was warranted concerning teacher retention and career satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

This research was conducted through a mixed-methods approach, including a case study which involved interviews of individuals, a focus group discussion, including detailed study of literature on the topics of teacher advocacy for marginalized students, collaboration, empowerment and retention; as well as a survey of veteran educators in order to study correlations between level of collaboration and advocacy, and job satisfaction. In order to delve into the rich experiences of the study participants, and

given that this research concerned attitudes of educational professionals, a qualitative approach was warranted, and a case study was most effective. But given my own background in statistical analysis, I also included a quantitative component, which was utilized to support and inform the work of the case study.

The perspective of this research study drew heavily from sociology. “The theoretical perspective..., drawn from the sociology of organizations, occupations, and work, holds that teacher turnover and, in turn, school staffing problems cannot be fully understood without closely examining the characteristics of the organizations that employ teachers and also examining turnover at the level of the organization” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 500-501). The assumptions involved an understanding that reality is socially constructed and that the goal of research is “of interpreting the social world from the perspectives of those who are actors in that social world” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8).

This study was conducted from the interpretivist perspective, particularly through a lens of caring. Given that the basis of the research lies in the understanding of the personal experiences of veteran educators, the interpretivist paradigm was appropriate. According to Glesne (2011), through Interpretivism, “your study design will tend to focus on in-depth, long-term interactions with relevant people in one or several sites” (p. 8). This Interpretivist Paradigm is the basis for much qualitative inquiry, including the work of this study.

I included both individual interviews and a focus group discussion for the data collection methods for this study. Since the classroom teachers share students and experiences at this particular site, the focus group discussion provided rich data concerning their opinions and experiences concerning leadership opportunities;

collaborations, both within and across academic departments; the extent to which they participate in professional organizations, as well as their beliefs concerning the ways in which advocating for marginalized students affect their job satisfaction. Since classroom observations of these teachers would not reveal their thoughts concerning the research questions, beginning with a focus group discussion, and following with individual interviews as necessary, provided the richest qualitative data for this research study.

The study participants had many years of experience as classroom teachers, and their willingness to discuss their attitudes toward their careers and what keeps them energized illuminated the issues surrounding the specific research questions set forth previously in this document. The individuals from the focus group, along with many other veteran educators at the research site, also participated in completing a survey of attitudes and experiences which bolstered the findings of the case study.

Operational Definitions

Definitions of terms relevant to this study include:

1. Career empowerment—the ability of individuals within the organization (school) to make decisions regarding their own work tasks and work environment.
2. Job retention—staying power. In this study job retention refers to veteran teachers deciding to remain in the classroom rather than moving on to another career in education, or rather than leaving the educational field altogether.
3. Job satisfaction—intangible feelings of worth and achievement that grow out of the work (school) environment.

4. Collaboration—working together and sharing ideas with other professionals.
5. Advocacy—working for equitable treatment of marginalized students
6. Marginalized—lacking power
7. Morale—the level of satisfaction and happiness among faculty members.

Significance of the Study

The significance of research concerning what motivates and empowers teachers to remain happily engaged in their profession cannot be overstated. Teachers provide the grounding for the educational achievement of any school, and administrators must realize that it is this core group of educators that make or break the school's success. Any research that can enlighten the educational community as to keeping effective teachers empowered and energized in their classrooms is significant work. Whereas teacher retention in general has been the focus of much research over the past twenty plus years, the connection between teacher collaborations and advocacy for marginalized students has not received significant attention. Considering the possibility that teachers who collaborate and advocate experience more job satisfaction and career empowerment than do others, this connection merited further thought and research.

Classroom teachers face a myriad of challenges in current K-12 classrooms. Keeping effective and dedicated teachers engaged and energized in their teaching must be a goal of educational leadership. Having served on this faculty for the past eighteen years, and having my two children graduate from this institution, I was confident that my colleagues would be open and frank with their thoughts and beliefs concerning how teacher participation in professional organizations impact career empowerment and job

retention. The following sections highlight and explain the research conducted. The Literature Review served to explore studies that have been conducted previously in the area of career empowerment and job retention among teachers. It also revealed the need for further study concerning the relationship between teacher morale, job satisfaction and participation in professional collaborations. The Methodology section includes a description of the data collection methods which were utilized in this study.

Limitations/Considerations

Given that this study involved teachers from a suburban high school in upstate South Carolina, the conclusions drawn from this research will not apply to educators in other parts of the United States or even in other parts of South Carolina. It was beneficial and limiting that I am a part of the faculty at the participant school which gives me particular insights and also challenges me to make the familiar strange. Given the fact that my own professional satisfaction has been improved through advocating for students and through participation in collaborations with other educational professionals, these topics of interest in terms of research came about naturally. Clearly further study is warranted in this area. This current research project was limited by the fact that only high school teachers are participants, and that these teachers were all from the same school. This suburban high school has traditionally been highly regarded and successful, and although there were issues of faculty morale and empowerment among this faculty, it was difficult to surmise whether or not these issues are universal among high school teachers in other areas. It was with these ideas in mind that extrapolation of the results of this study to other teaching environments would be limited.

Summary

I believe that the classroom teacher is the most influential educational professional in the lives of students. Keeping motivated, empowered, and dedicated teachers in public school classrooms must not be overlooked when considering how to improve education in South Carolina and all across America. While policy-makers; including legislators, department of education leaders, school boards, and district officials make decisions which affect the lives of thousands of students; classroom teachers have the unique privilege of knowing the students on a personal level. To quote Aristotle: “Those who educate children well are more to be honored than they who produce them.” While I acknowledge that American schools are fraught with inequities and problems of all types, I believe that caring teachers can do more for the students in their charge than theorists and policy-makers can. But classroom teaching is often a difficult and thankless job. So the goal of this research was to unravel how to empower teachers to advocate for their students, thus contributing to their own career satisfaction, while simultaneously improving the academic success and social capital of their students. Certainly a daunting task, yet this work was necessary for the benefit of both teachers and young people.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Much work has centered on the area of teacher retention due, in part, to a growing fear in this country, of possible looming teacher shortages. Richard Ingersoll, of the University of Pennsylvania, has done significant work regarding teacher retention. In one such study, Ingersoll (2001) investigated the issues of teacher turnover and teacher shortages in K-12 schools across the United States. According to Ingersoll (2001), the issue of a looming teacher shortage, as predicted through several large-scale studies during the 1980s is not so much an issue of the “graying” of the U.S. teaching force, as it is one of schools becoming “revolving doors”, where teachers leave, either to move to other, better teaching jobs, or they leave the profession altogether. “This analysis investigates the possibility that there are other factors—those tied to the organizational characteristics and conditions of schools—that are driving teacher turnover and, in turn, school staffing problems” (p. 499).

Teacher Retention and Collaboration

Ingersoll (2001) also discussed studies that were done during the 1980s and 1990s which focused on teacher turnover. He stated that, “Existing research has generally

sought to explain teacher turnover as a function of the characteristics of individual teachers” (p. 500). But Ingersoll focused his research on “examining the characteristics of the organizations that employ teachers and also examining turnover at the level of the organization” (p. 501).

Ingersoll discussed the emphasis on teacher recruitment that has pervaded educational policy attempts to address the issue of teacher shortage. But his contention was that these recruitment efforts ignore the need for study of what keeps qualified teachers in the classroom. His work attempted to address “the organizational sources of low retention” (2001, p. 501).

Santoro (2011) has also researched teacher retention and teacher satisfaction. She posed the question: “What happens when experienced teachers who are fueled by the moral dimension of teaching find that they can no longer access the moral rewards of the work?” (p. 2). She stated that “the prevention of burnout remains the responsibility of individual teachers who maintain a commitment to pursuing their own passions” and “in order to avoid burnout; teachers must replenish their individual store of personal resources” (p. 11). It is this notion, that teachers must be responsible for maintaining their own personal commitment to the profession in order to avoid dissatisfaction, which grounds the argument for participation in collaborative activities with other teaching professionals. That teachers who collaborate with others, who advance their understandings of educational theories and practice through collaborations and advocacy, would be more satisfied and empowered in their careers, seems to make perfect sense, but research concerning these connections is lacking and necessary.

Dedicated, experienced teachers are critical to the educational achievement and success of any school. According to Kukla-Acevedo (2009), “School, teacher, and student characteristics are all potential determinants of teacher turnover, and research provides fairly clear indications of these relations. However, much less is understood about the effects of organizational conditions on attrition” (p. 443). She cited Rivkin, Haushek, and Cain (2005), as stating “teachers generally need to acquire 5 years of experience to become fully effective at improving student performance” (p. 443). This statement provides further support of the argument that research is needed in the area of teacher retention of veteran classroom teachers.

Chapman (1984) argued that “the retention of public school teachers is an issue of continuing concern in education” (p. 645). He noted that “relatively little research has addressed in more than an anecdotal way the important factors associated with retention” (p. 645). Although Chapman’s work concentrated on teacher attrition in the early stages of the teacher’s career, it still provides support of the need for further research in the area of teacher attrition and teacher retention.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) posited that “increases in student enrollment and teacher retirements are not the primary causes of the high demand for new teachers and subsequent staffing difficulties. A larger part of the problem is teacher attrition—which is particularly high among teachers in their first few years of service” (p. 30). They argued that “the high turnover of teachers in schools does not simply cause staffing problems but may also harm the school environment and student performance” (p. 31). Educational research must continue in the area of keeping quality teachers in their classrooms.

York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggested that developing leadership opportunities among veteran teachers contributes to longevity and job satisfaction. They argued that “the concept of teacher leadership suggests that teachers rightly and importantly hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning” (p. 255). Their concern with leadership development correlates closely to the hypothesis that participation in collaborative professional organizations contributes to teacher satisfaction and empowerment.

Other research suggested “it is the goal of the elementary and secondary public school system in the United States to provide a high-quality education to every student. To do so requires an adequate supply of competent individuals who are willing and able to serve as teachers” (Guarino, C., Santibanez, L., Daley, G., 2006, p. 173). Research abounds on the subject of teacher attrition, and some studies concerning teacher motivation and efficacy also inform the study of teacher empowerment and job satisfaction (Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A., Hoy, W., 1998) and (Fernet, C., Senecal, C., Guay, F., Marsh, H., & Dowson, M., 2008). But inequities are evident in the placement and advancement of some teachers. Apparently “state educational policies, involving accountability and instructional reform, and local district and school conditions interact with teachers’ personal and professional backgrounds to shape two tracks of new teachers, tracks that reinforce existing educational inequities” (Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R., Speigman, A., 2004, p. 557). So not only do educational policy makers and researchers need to study ways in which to encourage teachers to remain energized in their classrooms, but also, work must be done in the area of equitable placement and treatment of all professional classroom teachers. Clearly much work is yet to be done on several

fronts in terms of attracting, supporting, and retaining qualified personnel in K-12 classrooms across the United States.

Inherent Dynamics between Teachers and Students

While classroom teachers argue that their voices are often unheard in the greater educational arena, the teacher remains an authority figure in classrooms across this state and nation. Current best practices require student-centered classrooms, where teachers guide students through collaborative lessons, but the teacher remains in a position of power, nonetheless. Although public schools across the country have implemented steps to recognize inequities, schooling remains an arena of dichotomies, where middle class, predominantly White students have advantages over others simply because the educational system is imbued with White middle class underpinnings. For many students of color and those of poverty, navigating this unfamiliar system is difficult at best. But when predominantly White teachers become the caring adults for these marginalized students, both groups of individuals appear to benefit. According to Hyland (2005), “Currently, schools in the United States are staffed by primarily White teachers,” continuing, “We do know that teachers participate in the reproduction of racial inequality and that teachers can mitigate or exacerbate the racist effects of schooling for their students of color depending on their pedagogical orientation” (p. 429). Teachers have the power to help eradicate inequities in their classrooms, thus contributing to improving educational experiences for students traditionally marginalized in American public education.

But the work of disrupting the status quo of the traditional classroom dynamics between teachers and students, particularly those who are marginalized in some way, can be difficult for well-meaning educators. Perhaps Boutte and Jackson (2013), captured the call to action best when they stated, “Responding to their discomfort in addressing issues of race, we ask White allies to hang in there on behalf of children – many of whom are uncomfortable daily in classrooms and schools” (p. 628). The ideas expressed here are also relevant to teacher-student power dynamics when the predominantly White middle-class teachers are interacting with students of poverty, and students who identify with LGBTQ communities as well. When students lack the social capital of the dominant group, which in public schools, remains the White, middle-class, Judeo-Christian, teachers must work to disrupt the norms, and become caring advocates for these students.

The Significance of Caring

Noddings (2005), argued, “The structures of current schooling work against care, and at the same time, the need for care is perhaps greater than ever” (p. 20). The need for staffing classrooms with teachers who care cannot be overstated. Oftentimes it is the classroom teacher who acts as the one caring adult for students. Teachers have little if any control over the home situations their students face, but when teachers demonstrate that they genuinely care for their students, both groups of individuals benefit. Noddings (2005) indicated that “Kids learn in communion. They listen to people who matter to them and to whom they matter. The patterns of ignorance we deplore today are signs that kids and adults are not talking to each other about everyday life and the cultural forms

once widely shared” (p. 36). Caring for students appears to be an inherent characteristic for some classroom teachers, but for others, the act of caring must be learned in order to become praxis. Regardless of the backgrounds and personalities of individual teachers, all students deserve to interact with teachers who genuinely care about them.

The idea of the caring teacher does not imply simply a teacher who is nice and treats students well. When teachers model caring behaviors and are intentional in developing a classroom culture of care, students experience growth which can be transformative. According to Noddings (2005), “When students learn to respect and befriend classmates from different cultures, they are learning an attitude significant for global citizenship” (p. 122). So not only is developing an atmosphere of caring in public school classrooms the right thing to do, it has lasting effects on the students involved.

But the argument for taking the time necessary to establish caring classroom environments is not without criticism. The focus on high-stakes testing and accountability has a deleterious effect on taking time to develop relationships of trust and respect within public school classrooms. “The pressure schools face to improve academic test scores and the current national emphasis on high-stakes testing have implications for the development and maintenance of caring relationships between teachers and students” (Jeffrey, A., Auger, R. & Pepperell, J., 2013, p. 114). Throughout my own thirty-two years of classroom teaching, I have been told to “teach from bell to bell,” countless times in professional development sessions and faculty meetings. This phrase seems innocuous, yet it belies an underlying devaluing of time spent in developing caring relationships within the classroom setting.

Advocacy for Marginalized Students

For the first twenty-five plus years of my teaching career, I worked diligently to treat all of my students with kindness and respect, but in the flurry of activity which comes with classroom teaching, I failed to understand the systemic factors which contributed to some students' advantages over others. Certainly I was aware of societal issues affecting students, but I did not realize the effects of pervasive White privilege until I returned to academia in 2011. The fact that as a classroom teacher I was consistently overwhelmed with details, deadlines and responsibilities does not diminish my embarrassment for failing to recognize these issues for so many years. But with class discussions on readings by theorists such as hooks, Ladson-Billings, West, Freire, Apple, Noddings, and others, I came to realize that although I had always tried to treat my students with fairness and respect, I needed to do more. hooks (2003) argued that "Teachers are often among that group most reluctant to acknowledge the extent to which white-supremacist thinking informs every aspect of our culture including the way we learn, the content of what we learn, and the manner in which we are taught" (p. 25). While I cannot change policy in my role as a classroom teacher, I can and must advocate for students who lack the social capital to navigate the system alone.

Marginalization is not unique to students of color in the educational arena. The American democratic system of education centers on White, Middle-Class, and Judeo-Christian traditions; so students who do not fall within any of these categories face difficulties in K-12 classrooms across the country. With the exception of student

teaching in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, under the authority of a brilliant and energetic Black supervising teacher, my entire career has been spent in middle and high school classrooms in South Carolina. My studies at the University of North Carolina were pivotal for me. I believe that my college experiences there mark the beginnings of my questioning the educational system and the issue of privilege. Noddings (2005) argued that “we are concerned, and properly, that a disproportionate number of black and Hispanic children are placed in lower tracks. The dramatic unfairness of this situation obscures our vision as we look for a solution” (p. 41).

Barone (2006) stated that “most of us for whom educational studies is our chosen field see ourselves as engaged in an ongoing quest to make the world of schooling a better place” (p. 213). While I am still a classroom teacher with future plans for a career in educational studies, I am committed to making my small sphere of influence a better place as well. Barone (2006) continued with a description of the problem of federal government intervention into the field of education, and he talked of one of “the available forms of resistance to this institutional oppression of educators is a quiet subversion of these externally generated policy mandates from behind the closed classroom door” (p. 214). While I realize that as a classroom teacher, I have a duty to uphold the policies of my district and state, I do also understand that it is “behind the closed classroom door” where I have the most influence. In my classroom, through my daily practices, I can intentionally be an ally to students who are overlooked and underserved by the educational bureaucracy.

Noddings (2006) discussed issues of feminism, specifically women in caring professions, and religion in her work. She stated that “Christianity and its legacies affect

every citizen of the Western world, and all students should know something about its myths and beliefs” (Noddings N. , Critical lessons: what should our schools teach, 2006, p. 251). Students from different religious backgrounds are at a disadvantage in public schools in South Carolina, where Christian religious traditions are pervasive.

Students in the upstate of South Carolina who identify with LGBTQ communities face ridicule and judgment from peers in the K-12 environment, and their needs are often ignored by policy-makers who seem hesitant to address issues that remain controversial in this conservative community. I have seen virtually no movement toward a discussion of the needs of these students in my own school district. In my school, I have noticed one Safe-Space decal on the door of one of our guidance counselor’s offices. I spoke with that counselor about the need for dialog concerning this student population, and although we agree that our LGBTQ students are in need of care and advocacy, we need guidance on how to begin. Banks posited that “a diverse school environment enables students from many different groups to engage in discussions to solve complex problems related to living in a multicultural nation and world” (Banks, 2006, p. 144). In the fall semester, 2014, a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) Club was founded at this high school. This important step toward tolerance and understanding was marred by the fact that signs advertising the first meeting, which were posted throughout the school, were torn down. Clearly there is work to be done in terms of acknowledging students who exist on the fringes; ignored, underserved and marginalized.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the methods which were utilized to conduct the research. The aim of the study was to determine how teacher collaboration and advocacy for underserved students, energizes the teachers and contributes to career effectiveness, satisfaction and longevity. It involved a focus group discussion, along with interviews of veteran classroom teachers from a suburban high school in the upstate of South Carolina. It examined how career educators view collaboration on educational issues, as well as how they view advocacy for marginalized students as contributors to career empowerment. This research will contribute to the literature on teacher retention and job satisfaction, while addressing the symbiotic relationships between educators and young people when teachers become the one caring adult for students who need help navigating the K-12 curriculum continuum. This chapter includes the procedure justification, the role of the researcher, the research questions, the context of the study, the ethical protection of the participants, the data collection methods, the trustworthiness of the study, and an explanation of the data analysis that will be utilized.

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how teacher collaboration and advocacy for underserved students, energizes the teachers and contributes to career satisfaction and longevity. Specifically the research attempted to address the following questions:

- 1) How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?
- 2) In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?
- 3) To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?

Focus group discussion, interviews, and observations with an ancillary statistical analysis portion were utilized in order to address these overarching research questions.

The methodology for this research project incorporated an ethnographic case study of suburban high school teachers in the upstate of South Carolina. A major component of the study was interviewing the participants. According to Glesne (2011), “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” (p. 104). Study participants for the qualitative portion of this research were veteran educators with at least ten years of classroom experience. Since I have been a classroom teacher in this school for the past eighteen years, I am intimately familiar with the culture of this educational setting and with these particular professional educators.

Mixed Methods: Qualitative Design with Quantitative Support

Research studies concerning teacher retention which are quantitative are prevalent. But further research involving the lived experiences of educators, specifically classroom teachers, in terms of what keeps them satisfied and motivated to continue their careers in the classroom is needed. With an interpretivist paradigm as the lens, I attempted to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of the study participants in this suburban school. Although I have a tendency to lean more toward a critical lens in my own personal ideologies, I cannot be an unbiased critical observer in this environment, with these individuals who mean so much to me. I do hope to do critical research at some point in the future but the interpretivist viewpoint seemed appropriate here. As Glesne (2011) described interpretivist traditions: “what is of importance to know, then, is how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, perception, etc.” and these methods “include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions” (p.8). That this study had career empowerment, job retention, and job satisfaction among K-12 teachers at its focus, provided the impetus for the use of predominantly qualitative methodologies. “Qualitative research is interpretive research, with the inquirer typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). This research focused mainly on the qualitative aspects of job satisfaction through collaboration and advocacy, and qualitative research is appropriate for this type of study. I included ancillary statistical analysis to support the primary qualitative data collection in order to provide additional perspective toward addressing the research questions. This mixed-methods study provided the majority of the data from qualitative data sources with quantitative support serving a lesser role.

Context of the Study

Given the fact that I interviewed colleagues, some of whom I have known for eighteen years, impartiality was a challenge. My research questions concerning advocacy for marginalized students and collaboration with other professionals were ones that I believe to be significant. Having served as a mentor for several new teachers who left the profession after just one or two years in the classroom, I feel strongly that the issues of teacher empowerment and job retention merit study. I have been a K-12 classroom teacher for thirty-one years, and I do believe that professional collaborations, both formal and informal have helped me maintain positive energy and motivation for my work throughout my career. It has only been within the last four years that I have realized how energizing and rewarding advocacy for marginalized students can be for educators. With the Diversity Block requirement in the Curriculum Studies coursework at the University of South Carolina, my view of the educational landscape and of my place within it has completely changed. Now I see educators who are the “one caring adult” for their students, doing life-changing work, and I wanted to know more about what drives and motivates their efforts.

The main study participants included a core group of veteran educators who participated in a focus group discussion, as well as individual interviews. . This school is an award-winning AAAA High School in suburban Greenville County, in the upstate of South Carolina. With a student body of approximately 1,650, the demographics are changing. This school, which opened in 1973 in what was then a rural part of the county,

to ease over-crowding at neighboring high schools, is now squarely in the suburbs. According to the School Portfolio, the school has been challenged dealing with a more diverse student body with seventy-two different languages, as well as handling an increase of Poverty Index from 21.0 to 32.46 in the past three years. Family involvement and academic excellence are prevalent, and the graduation rate is 92%. The faculty is highly educated, with 100 percent of teachers certified by South Carolina, 63 percent of teachers have Master's degrees, 17 percent of teachers have Master's degrees plus 30 hours, 90 percent of teachers are technology proficient, and 12 percent of teachers are National Board certified. As stated previously, this faculty is predominantly White. A sad reality existed in that of approximately eighty-five classroom teachers at this suburban high school, only four teachers were of color. So most of the teachers at this school who advocate for marginalized students who are of color or otherwise, are White teachers. Given this demographic understanding, I did not distinguish teachers by their ethnicity unless it would illuminate the study results in some way.

Researcher Positionality and Trustworthiness

I am the chair of the mathematics department at this high school, but that position in no way places me above any of my colleagues at the school. I have no authority to hire and fire, or even to reprimand; so I did not encounter any hesitance on the part of the study participants in terms of sharing their thoughts and experiences with me through this research process. In fact, when I have been asked in the past to help others by answering

questions concerning my experiences and philosophies of education, I have been delighted to help.

Since I am quite familiar with the culture of this particular school, selecting a purposeful sample of veteran educators was not difficult. The level of mutual respect and trust between these colleagues has been established through years of working together; so they were comfortable answering interview questions honestly and with confidence. The focus group discussion was a process that did not elicit any stress on the part of the study participants for these same reasons. These colleagues were more than willing to contribute to this research.

As the researcher, I was dedicated to the integrity of the work. I worked diligently to protect the privacy of the subjects, and remain impartial, particularly since we have worked so closely during the past several years. As Glesne (2011) cautioned: “Predicated on trust, care, and a sense of collaboration, relational ethics is at the core of research in which friendship relationships are welcomed” (p. 171). I asked questions in order to understand the lived experience of these educators, not to project my ideas into their narratives. I coded responses carefully and as objectively as possible. Since I am a colleague of these individuals, I had to bracket my own hypotheses concerning career empowerment in order to be able to understand the experiences and ideas that they share. I was interested to learn how the quantitative piece supported the themes revealed through the interviews, observations, and focus group discussions.

Since this study involved a suburban high school in the upstate of South Carolina, the findings should not be extrapolated to other regions of the country, or to other regions

of the state. But it is my hope that this work might spur researchers in other locations to begin to pursue an understanding of how collaboration between educational professionals, and advocacy for students who need it, contributes to teacher effectiveness, career satisfaction and longevity.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

As discussed in the Literature Review, there are many systemic factors which appear to contribute to teacher attrition in American schools. Ingersoll (2001), stated that instead of simply an issue of an aging teaching force “there are other factors—those tied to the organizational characteristics and conditions of schools—that are driving teacher turnover and, in turn, school staffing problems” (p. 499). So with the goal of understanding variables which contribute to teacher longevity and career satisfaction, the study participants must be veteran educators. This research attempted to unravel circumstances and opportunities which contribute to teachers staying committed and motivated year after year.

With these ideas in mind, I asked all of the classroom teachers at this school with at least five years of experience to complete a simple survey of attitudes and experiences. This survey, which was a compilation of statements based on the work of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), at Ohio State University, along with a few original statements which I included, involved Likert scale responses and provided the quantitative data for the study. The survey, which asked for responses to a range of statements concerning classroom experiences, job satisfaction, collaborative and

advocacy opportunities, has been provided in the Appendix section of this study.

Specific statements which were paired for data analysis, are outlined and explained in Chapter Four under Research Findings and Chapter Five's Summary and Discussion.

The main focus of research, on the qualitative side, involved initial questioning, and then detailed interviewing of five veteran classroom teachers, several of whom are known advocates for underserved students. Two male foreign language teachers provided insight into the value of collaboration. These teachers do not teach the same language, yet they utilized common planning and collaboration on a regular basis. Purposeful sampling was utilized here. As Creswell (2009) stated, "the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 178). These teachers, along with the administrators, all work collaboratively, and they have years of experience in advocating for students. A major goal of this research was to understand and illuminate what aspects of the lived experience of these individuals have contributed to their career satisfaction and their effectiveness with students.

Ethical Protection of Study Participants

As with any research in the school setting, protection of the privacy of the participants was foremost. Following permission from the school and district administration, I asked veteran educators in this high school to answer the introductory questions. Participation in any of the questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions,

and observations was be completely voluntary, and the identities of the study participants were not revealed in any of the notes or documents relating to data collection or data analysis for this research. The researcher utilized a number system to keep track of individual participant responses, and this system was not shared with anyone at any time. Interviews and focus group discussions that were recorded via technology were transcribed privately and the recordings will be deleted following the final publication of this dissertation. Complete confidentiality protected all of the individuals involved in this research, and also contributed to the validity of the responses, thus the believability of the research results.

Data Collection and Interview Protocol

Research began prior to summer vacation in June, 2014, following approval from the local school district and the Institutional Review Board for the university. I began with the initial questioning outlined in the Role of the Researcher section of this chapter. Once this questioning was completed, I conducted detailed interviews of at least two of the teachers concerning their experiences with advocacy of marginalized students. Upon school opening in August, 2014, data collection resumed in earnest. Follow-up interviews and a focus group discussion took place in early October, 2014. Interviews of two other teachers concerning their experiences with collegial collaboration took place, followed by observations of collaboration in department and committee meetings. The issue of caring for students was at the heart of this research. In a recent conversation with one of the teachers at this school, I was giving an informal overview of this research project, and

she said that the reason she believes that teachers who advocate for students in the margins are happier than those who do not, was a simple statement: “either you care or you don’t, and those of us who care tend to be happier in the job.” So the qualitative aspects of this study focused on the attitudes and opinions of teachers who care, teachers who collaborate, and teachers who advocate.

Just prior to the closing of school, in June, 2014, the teachers with five or more years of experience were asked to complete the survey of attitudes and experiences. Since participation in all facets of this research was strictly voluntary, I hoped to receive more than half of the surveys completed. In terms of the teachers who were to be interviewed and would be giving up a large amount of time, I planned to conduct interviews both on and off campus, where the promise of a free meal might motivate these colleagues to participate in the study.

In carrying out this research, I began with interviewing ten to fifteen veteran classroom teachers and asked the following questions:

1. How many years have you taught at this school?
2. How many years have you taught altogether?
3. Has your teaching assignment at your current school varied during your time there? (ie. have you taught a variety of courses or levels, or has your teaching assignment remained fairly constant?)
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. Where did you go to school (K-12, college, post-graduate)?

6. Are you a National Board Certified teacher? (When did you complete the certification process?)
7. Do you find collaboration with other teaching professionals helpful to your own teaching?
8. Please elaborate (with whom do you collaborate? With people at your own school? With others in your district? With individuals in the state? With individuals on a national level?)
9. Would you consider the collaborative process to be a valuable part of your remaining energized and empowered in your own teaching assignment?
10. Please elaborate as to how these collaborations assist you in remaining positive about your current assignment.
11. Have you advocated for marginalized students in any way?
12. If yes, please elaborate on the student(s) and the circumstance(s).
13. Please share your thoughts on how to encourage teachers to remain positively engaged in their classrooms.

Following these interviews, I coded the responses in order to determine common themes; and I triangulated the qualitative data, which informed the remainder of the research. Through coding of the interviews I noticed thematic similarities between the respondents. Every teacher interviewed pointed to their dedication to “the needs of the students.” One of the teachers interviewed even ended her interview, saying, “I am a Christian, and I try to model my life after Jesus. You know, Jesus was a teacher. I can’t imagine any work that is more important than what we do.” All of the educators who

responded that they were active with advocacy and collaboration agreed to further discussions and sharing.

In order to triangulate the results, I utilized a parallel quantitative approach to the research process, in which I asked all of the faculty members of the school with at least five years of experience to complete a Likert-scale survey of attitudes toward teaching. The results of this survey provided further understanding of the attitudes and experiences of these veteran educators. The hypothesis statements included predictions that teachers who collaborate and who advocate for their students, tend to feel more empowered and satisfied in their careers than those who do not. The data analysis included tests of significance, which supported the findings of the qualitative aspects of this research.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative data from this study was an ongoing process throughout the course of the data gathering phase. Transcripts of interviews and observations were written within two days of the interactions in order for the information to remain accurate, not biased due to any time lapse. Upon transcription, coding was conducted in order to reveal common themes between the lived experiences and attitudes of the study participants. Should disparate ideas have emerged, they would have been acknowledged and included in the analysis of the results section of the study. Member-checking was a significant aspect of the qualitative data analysis in order to ensure that my understanding of what the study results revealed consistent with what the study participants conveyed. Triangulation also played an important role in that common

themes emerged through the individual interviews, the focus group discussion, and the results of the surveys. Among the issues that were obvious concerns for most all of the teachers involved included the need for time for teachers to collaborate with each other, which is at the core of the idea of professional learning community. The need for professional learning communities, was outlined by DuFour (2005), when he stated, “the right kind of continuous, structured teacher collaboration improves the quality of teaching and pays big, often immediate, dividends in student learning and professional morale in virtually any setting” (p. xii). These teachers also discussed how simple recognition and thanks for a job well done can go a long way in terms of their morale.

On the quantitative side, tests of significance were conducted concerning possible relationships between caring, collaboration, and advocacy experiences among veteran teachers, and their attitudes toward their careers. Quantitative data analysis included paired T-tests for means, which revealed relationships, or the lack thereof. The quantitative analysis was completed following the collection of the surveys from the larger group of faculty participants; those with at least five years of teaching experience.

For the quantitative analysis, the following hypotheses were investigated:

1. There is no significant difference between teacher attitudes toward their work and their level of collaboration.
2. There is no association between teacher levels of care and their job satisfaction.
3. There is no significant difference between teachers who advocate for marginalized students and teachers who do not advocate in terms of career longevity.

Analysis of the quantitative data occurred immediately following the collection of the surveys of faculty members with five or more years of teaching experience, with completion by the end of October, 2014. Had the qualitative and quantitative results appeared contradictory, I would have reported the disparities without judgment in order to protect the conclusions from my own biases and opinions. The conclusions drawn from the data analysis portion of this research should not be extrapolated to other sites; however, they should contribute to the larger body of literature concerning teacher attrition, empowerment, and career satisfaction.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the research design and methodologies which were utilized in this study of the relationships between teacher caring, collaboration, and advocacy; and career effectiveness and job satisfaction. Since the major focus of the research was the lived experiences and philosophies of the study participants, the qualitative paradigm received the most emphasis. This study also involved a tangential mixed-methods approach as well. It was interesting to attempt to quantify attitudes and experiences in order to support my belief that teachers who care, teachers who collaborate, and teachers who advocate--work longer, more effectively, and with a greater degree of satisfaction. While I acknowledge that it might have been a bit of an exercise in futility to attempt to quantify variables that are clearly qualitative in nature, it seems to be common practice in state departments of education; so I felt that I had permission to do the same. The next chapter, Chapter Four, outlines and discusses the data results from

both the qualitative and quantitative work which were completed using the timeline that was described here.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research Findings

This chapter includes descriptions and data which include the results of extensive in person individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and a survey which was made available to all of the teachers in the school. Only four certified teachers are of color; three are Black and one is Hispanic, and all four are female. This school's faculty is comprised of eighty-four members, aside from me, fifty-four of whom returned the survey (response rate of 64%), which should contribute to the validity of the results.

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter One, from *A Nation at Risk*, through *No Child Left Behind*, to the highly touted *Common Core Standards*, classroom teachers have been tasked with navigating a results-oriented landscape which emphasizes a subject-centered curriculum rather than one that is student-centered. Although traditionally viewed as a helping profession, teaching has become a competitive, "win at all costs," job which for many neophyte teachers is simply too difficult. The challenges outweigh the rewards for many young teachers, and the exodus from American classrooms has been documented for years.

If classroom teaching is difficult for many, schooling remains an arena of dichotomies, where middle class, predominantly White students have advantages over other students simply because the educational system is imbued with White middle class underpinnings. For many students of color and those of poverty, navigating this unfamiliar system is difficult at best. But when predominantly White teachers become the caring adults for these marginalized students, both groups of individuals appear to benefit. So one problem this research attempted to address was how to empower teachers to advocate for their students, thus contributing to their own career satisfaction, while simultaneously improving the academic success and social capital of these young people.

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how teacher collaboration and advocacy for underserved students, energizes the teachers and contributes to career satisfaction and longevity. Specifically the research attempted to address the following questions:

- 1) How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?
- 2) In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?
- 3) To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?

As stated in the previous chapter, this research focused mainly on the qualitative aspects of job satisfaction through collaboration and advocacy, and qualitative research was appropriate for this type of study. I included ancillary statistical analysis to support the primary qualitative data collection in order to provide additional perspective toward

addressing the research questions. This mixed-methods study provided the majority of the data from qualitative data sources with quantitative data serving a supporting role.

Qualitative Data Collection

Following IRB and district approval for this research, in May 2014, I began interviewing veteran teachers at my local high school, in order to determine which individuals would be willing to speak with me individually concerning their experiences with caring, collaboration, and advocacy in terms of their longevity and job satisfaction. While approximately fifteen teachers offered their time, I knew that I needed to delve more deeply than would be possible if interviewing so many; so I decided to have in-depth interviews with five individuals. Two of the teachers collaborate closely with each other, and I conducted their interview with the pair, rather than individually. These five teachers were comprised of two males and three females, all of whom have more than ten years' experience in the classroom. Four of the five are White, and one is Hispanic. The departments represented were mathematics, foreign language, and social studies.

Although I have interviewed individuals in the remaining four departments in the school (English, related arts, physical education, and business), no one from these departments indicated an interest in having individual, in depth conversations. One of the related arts teachers did talk privately with me, but did not offer any specific insight into this teacher's thoughts on the relationships between advocacy, collaboration, caring and job satisfaction; so it was obvious that further discussions would not illuminate these issues.

One teacher in the business department did participate in the focus group discussion, however.

The following table provides demographic information for study participants who agreed to in-depth, individual interviews, as well as the focus group discussion.

Table 4.1: Study Participant Demographics

Total Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Experience at this School	Ethnicity and Gender	Educational Background
39	7	Hispanic Female	B.A., La Universidad del Turabo, Puerto Rico.
15	2	White Male	B.S. and M.A.T. U. of S. C.
20.5	16	White Male	B.S., Wofford M.A.T, Clemson
15	9	White Female	B.S., U. of Tennessee
20	10	White Female	B.A., Clemson M.A.T, U. of S.C.
20	18	White Female	B.A./ M.A.T., Converse
20	15	White Female	B.A. Western Carolina
30	30	White Female	B.A. Clemson, M.A.T. Converse
13	13	White Female	B. A. Wofford

Quantitative Data Collection

Following IRB and district approval of this research proposal, I developed and administered a survey of teacher attitudes, which was adapted from the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A., 2001), and was printed and placed into eighty-four teacher's mailboxes at the school. I asked teachers to complete the surveys and return them to my mailbox before leaving school for the summer during the second week of June, 2014. The survey, provided in the Appendix section of this document, consisted of twenty-five statements, with Likert-scale responses of 1—Strongly Agree, 2—Agree, 3—Neutral, 4—Disagree, and 5—Strongly Disagree. I also asked the teachers to indicate their years of experience in the classroom at the bottom of the survey.

Fifty-four surveys were completed and returned by June 10th, a response rate of 64%, which afforded me a valid view of opinions and attitudes of the teachers on staff at the school. Four pairs of statements were used to perform significance tests for each of the three research statements. One of the paired tests fit for two of the questions; so eleven separate paired t-tests were studied. The average number of years of classroom experience for the fifty-four respondents was 16.3 years. Two of the teachers did not respond to each statement; so although their years of experience are included in the mean, which was reported in the previous sentence, their Likert responses could not be used due to the pairing required by the significance tests. Therefore the results of the paired t- tests reflect the responses of fifty-two faculty members.

Research Question #1: How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?

Qualitative Analysis

While the mean response for the statement, “I am an advocate for my students,” on the teacher survey, was 1.57, indicating that, on average, the teachers at this school fall between ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ for this statement, many teachers, when asked for specifics about their level of advocacy, do not elaborate beyond the realm of helping students to master academic objectives within the courses that they teach. There are several teachers, however, who are true advocates for their students, not only academically, but also in terms of the details of employment, safety, food, avoiding incarceration, and overall well-being.

Two such individuals teach in my department, mathematics. I have spoken with both of these teachers on an almost daily basis for approximately eight years, but it was not until I began work on this dissertation that the talks became more frequent and with greater depth. Through observations of these two veteran educators, I determined that a case study would be the best method for unravelling how advocating for marginalized students can not only change the lives of the young people, but can also enrich and motivate the teachers themselves.

The first of these teachers is one who teaches, by choice, the lowest academically performing students in the school. Her students are all freshman, some for the second or third time, and most are performing below grade-level. For the past eight years, I have observed her interactions with her current and former students, and the level of

commitment that this teacher has to “her babies,” as she calls them, is unparalleled. These students, most of color and many from poverty, refer to this teacher as “Ma,” and they lean on her for everything.

This teacher, a South Carolina native with more than twenty years in the classroom, sees herself as not only a teacher, but a counselor, an advocate, and a friend to her students. She has experienced personal struggles in her own life, which appear to have ignited a need for helping others. She transferred to our school from a neighboring high school eight years ago, and although it took her a couple of years to settle into the culture of our school, she became an advocate for her students from day one. On several occasions over the past few years, this teacher has reached out to our department to gather food or clothing for emergency support for the families of some of her students. She holds tutoring sessions on her own time, not only helping students with their high school work, but also feeding them, and helping them navigate the world outside of our school. Many of this teacher’s students are potential high school drop-outs, and she works diligently to advocate for them, whether it be to help them enroll in classes online, to get proper medical attention, to connect with appropriate social services, or to help them apply to technical schools in the upstate.

An outside the box educator, this teacher is underappreciated on the faculty of this suburban high school. I have shared with her on numerous occasions that I am in awe of her willingness to work exclusively with students who are difficult to motivate, and her complete dedication to advocacy for the needs of her students in every aspect of their lives. She replies that “It’s just who I am.” While working with these students can be difficult even for this individual, she has determined that working with student teachers

helps her to maintain her energy and motivation. So almost every year, this teacher invites a student teacher into her classroom. Here she is able to influence neophyte teachers in meeting the needs of marginalized students, and at the same time, having a student teacher allows her to counsel with and help individual students while the student teacher handles details of the daily lessons for a semester.

Earlier in this writing I described a student who was struggling in Geometry, and whose life was fraught with difficulties. This student was searching for the teacher just discussed here on the day that I talked with her. It was that encounter that propelled me to investigate advocacy for marginalized students as part of this dissertation.

The second teacher in the department of mathematics who is the epitome of advocacy, is just a few years older than the first, displays a more reserved demeanor than the first, yet she has literally changed the lives of individual students by her refusal to give up on them. This teacher came to the upstate of South Carolina in the late 1980s, as a staff member of Young Life, a Christian youth outreach organization, having completed student teaching several years earlier. She began teaching in an inner-city high school in Greenville in 1990. According to this teacher, the first year at the school was horrible, and she was not planning to return the following year. During that first year, a fourteen year old female student was shot and killed at the bus stop, waiting to come to school; the librarian of the school committed suicide, and this young teacher broke up numerous fights. Given her religious nature, it is not surprising that she sought guidance through prayer, and she describes in vivid detail that over that summer, “God said the person who needs to change is you.”

So she returned to the school the next fall with a changed mindset. She was determined to be a light to the students who were living in a very dark existence. She relates that from the first day of school that second year, she had three rules for her students:

1. Do what I ask you to do.
2. Be on time.
3. Don't challenge me in front of my class.

She began noticing things about the kids, attempting to get to know them personally. She asked them about their interests, and shared some of hers. She realized that these students needed a safe environment with consistent rules. And she was “blown away that the learning started happening.” The epiphany that she experienced was that “they’ll do the math for me, they just have to know that I care for them first.” Her advice to any teacher dealing with difficult students is this: “Don’t assume the worst, just love them.” Given my own lens of caring as the answer to most of the problems in American classrooms, I was energized and encouraged through interviewing this teacher.

This individual taught at this inner-city poverty school for five years. When she had her first of three children, she left the classroom to be a stay at home mom for the next six years. She returned to teaching at a local Christian Academy, a completely different academic environment, and stayed on staff there for six years. While teaching middle school mathematics at the academy, she was tutoring a former student, who was a freshman at a local suburban public high school. This student was “pouring out about the needs of high school kids,” and this conversation prompted her to resign from the Christian school the next week for the next school year. It was then that she applied for a

position back with the public schools in Greenville County, and took the job at our high school for the next year.

This teacher says that she has always been “drawn to misfits.” She does not want to teach honors students because they already have people in their corner, for the most part. While this teacher advocates for marginalized students every day, she has changed the life of one young man who she refused to let fail. This Black male student was participating in gang activity and had been arrested several times. He had been placed in the alternative school program in Greenville County, but was planning to drop out of school altogether. This teacher brought him in and helped him navigate the application process for Job Corps. “Job Corps is a **free** education and training program that helps young people learn a career, earn a high school diploma or GED, and find and keep a good job. For eligible young people at least 16 years of age that qualify as low income, Job Corps provides the all-around skills needed to succeed in a career and in life” (Job Corps , 2014). This teacher felt strongly that the young man needed to be far away from the dysfunctional influences of his family and the destructive tendencies of his friends; so she encouraged him to pursue job corps training in Indiana. It took him several years to complete the training and graduate, but he did, and is now gainfully employed and doing well.

Not only has this teacher served as an unwavering advocate in this young man’s life, she also petitioned the school principal to allow her to begin a class for struggling students last year, titled “Freshman Success” because she was very concerned about the fates of young male students, particularly poverty and minority students who were on a path to school failure and dropping out. Last year she gave up one of her planning

periods in order to intervene on the behalf of these students. She believes that “kids are craving boundaries and unconditional love.” And she is prepared to be the one caring adult in the lives of these students. Her dedication to advocacy for these young people is remarkable.

Through interviews with several other teachers at the school, it became apparent that teachers who care about their students, who are willing to advocate for them, tend to be satisfied and energized through their jobs. One foreign language teacher with thirty-nine years of experience, stated that she “just loves the children.” She said that she considers herself a third parent for her students, and she sees caring as foundational to the career of teaching. According to this teacher, “If you don’t want to be with children, you’re in the wrong job.” Given her extensive experience in the classroom, her words of advice include that “Kids perceive our attitudes, and while we cannot please them all, if you love your job, the years fly by.”

A fourth teacher who dedicates time and attention to advocacy for marginalized students perhaps said it best with this statement: “And the people who don’t care need to get out.” This effusive and exuberant social studies teacher with twenty years of classroom experience, has just helped form the first GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) club in the history of this high school. She teaches mostly honors students; so she does not have as much contact with students of poverty that the previous individuals do, but her caring, loving nature allowed some of the Gay students to feel comfortable approaching her last spring to ask about starting a chapter at our school beginning this fall. The club is in its infancy, but I am very excited that our Gay and Straight students have a safe space in which to interact and feel welcomed and affirmed.

Quantitative Analysis

Since the major focus of this study was qualitative, attempting to quantify the beliefs and experiences of veteran teachers was a challenging task. The first research question stated: “How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?” To address this question quantitatively, I performed four paired t-tests on the differences between teacher ratings of two statements from the Likert-scale survey that I distributed to the teaching staff at this school. I utilized paired testing to ensure that the responses of individual teachers would be compared to themselves.

Research Question 1: How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?

Table 4.2: Research Question #1 Results

Paired T-Test	Test Statistic	Mean Difference	P-Value	Standard Deviation
1: Statements 1, 13	-5.107	-.7647	5.134×10^{-6}	1.069
2: Statements 5, 14	5.577	.5686	9.869×10^{-7}	.7281
3: Statements 9, 15	-1.5619	-.2157	.1246	.9862
4: Statements 11,18	-5.9215	-1.196	2.898×10^{-7}	1.4425

Question 1, Paired T-Test #1:

Statements from Teacher Survey:

1: I am able to motivate most of my difficult students.

13: Teachers at my school care about their students.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers' ability to motivate difficult students and their level of caring for their students.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers' ability to motivate difficult students and their level of caring for their students

The extremely low p-value for this test showed results which indicated a significant difference between teachers' perceived ability to motivate difficult students and their level of caring for their students. This difference suggested that although teachers care, they might not have confidence in their ability to motivate difficult students.

Question 1, Paired T-Test #2:

Statements from Teacher Survey:

5: My teaching motivates students who have little interest in learning.

14: I can get my students to believe they can do well in school work.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers' ability to motivate disinterested students, and their ability to encourage their students to believe in their academic abilities.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers' ability to motivate disinterested students, and their ability to encourage their students to believe in their academic abilities.

The extremely low p-value for this test suggested a significant difference between teachers' perceived ability to motivate disinterested students and their ability to help their students believe in themselves in terms of their schoolwork. One would expect no

significant difference between teachers able to motivate disinterested students and teachers who help students believe in their own academic abilities. Perhaps the difference suggested that teachers feel more confident in their own actions than in their ability to change the mindset of their students.

Question 1, Paired T-Test #3

Statements from Teacher Survey:

9: I have enough training to deal with almost any learning problem.

15: I help my students to value learning.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers' training and their ability to help students value learning.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers' training and their ability to help students value learning.

The results of this paired T-Test were not significantly significant. We were not able to conclude that a difference exists between teacher training and a teacher's ability to help students to value learning. The results of this particular test were not particularly surprising. Many teachers who expressed confidence in their ability to motivate and teach difficult students, indicated that their undergraduate and professional development experiences did not prepare them directly for success in the classroom.

Question 1, Paired T-Test #4

Statements from Teacher Survey:

11: Even with good teaching abilities, a teacher may not reach many students.

18: Teaching is a caring profession.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers who state that even with good teaching abilities they may not reach many students, and teachers who view teaching as a caring profession.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers who state that even with good teaching abilities they may not reach many students, and teachers who view teaching as a caring profession.

The results of this test indicated a significant difference between teachers who stated that even with good teaching abilities they may not reach many students, and those who view teaching as a caring profession. Further study might shed light on these differences. Perhaps teachers who consider their own abilities a priority might not see caring as critical to their success in the classroom.

Summary

From the qualitative inquiry carried out through detailed interviews of individual teachers at this school, it appeared that teachers who advocate for marginalized students gain a great deal of satisfaction through the work of advocacy. The teachers interviewed love their students. They care deeply for not only their academic success, but also for

their development into responsible adults. They act as mentors and counselors, along with their teaching roles, and this concern for the whole individual seems to give them purpose in their work as classroom teachers.

The quantitative support for this research question led to similar conclusions, along with some issues which call for further study. The rejection of the null hypotheses in the first two paired t-tests suggested that although teachers care about their students and want them to do well, the same teachers did not seem to feel that they are able to motivate difficult students nor do they see themselves as able to motivate these students. These teachers did not indicate that their teacher training helped prepare them for motivating challenging students, which was not surprising. The results of the fourth paired t-test did provide a glimpse into the differences between caring teachers and teachers who do not consider themselves as caring. Caring teachers also exhibited confidence in their ability to motivate students.

Research Question #2: In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?

Qualitative Analysis

According to government statistics for South Carolina for the 2013-2014 school year, 79% of the state's classroom teachers were White, 15% were Black, 1% were Hispanic, 1% Indian, and 4% were not reported (SC.GOV, 2013-2014). This faculty consists of eighty-five full and part-time teachers, of whom eighty-one (95%) are White, three (3.5%) are Black, and one (1%) is Hispanic. So the vast majority of this faculty are

White teachers. Many of these individuals have dedicated their lives to caring and advocacy of marginalized students. The racial composition of the students at this suburban high school includes: 73.3% White, 9.6% Black, 8.6% Hispanic, 5.0% Asian, and 2.4% Multi-Racial. This school has experienced a major shift in terms of poverty over the past ten years, with a Poverty Index increasing from approximately 8% to 32% students of poverty currently. While most of the students at this school do not come from poverty households, many of the poverty students (identified through free- and reduced-lunch status) at this school are students of color. Poverty students are over-represented in the lower level classes here, but there are poverty students who are among the outstanding academic achievers as well. The salutatorian for the graduating class several years ago was a female student of color on free-lunch status.

To address the question at hand in terms of White teachers advocating for marginalized students, one must spend time unraveling which students face marginalization at this school. While students of color deal with White privilege in every aspect of American schooling, presently students from every racial make-up deal with difficulties if they are not part of the heteronormative majority. The issues of LGBTQ students are just beginning to be addressed in any formal way at this school.

Since 96% of the teachers at this high school are White, those who advocate for students who face marginalization in any form, are predominantly White females. Of the four teachers interviewed and described in the previous section of this chapter, all are advocates for marginalized young people, all are female, three are White and one is Hispanic.

The focus group discussion which was conducted as part of the data collection for this research, provided a deeper understanding of White teacher advocacy for underrepresented students. One of the discussion participants stated the following: “How many kids have we seen not get credit for a class due to attendance, and then other students with the same number of days missed, do get credit. I’ve already lost 3 out of my CP Psychology class. They lost homes, and had to move to other places. I’ve said that we need social workers, to the district person, and he was offended and said that we have social workers. I said, where are they?” This individual is not only advocating for her students within the boundaries of the school, but she has taken advocacy for these young people to the district level administration.

As a member of the majority among high school teachers in South Carolina, White and Female, I understand the school culture of this high school and this district in this particular, very traditional and conservative place, enough to tread lightly here. My studies over the past four years for this doctoral program have not only opened my eyes to issues that I had ignored or not understood for decades, but they have stirred in me a need to work to bring about change. But I do work here, and these people know me. I have been with them through births of babies, issues of raising children, struggles of dealing with aging parents, and the grief process following deaths of beloved family members. So although I feel a strong need to change the culture of White privilege which pervades this system, I perform this work cautiously. It is with these issues in mind that I realize that “research in one’s back yard” can be fraught with difficulty. It would be much easier to point out inequities in an educational setting where I am not, nor ever have been a stakeholder. In this particular school, I have been a classroom teacher

for the past nineteen years, six years of which, I was also a parent as both of my own children navigated the curricula; explicit, implicit, and hidden. I agree with Tim Wise (2014), when he stated: “This maxim, to be soft on people but hard on systems is perhaps, at least in my experience, the most important guidepost any of us can follow when trying to challenge monumental social problems like racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, religious bigotry, ableism, or any other form of identity-based mistreatment.”

While I often feel compelled to speak out against injustices that I witness in my school and elsewhere in education, I do attempt to proceed with caution because I have worked for many years to build relationships with the decision-makers here. I know these individuals to be caring and considerate, yet we are all products of a system which continues to inculcate the values of some over others. For instance, one of the foreign language teachers interviewed for this research said that on more than one occasion she has intervened on behalf of her students with some of our colleagues. She has explained to members of this faculty that in many cultures, avoiding eye-contact is a sign of respect. In the upstate of South Carolina, the act of looking someone squarely in the eye is still normative and expected behavior. This teacher has helped her students and colleagues by explaining that Hispanic and Asian students, for instance “lower their heads and avoid eye-contact” as a sign of respect to the teacher, which many members of our faculty would naturally interpret as intentional disrespect.

As previously quoted, a math teacher stated, “Don’t assume the worst, just love them,” when describing how she learned to relate to students who were from poverty, many of whom had been arrested and were considered “difficult” students to teach. This recognition that teachers need to “love” their students, makes the connection between

caring and advocacy. Teachers who genuinely care about their students are staunch advocates for their success, both in the classroom and in life. One of the teachers interviewed said that she tells students in her class that they are lucky to have her in their corner, declaring, “I will fight for you.”

While advocacy for marginalized students can be seen in many forms across a spectrum which runs from showing concern for students from varying backgrounds, all the way to instituting sweeping social programs; in this suburban school in the upstate of South Carolina, teachers who advocate for students are teachers who care. Here, advocacy takes place one student at a time, and one classroom at a time, but it is changing lives nonetheless. These teachers often act as the one caring adult in the lives of high school students who lack the social capital to navigate the landscape of work and family responsibilities, much less the issues of graduation requirements and plans for post-secondary educational experiences. Although social activists might argue that this one-on-one work is an exercise in futility, the students whose lives have been changed for the better by the work of these caring and dedicated teachers, would surely disagree.

Quantitative Analysis

To address this research question quantitatively, I performed four paired T-tests on the differences between teacher ratings of two statements from the Likert-scale survey that I distributed to the teaching staff at this school. I utilized paired testing to ensure that the responses of individual teachers would be compared to themselves.

Research Question #2: In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?

Table 4.3: Research Question #2 Results

Paired T-Test	Test Statistic	Mean Difference	P-Value	Standard Deviation
1: Statements 5, 14	5.577	.5686	9.869×10^{-7}	.7281
2: Statements 9, 20	-4.67	-.686	2.269×10^{-5}	1.049
3: Statements 16,18	-3.889	-.5686	2.97×10^{-4}	1.044
4: Statements 18,19	.9418	.0784	.3508	.5947

Question 2, Paired T-Test #1

This paired test has implications for both Research Questions 1 and 2; so it is restated here:

- 5: My teaching motivates students who have little interest in learning.
- 14: I can get my students to believe they can do well in school work.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers' ability to motivate disinterested students, and their ability to encourage their students to believe in their academic abilities.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers' ability to motivate disinterested students, and their ability to encourage their students to believe in their academic abilities.

The results of this test indicated a significant difference between teachers' perceived ability to motivate disinterested students and their ability to help their students believe in themselves in terms of their schoolwork. One would expect no significant

difference between teachers' ability to motivate disinterested students and to help students believe in their own academic abilities. Perhaps the difference suggests that teachers feel more confident in their own actions than in their ability to change the mindset of their students.

Question 2, Paired T-Test #2

9: I have enough training to deal with almost any learning problem.

20: I am an advocate for my students.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teacher training and advocacy.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teacher training and advocacy.

The results of this test indicated a significant difference between teacher training and advocacy. Since the differences were calculated using Statement 20 minus Statement 9, the negative mean difference suggests that teachers on this staff rate their training to deal with learning problems higher than their advocacy. Clearly advocacy among classroom teachers at this school was not evident in a majority of the staff.

Question 2, Paired T-Test #3

16: Faculty at my school care about each other.

18: Teaching is a caring profession.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teacher ratings of a caring faculty at this school and teacher ratings of teaching as a caring profession.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teacher ratings of a caring faculty at this school and teacher ratings of teaching as a caring profession.

The results of this test indicated a significant difference between teachers who rated this faculty as caring, and those who consider teaching to be a caring profession. Since the differences were calculated using Statement 18 minus Statement 16 , the negative mean difference suggested that faculty here believe that teachers at this school care about each other, but that teaching is not necessarily a caring profession. The results of this paired test suggested further clarification is needed in terms of the definition of teaching as a caring profession. On a positive note, it did appear that teachers on this staff do believe that the school staff cares about each other.

Question 2, Paired T-Test #4

18: Teaching is a caring profession.

19: Helping other people contributes to my job satisfaction.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teacher ratings of teaching as a caring profession and those who state that helping other people contributes to their job satisfaction.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teacher ratings of teaching as a caring profession and those who state that helping other people contributes to their job satisfaction.

The results of this paired T-Test did not reveal any significant difference between teacher ratings of teaching as a caring profession and those who stated that helping other people contributes to their job satisfaction. The results of this test were not surprising. One would expect that teachers who see teaching as a caring profession would also derive job satisfaction through helping others.

Summary

From the qualitative inquiry carried out through detailed interviews of individual teachers and through the focus group discussion, it appeared that teachers here provide support and guidance for marginalized students in a myriad of ways. They act as mentors and counselors, along with their teaching roles, and this concern for the whole individual seems to give them purpose in their work as classroom teachers. These teachers meet the needs of their students, not only academically, but also physically, through collecting clothing and food when needed, and spiritually by directing them to counselors, both in school and in the community.

The quantitative support for this research question led to similar conclusions, along with some issues which call for further study. The rejection of the null hypotheses in the first three paired t-tests suggested that although teachers care about their students and want them to do well, the same teachers do not seem to feel that they are able to motivate difficult students nor do they see themselves as able to motivate these students. An interesting result indicated that while this faculty sees colleagues as caring for each

other, it does not necessarily see teaching as a caring profession overall. That the third paired t-test resulted in a failure to reject the null hypothesis indicating that teachers who rated the teaching profession as one of caring, suggested that they also derive job satisfaction from helping others.

Through both qualitative inquiry and quantitative data collection, it appeared that teachers at this school who help their students through advocacy, tend to derive more satisfaction from their jobs and empowerment through their work, than those who do not make an effort to be advocates and helpers for their students. According to this research, caring and advocacy contribute to job satisfaction. These teachers, committed to guiding and supporting marginalized students, tend to be happier in their jobs than their counterparts.

Research Question #3: To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?

Qualitative Analysis

In my own teaching experience, collaboration has been a major contributor to my job satisfaction, therefore affecting my career longevity. For the past fifteen years I have been the sole teacher of A.P. Statistics at my school. The former teacher left our school just over fifteen years ago; so there has been no one on our staff with whom to share ideas about teaching methods and assessments. For the past ten years I have been the only teacher of the Teacher Cadet course at my school as well. With three sections of A.P. Statistics and one section of Teacher Cadets, I have only had the opportunity to

collaborate with colleagues within the school on my one class of Algebra 1 for the past several years. But the ability to share ideas with other teachers, in person, has been invaluable to me with my Algebra planning. I also make it a priority to collaborate with other A.P. teachers through the online community provided by College Board. In terms of collaborations for the Teacher Cadet program, I attend workshops and seminars annually, as well as discussing issues and ideas with the former Teacher Cadet instructor, who remains on our faculty as a Curriculum Resource Teacher now.

As conveyed in Chapter 1 of this document, I found teaching to be a lonely profession during my first years in the classroom, but once I came to understand that other teachers were willing and interested in talking with me about classroom issues, and they were kind enough to share ideas and materials, I began to enjoy my teaching rather than simply endure it. So I was interested at the outset of this research, to unravel the attitudes of my colleagues toward collaboration as a contributor to career longevity.

As I interviewed individual classroom teachers concerning their collaboration, most of the responses were positive, indicating that teachers at this school view collaboration as central to their effectiveness and career satisfaction. But the details of these collaborations were varied. One social studies teacher emphasized finding people who balance your talents; so that there is a give-and-take situation. She stated collaborations must occur with teachers who are close by, and who have time to talk. One year, she and another teacher had the same planning period, close to lunchtime; so frequently the two teachers had lunch together and discussed their classes, planning together and trouble-shooting issues. She stated: “the majority of my collaborations

happen over meals. The key is feeling comfortable with the colleagues” with whom she collaborates.

Another teacher indicated that not only does she collaborate with members of her foreign language department, she also works with the Guidance department in terms of acting as an interpreter for families who do not speak English. She translates documents for the guidance counselors; so she gets a sense of satisfaction not only through her teaching, but also through the fact that the school relies on her for her expertise in translation and interpretation.

Two male teachers, one with fifteen years of experience, and the other with twenty years of classroom experience, were collaborating on assessments when I arrived to interview one of them; so the other teacher asked if he could stay and share his thoughts as well. While these two individuals teach foreign language, one Spanish and the other German, they plan their lessons, activities and assessments to align with each other. They both indicated that although the mechanics of the different languages, and obviously the culture and vocabulary lessons, are different, the activities and assessments in any first- or second-level foreign language course should be similar. They both agreed that they enjoy their teaching careers more with collaboration than without. Sharing similar philosophies about teaching, one of these teachers stated, “Every kid in my class thinks I like them—I’m professional to all of them. They have to believe that you want the best for them.” The other individual stated that “you have to care to teach.” They both value time away from the job in order to recharge and remain positive and energetic in the classroom. According to the younger of these two teachers, at school he is 100% engaged, but when he gets home, he turns off his teacher mode. According to this

teacher, “teaching will suck your life away. Unless you intentionally have other outlets in your life, you’ll burn out.”

In terms of collaboration, these foreign language teachers argued for common planning time for teachers who teach the same subject. If all teachers of Spanish 1, for instance, have the same planning period, then collaboration is much easier. They also emphasized the importance of providing caring, competent mentors for all new teachers. Mentors force the issue of collaboration, in a positive and non-threatening way, for newer staff members, thus easing their transition from college or other careers, into the classroom.

The focus group discussion also illuminated the issue of collaboration. One math teacher in the group stated that she views collaboration with other teachers as critical to her career longevity. She said, “I couldn’t live without collaborating. It helps me to be able to ask another math teacher, am I teaching this at the right level? [Her husband] has no idea what my day is like. It helps, even if it’s just a shoulder to lean on, to be able to share things with other teachers.” Clearly this individual has found teaching to be a lonely profession, like I did, and collaboration helps stave off the loneliness. Another member of the focus group had this comment about collaboration, “To me, the best kind of collaboration is informal collaboration. If I’m grading something and I’m not sure, I can pass it to a colleague in my department because we grade the same way. I have never found anything beneficial about any of these scheduled collaboration meetings.”

While the administration in our school, following district prompting, has instituted required collaboration sessions on a bi-weekly basis, of all faculty members

who teach the same courses, the mandated collaborations are not seen as helpful by many of the teachers on this faculty. Rather, these meetings were viewed as just another time-consuming responsibility over which classroom teachers have no control. It appeared that the consensus among the teachers who had extensive interviews for this research, along with those who participated in the focus group discussion, was that in order for collaboration to be a positive contributor to teacher career retention, it must be instigated by the teachers themselves, rather than mandated by administration.

Quantitative Analysis

To address this research question quantitatively, I performed four paired T-tests on the differences between teacher ratings of two statements from the Likert-scale survey that I distributed to the teaching staff at this school. I utilized paired testing to ensure that the responses of individual teachers would be compared to themselves.

Research Question #3: To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?

Table 4.4: Research Question #3 Results

Paired T-Test	Test Statistic	Mean Difference	P-Value	Standard Deviation
1: Statements 7, 8	-.903	-.057	.37	.456
2: Statements 12, 22	-1.862	-.245	.0682	.959
3: Statements 13, 23	-.683	-.075	.4979	.805
4: Statements 20, 23	.843	.094	.4032	.815

Question 3, Paired T-Test #1

7: Teachers at my school work together for curricular planning.

8: Teacher collaborate on planning and assessment at my school.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers' ratings of collaboration for curricular planning, and those of planning and assessment.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers' ratings of collaboration for curricular planning, and those of planning and assessment.

The results of this test indicated no significant difference between teachers' ratings of collaboration for curricular planning, and those of planning and assessment. Since the test statistic fell within the acceptance region for the null hypothesis, and the p-value was greater than $\alpha = .05$, we failed to reject the null hypothesis. That teachers who indicated a high level of collaboration on curricular planning would also collaborate on assessments, makes logical sense.

Question 3, Paired T-Test #2

12: I enjoy collaborating with teachers in my department.

22: I enjoy teaching.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers who enjoy departmental collaboration and those who enjoy teaching.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers who enjoy departmental collaboration and those who enjoy teaching.

The results of this test indicated that there was no significant difference between teachers who enjoy departmental collaboration and those who enjoy teaching. The results of this test appeared to support the belief that collaboration among teachers contributes to their job satisfaction.

Question 3, Paired T-Test #3

13: Teachers at my school care about their students.

23: I am satisfied with my career choice.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers who care about students and those who are satisfied with their career choice.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers who care about students and those who are satisfied with their career choice.

The results of this test fell within the acceptance region of the null hypothesis. There was no significant difference between teachers who indicated that they care about their students and those who are satisfied with their career choice. These test results were a clear indication that teachers who responded that they care about their students, also responded that they are satisfied with their career choice, suggesting an association between caring and job satisfaction.

Question 3, Paired T-Test #4

20: I am an advocate for my students.

23: I am satisfied with my career choice.

Hypothesis Statements:

Ho: There is no significant difference between teachers who advocate for their students and those who are satisfied with their career choice.

Ha: There is a significant difference between teachers who advocate for their students and those who are satisfied with their career choice.

The results of this test suggested that there is no significant difference between teachers who advocate for their students and those who are satisfied with their career choice. Since there is no significant difference between teachers who see themselves as advocates for their students, and those who are satisfied with their career choice, the data suggests that an association exists between advocacy and career satisfaction.

Summary

From the qualitative inquiry carried out through detailed interviews of individual teachers and through the focus group discussion, it appeared that teachers who collaborate informally with other faculty members tend to see these collaborations as contributing to their overall job satisfaction and career longevity. They do not enjoy mandated collaborations, however, and they indicated through interviews and the focus group discussion, that such required collaborative sessions are even counterproductive and foster negative feelings among these teachers. A sense of true community appeared to exist among teachers who collaborate on their own terms, for planning and assessment, with all of the interviewees acknowledging the significance of collaboration to competent teaching and career satisfaction.

The quantitative support for this research question led to similar conclusions. The first paired T-test for this research question simply provided baseline data, indicating the teachers who participate in curricular collaborations also collaborate for planning and assessment. The results of this test demonstrated that the teachers who completed the survey were consistent in their responses about collaboration. None of the null hypotheses were rejected for this research question. Therefore, the quantitative data indicated no significant difference between teachers who enjoy collaborating with the members of their academic department, and those who indicate that they enjoy teaching. So teachers who enjoy collaborating also enjoy teaching. This connection does not prove a causal relationship, but it did indicate an association between collaboration and career satisfaction. While the first two paired T-tests for this research question did support a positive relationship between collaboration and enjoyment of the teaching profession, the latter two paired t-tests were conducted simply to provide further support of the potential connections between caring and advocacy, with career satisfaction and longevity.

Through both qualitative inquiry and quantitative data collection, it appeared that teachers at this school who collaborate with other colleagues in terms of curricular planning and assessments, tend to derive more satisfaction from their jobs than those who do not make collaborations a priority or a common practice. One key point to remember concerning the conclusions drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative data collected for this research question, is that the teachers who were involved in the interviews and discussions were consistent in their praise of informal collaborations and their criticism of mandated collaborations. Perhaps further inquiry into the issue of

personal control over the daily lives of teachers, as it relates to career empowerment and job satisfaction might be warranted in a later study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Summary and Discussion

This chapter provides a summary of the theory, research problem, research questions and methodology which form the foundations of this study. The results will be interpreted here, along with a discussion of the study limitations, as well as implications of the study for future research in the areas of teacher empowerment, job satisfaction, and career longevity.

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how teacher collaboration and advocacy for underserved students, energizes the teachers and contributes to career satisfaction and longevity. Specifically the research has attempted to address the following questions:

- 1) How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?
- 2) In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?
- 3) To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?

The perspective of this research study draws heavily from sociology. “The theoretical perspective . . . , drawn from the sociology of organizations, occupations, and work, holds that teacher turnover and, in turn, school staffing problems cannot be fully understood without closely examining the characteristics of the organizations that employ teachers and also examining turnover at the level of the organization” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 500-501). The assumptions involve an understanding that reality is socially constructed and that the goal of research is “of interpreting the social world from the perspectives of those who are actors in that social world” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). This study was conducted from the interpretivist perspective, through a lens of caring. Given that the basis of the research lies in the understanding of the personal experiences of veteran educators, the interpretivist paradigm is appropriate. According to Glesne, through Interpretivism, “your study design will tend to focus on in-depth, long-term interactions with relevant people in one or several sites” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). This Interpretivist Paradigm is the basis for much qualitative inquiry, including the work of this study.

The lens through which this work was conducted is based on the work of Noddings. Her theory of ethical care in schooling provided the impetus for this study several years ago (Noddings N. , 2005). The Aristotle quote, included in Chapter One of this work, places teachers at a higher level than parents. Perhaps a bit of an overstatement, Aristotle was insightful in his understanding of and appreciation for the value of teachers in society. I have always believed that caring teachers can do more for the students in their charge than theorists and policy-makers can. Undervalued and frequently left out of the decision-making process, teachers who genuinely care about

their students affect positive change. This underlying principle of care guided the research process.

This research focused mainly on the qualitative aspects of job satisfaction through collaboration and advocacy; so qualitative research provided the foundation of the research. I included ancillary statistical analysis to support the primary qualitative data collection in order to provide additional perspective toward addressing the research questions. This mixed-methods study gathered the majority of the data from qualitative data sources with quantitative support serving a lesser role.

Interpretation of the Results

For question #1, (How does advocacy for marginalized students contribute to teacher empowerment and job satisfaction?), the results of the interviews, focus group discussion, and surveys, were quite informative. From the qualitative inquiry, it appears that teachers who advocate for marginalized students gain a great deal of satisfaction through the work of advocacy. These teachers love their students. They care deeply for not only their academic success, but also for their development into responsible adults. They act as mentors and counselors, along with their teaching roles, and this concern for the whole individual seems to give them purpose in their work as classroom teachers. The quantitative data also supports these conclusions, that teachers who see themselves as advocates for their students, consider advocacy as a contributor to their sense of empowerment and their career satisfaction.

Question #2, (In what ways can White teachers provide support and guidance for such students?), was a bit more difficult to address given that research was conducted in

my own high school. This research question, which is such an important one, required a bit more subtlety which contributed to results that were more difficult to interpret than with the other two questions. As reported in a previous chapter, this faculty consists of 96% White teachers. With this statistic in mind, it is clear that teachers on this faculty who are providing support and guidance for students of color, of poverty, who belong to the LGBTQ communities, and those who are otherwise marginalized in some way, are predominantly White teachers. From the qualitative inquiry carried out through detailed interviews of individual teachers and through the focus group discussion, it was apparent that teachers here provide support and guidance for marginalized students in a many different ways. They act as mentors and counselors, along with their teaching roles, and this concern for the whole individual seems to give them purpose in their work as classroom teachers. The quantitative results indicated that teachers on this faculty do not appear confident in their abilities to motivate difficult students. But those teachers who rated teaching as a caring profession, indicated that they derive job satisfaction through helping others, which supports the argument that teachers who act as advocates for marginalized students gain empowerment and career satisfaction through the advocacy experience. Through both qualitative inquiry and quantitative data collection, it appears that teachers at this school who help their students through advocacy, tend to derive more satisfaction from their jobs and empowerment through their work, than those who do not make an effort to be advocates and helpers for their students. According to this research, caring and advocacy contribute to job satisfaction. These teachers, mostly White, committed to guiding and supporting marginalized students, tend to be happier in their jobs than their counterparts.

For question #3, (To what extent does collaboration among caring teachers contribute to career retention?), the results of the interviews, focus group discussion, and surveys, were consistent and enlightening. Through the qualitative work conducted for this research question, it appeared that teachers who collaborate informally with other faculty members tend to see these collaborations as contributing to their overall job satisfaction and career longevity. The teachers who were interviewed individually, in pairs, and through the focus group discussion, were like-minded in their rating of informal collaborations as valuable, but mandated collaborations as a deterrent to teacher morale. The quantitative support for this research question led to similar conclusions. The first two paired t-tests for this research question did support a positive relationship between collaboration and enjoyment of the teaching profession, the latter two paired t-tests were conducted simply to provide further support of the potential connections between caring and advocacy, with career satisfaction and longevity.

Through both qualitative inquiry and quantitative data collection, it was obvious that teachers at this school who collaborate with other colleagues in terms of curricular planning and assessments, tend to derive more satisfaction from their jobs than those who do not make collaborations a priority or a common practice.

Implications of the Findings

Although this study did have limitations, as outlined in the previous section of this chapter, the findings of this research do have implications which may apply to other schools, and which call for further research on the topics of caring, collaboration, and advocacy as contributors to career retention, satisfaction, and empowerment among

classroom teachers. While much work has been done in the area of teacher leadership and the significant roles that administrators play in encouraging teachers in their work, in the area of teacher longevity and satisfaction as it relates to collaboration between and among teachers, little research has been conducted. As discussed in Chapter One of this document, the problem of teacher turnover in American Schools has been and continues to be an issue of great concern to legislators, educational leaders, and community members. It is not enough to attract qualified teachers into K-12 teaching. The educational establishment, including policy makers, administrators, as well as teacher leaders; must work toward helping teachers to be fulfilled in their work, thus encouraging them to stay in teaching. For simply staffing our nation's classrooms with anyone, rather than dedicated, enthusiastic teachers, does a disservice to our young people and to society as a whole.

The results of this study indicated associations between teachers who care for students, those who collaborate with colleagues, those who advocate for students who face marginalization in school; and those who indicate that they are satisfied with their career choice. Many teachers who expressed confidence in their ability to motivate and teach difficult students, indicated that their undergraduate and professional development experiences did not prepare them directly for success in the classroom. According to Harris and Sass (2011) "There is no evidence that teachers' pre-service (undergraduate) training or college entrance exam scores are related to productivity" (p. 798). Although in my own experience, my graduate studies have contributed greatly to my focus on advocacy, I understand that many educators find their own training to be inadequate preparation for the difficulties and challenges of classroom life.

Not only have the interviews, focus group discussion, and quantitative work related to this research strengthened my own dedication to caring, collaboration, and advocacy; my own classroom experiences within this year of research and writing have continued to motivate me. Within one week during January 2015, I was approached by two very different students, asking for help. One of the students, a White freshman female whom I teach in a C.P. (regular) level class, shared with me personal issues concerning a potentially abusive relationship. She could not focus in class, and I had a room full of students. So I asked the class to work on an assignment while I stepped out into the hallway to speak with the student. Upon hearing what the student was dealing with, I encouraged her to speak with our School Resource Officer, who is one of the kindest, most caring Swat Team leaders I have ever met. She did speak with the SRO, who then intervened on her behalf with the young man who was causing her fear and anxiety.

The other student, a gifted senior student leader, who is a Black female, stayed after class to speak with me. She explained to me that although she displays an exuberant personality full of confidence and optimism, she frequently faces racism on our campus. She described a situation which had occurred in one of her classes that day, which had left her in tears. She said that she is usually able to just let racist comments roll off of her, but on that day, she was really hurt by comments made by another student, under the guise of humor. I was shocked and saddened by her descriptions of what had transpired. The other student is a member of a campus organization which I advise; so I assured her that I would speak to the offender, which I did later that same day. I also directed her to a counselor and a particular administrator, both of whom have the authority to investigate

and punish if necessary. This student told me that she has faced racism throughout her schooling. The most disturbing example that she shared with me occurred when she was in elementary school. On the first day that she was assigned to attend Challenge (our district's Gifted and Talented Program), her teacher stopped her at the door, and said that she was afraid that this child was in the wrong class. According to the student, the teacher said: "I thought you must be in the wrong class because I have never had a Black student in Challenge before." It is examples like this one that continue to drive my determination to fight against White privilege, even though I have been an unwitting beneficiary my entire life. I appreciate the guidance of Boutte and Jackson (2014), who suggested "We have to prepare educators to teach children from all walks of life" (p. 628). Clearly this student has faced difficult situations throughout her schooling; so although I do feel hesitant to disrupt the status quo, the work of anti-racist education is simply too important for me to remain quietly compliant.

This second exchange, with the extremely bright, Black female student, brought me back to the work of bell hooks (2003), who stated "I have learned firsthand that individual white people who choose to be anti-racist make a difference" (p. 65). She continued, "Free of the will to dominate on the basis of race, they can bond with people of color in beloved community living the truth of our essential humanness" (p. 66). While I feel honored to bond with people of color, I know that further research is warranted concerning how to enlighten predominantly White teachers to the issues of White privilege in diverse public schools.

The results of this study have implications for further research into how to encourage teachers who do not presently see themselves as collaborators and advocates,

to become caring advocates for their students and collaborators with their teaching colleagues. Perhaps modeling collaborations and discussing opportunities for advocacy, might help other teachers to further enjoy their teaching, thus contributing positively to career retention, and lessening the turnover rate among classroom teachers.

As a White teacher, I realize that I have a responsibility to contribute to equity and social justice in education, not only in my own classroom, but through the larger educational institutions and systems that I am a part of. My commitment to advocacy has been tested recently, and I feel that I have found my voice. I refuse to sit idly and quietly by while unfairness pervades my corner of the educational world. I do see myself as a White ally, defined on Mount Holyoke College's website as "a white person who actively works to eliminate racism. An ally is motivated by self-interest, a sense of moral obligation, or a commitment to foster social justice and does not patronize or assume to 'help' people of color in paternalistic ways. A white ally may engage in anti-racism work both in collaboration with other white people and in coalition with people of color" (2015). As Boutte and Jackson (2014) stated: "we appreciate and need White allies' voices in conversations and actions designed to interrupt racism. However, these voices should not dominate the dialogue or shadow those of people of Color. Importantly, they should be informed by the insights of people of Color – whose voices are often absent in the conversation" (p. 624). This point is critical: my dedication to the fight for equity in education must be grounded through collaborations with colleagues of Color. Because although I genuinely care, and I am dedicated to positive change, my perspective has been shaped through a life of privilege. But this work is not easy. As indicated previously, I have worked in this particular school for almost nineteen years. I have

friends in every department, and I grew up within five miles of the school building; so I am intimately familiar with the culture. But within the past month, the issue of equal access has been raised, and I now find myself in complete opposition to those in the building with decision making authority.

Our school has operated on a traditional schedule, with an “early bird” class option, beginning at 8:15 a.m., since before I began teaching there in 1996. Students who wish to take seven academic classes must have their own transportation. Students who must take the bus to school cannot take an early class because the busses do not make it to school until after 8:30 a.m. So the bus riders only have access to six academic courses per year, and the high school graduation requirements in South Carolina are twenty-four units. These students cannot graduate on time if they fail even one class over the course of their four years of high school, and this issue has only been raised recently because our demographics are changing. Even now, with almost seventeen hundred students, our school only has 10 bus routes; so these students, many of whom are of poverty and of Color, do not have equal access to the entire seven period day that the rest of the student body has. The most recent suggestion for solving this equity issue has involved a plan which would allow the bus riders to take an online class during the middle part of the school day. Nothing has been implemented yet, but the presentation of the possibilities was given in such a way that it was clear that discussion and collaborations were not welcome. I attempted to discuss issues of equity at a meeting of teacher leaders, and was quieted in a most unkind fashion. So I appreciate and hold fast to the acknowledgment that “the nature of this work involves working through difficult spaces, beyond most allies’ comfort zones, and may not result in resolution where everyone holds hands and

sings Kumbaya” (Boutte, G. & Jackson, T., 2014, p. 636). This encounter caused me several sleepless nights, and soul-searching about how long I can remain on staff here. Perhaps these years of academia and this year of research has rendered me unable to remain satisfied to work toward equity within the confines of my own classroom. If I am unable to contribute toward social justice in the greater landscape of my school and district, I must consider what this frustration means for my own future as an educator. I have no intention of leaving education, but I also refuse to remain stifled.

While gaining a deep understanding of lived experiences of classroom teachers requires an extended amount of time, the quantitative side of this research could be expanded fairly seamlessly to a larger audience of classroom teachers. Districts and states already conduct surveys of classroom teachers on an annual basis, but perhaps surveys could be issued which could illuminate the issues of teacher retention, career empowerment, and job satisfaction. Programs for professional development could be developed utilizing the experience and expertise of classroom teachers who collaborate and act as advocates for their students. As with most research, the results of this study call for an expansion of the research questions, and replication of the study to other locations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given that this study involves teachers from a suburban high school in upstate South Carolina, the conclusions drawn from this research will not apply to educators in other parts of the United States or even in other parts of South Carolina. Both beneficial

and limiting was the fact that I am a long-standing member of this faculty. That I serve on this faculty gave me particular insights, but it also challenged me in the need to make the familiar strange, for this research. Clearly further study is warranted in the areas of Caring, Collaboration, and Advocacy among classroom teachers.

My own personal perspective served as perhaps the major contributing factor to the limitations of this study. While a critical lens was possibly warranted with this work, I could not work from the critical perspective. The faculty and administration of this school have supported me through the development of my children, the aging illnesses and deaths of my parents, and virtually every aspect of my life for the past nineteen school years. I am simply unable to criticize this loving and caring group of individuals in public forum, even when anonymity is assured. With these ideas in mind, I approached this research using the Interpretivist perspective and through the lens of a caring educator and colleague. I believe that this perspective is appropriate when conducting research in this “home” environment, yet I do acknowledge the limitations that exist through this viewpoint.

This particular research project was also limited by the fact that only high school teachers were participants, and that these teachers were all from the same school. This suburban high school has traditionally been highly regarded and successful, and although there are issues of faculty morale and empowerment among this faculty, it was difficult to unravel whether or not these issues are universal among high school teachers in other areas. It is with these ideas in mind that extrapolation of the results of this study to other teaching environments would be limited.

While limitations to this research concerning researcher positionality were evident throughout, the methodological limitations to the conducting of this research were few. The qualitative research provided the most significant data since the goal of this study was to understand the lived experiences of classroom teachers in this suburban high school in the upstate of South Carolina. Preliminary conversations happened toward the end of the 2013-2014 school year, and although several faculty members agreed to participate in more detailed interviews, finding a time when they were available was difficult. One classroom teacher did agree to the interview, but although she stated that she was happy to help, she provided very brief answers to the interview questions (several one-word answers), and her interview provided no understanding of anything deeper than surface issues; so her data could not be used as part of the study.

Another limitation to the methodology was simply having to focus and narrow down the research. Initially, I had hoped to interview approximately twenty faculty members, but my committee encouraged me that such broad data collection would not illuminate the research questions, it would confuse the issues.

In terms of the quantitative methodological limitations, I was encouraged to have 64% of the surveys completed and returned. This response rate is high; so I was able to collect a large amount of data here. But the results are limited by the question of the teachers who did not return their surveys. There is no way to know whether or not the 36% of teachers who did not complete the surveys would have responded to the twenty-five prompts in the same way that the 64% who did return the surveys responded. Perhaps these teachers have very different ideas about teaching than the respondents.

While pondering these issues is futile, that 100% of the surveys were not returned does contribute to the methodological limitations of this study.

Speculations

As a classroom teacher with over thirty-one years of experience in South Carolina schools, I have witnessed countless talented young people come into teaching with enthusiasm and passion, only to be frustrated by a stifling system which limits rather than inspires. As outlined in Chapter One of this document, I believe that it is not enough to attract qualified teachers into K-12 teaching. The educational establishment, including policy makers, administrators, as well as teacher leaders, must work toward helping teachers to be fulfilled in their work, thus encouraging them to stay in teaching. Over the past several years I have had numerous conversations, both formal and informal, with classroom teachers, coaches, and administrators; and the recurring theme appears to be that teachers who feel that they are able to connect with students and other educators, tend to remain committed to the profession.

One of my courses for this doctoral program required the participants to take a position in terms of what they feel to be the most significant work in education: Policy, Theory, or Practice. As a veteran classroom teacher for many years, I have enjoyed studying theories, but I have rarely seen them trickle down into the classroom setting. I have continually been frustrated by policies that are mandated by the state and by districts based on the work of legislators and even education oversight committees comprised of individuals who have never worked in classrooms.

I have found that the place where I am able to affect change, to communicate that I care, to help and to guide, is within the practices of my classroom. When I close my classroom door, although I am required to align my teaching to mandated standards, I am able to serve as the one caring adult in the lives of many students. I know that I make a difference, and with that knowledge, I have been able to enjoy my teaching for many years. But I also believe that I have a duty to model empowerment and a positive attitude for younger teachers. This research has been conducted in order to help unravel variables which contribute to career retention among classroom teachers. It is important work because we must turn the tide of the revolving door of educators in and out of the classroom.

Teaching has a public relations problem, and those of us who are in education have a duty to work to rectify this situation. Too often my encounters with non-educators include conversations where people categorize teachers as unprofessional sell-outs, people who don't really want to work, who want summers off, and really could not make it in the real world. And when I smile and say that I have been a math teacher for the past thirty-one years, they always begin to stammer and recover, stating how wonderful it is that I have dedicated my life to young people. There is no more important work, they then say. I try to remain calm and politely agree. While I am not interested in having verbal arguments with these individuals, these exchanges have fueled my dedication to researching teacher empowerment.

In terms of speculation based on the research conducted here, I believe that teachers in South Carolina are collectively, entirely too passive. I include myself in this indictment. Why we sit by and allow parents, the community, and even administrators

who are in their positions in order to support our work as teachers, to belittle our dedication to this esteemed profession, is baffling to me. We are indeed professionals who are highly educated, operating under circumstances and pressures which the general public cannot begin to understand, and we must collaborate to support each other in this significant work. It is my hope that the results of this research will prompt other classroom teachers to continue the study of what keeps teachers motivated and empowered in the classroom setting. Research conducted by academics in higher education is welcome here as well. But the lived experiences of teachers in the classroom, can be understood more readily by those of us on the front lines.

Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter One of this document, the American system of education has changed little during my career as a professional educator. I began teaching in January 1983, just after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, which ushered in an era of accountability in education that continues today. From *A Nation at Risk*, through *No Child Left Behind*, to the highly touted *Common Core Standards*, classroom teachers have been tasked with navigating a results-oriented landscape which emphasizes a subject-centered curriculum rather than one that is student-centered. Although traditionally viewed as a helping profession, teaching has become a competitive, “win at all costs,” job which for many neophyte teachers is simply too difficult. The challenges outweigh the rewards for many young teachers, and the exodus from American classrooms has been documented for years.

If classroom teaching is difficult for many, schooling remains an arena of dichotomies, where middle class, predominantly White students have advantages over other students simply because the educational system is imbued with White middle class underpinnings. For many students of color and those of poverty, navigating this unfamiliar system is difficult at best. But when predominantly White teachers become the caring adults for these marginalized students, both groups of individuals appear to benefit. So the problem this research attempted to address is how to empower teachers to advocate for their students, thus contributing to their own career satisfaction, while simultaneously improving the academic success and social capital of these young people.

From the qualitative inquiry carried out through detailed interviews of individual teachers at this school, it appears that teachers who advocate for marginalized students gain a great deal of satisfaction through the work of advocacy. These teachers love their students. They care deeply for not only their academic success, but also for their development into responsible adults. They act as mentors and counselors, along with their teaching roles, and this concern for the whole individual seems to give them purpose in their work as classroom teachers.

Teachers here provide support and guidance for marginalized students in a myriad of ways. They act as mentors and counselors, along with their teaching roles, and this concern for the whole individual seems to give them purpose in their work as classroom teachers. These teachers meet the needs of their students, not only academically, but also physically, through collecting clothing and food when needed, and spiritually by directing them to counselors, both in school and in the community.

But the issues of social justice and equity in education remain areas in great need of research and action. As Michael and Conger from the University of Pennsylvania (2009) posited, “I feel strongly that issues of race, culture, and class are inherent in the research questions I wish to pursue. To what extent does my identity as a white middle class woman preclude me from writing critically about these issues” (p. 58)? My own personal need to delve into research on the issues of racism in education were also hampered by the type of discomfort described here. But regardless of the anxiety that might accompany such study, since the majority of educators in my school and district are White, and given that racism and equity issues are still present, White educators must continue work alongside researchers of Color, to bring about positive change for everyone involved in public education. Michael and Conger (2009) concluded with, “Even as we work to end racism, it is constantly cultivated in the world around us and in ourselves. We need to persistently root it out. Simultaneously, we must approach our allyship with humility, recognizing that we are fallible and remaining open to feedback and critique” (p. 59). The advocacy portion of this research has pointed out areas for further study that I plan to pursue. But the issues of White privilege and equity in education are so significant that much research is warranted in order for real change to come about in our schools and districts.

Through both qualitative inquiry and quantitative data collection in the current study, it appears that teachers at this school who collaborate with other colleagues in terms of curricular planning and assessments, tend to derive more satisfaction from their jobs than those who do not make collaborations a priority or a common practice. One key point to remember concerning the conclusions drawn from both the qualitative and

quantitative data collected for this research question, is that the teachers who were involved in the interviews and discussions were consistent in their praise of informal collaborations and their criticism of mandated collaborations.

This research, while not without limitations as outlined in this chapter, has attempted to unravel the relationships between caring, collaboration, and advocacy; and teacher satisfaction, empowerment, and career retention. Through triangulation of coded responses from personal interviews, focus group discussion, as well as survey results, positive associations do exist between the aforementioned explanatory and response variables. Teachers who indicated that they care for their students, as well as for their colleagues, tended to respond more positively to statements such as “I enjoy teaching,” than their counterparts who did not indicate that caring is critical to their work. In a similar fashion, teachers who considered themselves advocates for their students, particularly students who are marginalized, described their fulfillment in the profession in more positive terms than those who did not see advocacy as an important facet of the teaching profession. Thirdly, teachers who said they collaborate tended to be happier than those who work in isolation.

While the results of this study might not appear surprising, the work of encouraging classroom teachers to care and to advocate for their students is certainly significant. Young people crave attention and care. Every student comes into class with some sort of problem or struggle, and oftentimes it is the classroom teacher who can help in a non-threatening way. During the writing of the final chapters of this dissertation, a senior at this high school committed suicide. A varsity state championship athlete for the past six years, this White, upper-middle class family is devastated, and this young man’s

classmates and teachers are grieving his loss. Everyone is wondering what they could have done to prevent this tragedy. Teachers in all departments are consoling students, and at the same time, trying to continue with the routine of teaching in order to provide some sense of normalcy for the young people.

This White male student embodied every privilege that society bestows, yet he still struggled to the point of taking his own life. He had been in counseling with his family. They loved him, and were working together to try to help him face and overcome his problems, but they were still unsuccessful. Several of his teachers had spent hours with this student in recent days, trying to encourage him out of the dark place that he was in.

I mention this situation here only to highlight the sobering circumstances that classroom teachers face in their work. As a high school teacher, it is not uncommon to have one hundred fifty students in class every day; so interacting with each one on a personal level on a daily basis is practically impossible. Even students who appear to have all of the privileges, still struggle with navigating the challenges of acceptance, planning for the future, and success in the academic arena. When the pressures of poverty, incarcerated parents, institutional discrimination, and issues of identity, are added to the already stress-filled lives of high school students, many young people find the struggle simply too much to handle, and dropping out of school, along with other more destructive options, become attractive alternatives to the difficulties of high school life.

Several of the teachers interviewed for the qualitative research aspect of this study, have not only been directly responsible for keeping students in school, but a couple of them have also gone with students and their parents to drug intervention programs, literally saving their lives. The significance of having caring teachers in classrooms, teachers who take the time to get to know their students personally, and who risk criticism through advocating for these students, cannot be overstated. One of the teachers interviewed for this study, said that she tells her students every year, “You don’t know how fortunate you are to be in my room, because I will fight for you.” I believe this quote sums up the importance of caring and advocacy among teachers who feel empowered through their work. This particular teacher has been in the classroom for thirty-nine years. Still excited and energized through her work with these young people, she indicated that she views her career as a calling, indicating that this was the work that she was born to do.

While I have acknowledged that this research was conducted in my own suburban high school; so any conclusions drawn here should not be extrapolated to other settings, I do believe that this work has implications for further study. Although much work has been done in the area of teacher leadership and the significant roles that administrators play in encouraging teachers in their work, in the area of teacher longevity and satisfaction as it relates to collaboration between and among teachers, little research has been conducted. The results of this research prompt me to want to continue my study. Specifically, I wonder if people with certain personality types or preferences might be more likely to act as advocates for marginalized students than others. Further research, which would distinguish between the nature (personality type and life experiences) and

the nurture (preparation through teacher education and professional development programs) of teachers who care and advocate, is certainly warranted.

Since the majority of this faculty consists of White females, what leads some of these individuals into a dedication towards care and advocacy, and others with similar demographic characteristics to shrink away at the mere mention of the words? Several years ago, I overheard a colleague say that she did not need to understand what was going on in the lives of her students, she just wanted to see if they had done their homework. This statement was so offensive to me that I have struggled to even have polite conversation with this individual since then, yet on paper, we appear to be the same person, albeit she would be a considerably younger version of my demographics.

Another suggestion for future research involves the question of whether or not caring can be taught. Is it possible to provide support and professional development for neophyte teachers which would encourage them to become caring advocates for their students? Can collaborations between new teachers and their mentors, foster caring and advocacy? If caring, advocacy, and collaboration contribute to overall career empowerment, job satisfaction, and career longevity, why have these issues not been studied more often and more thoroughly?

I have acknowledged the difficulties that I had in narrowing the participants and the focus of this study. The three central themes: caring, advocacy, and collaboration, although interwoven for the participants in this study, could be the focus of three separate research projects. The caring lens prompted my interest in teacher-student relationships at the outset, interest in advocacy was heightened through my own return to academia,

and collaboration has always contributed to my own career satisfaction. For future study I hope to focus with a more critical perspective on issues of equity in education, but I will conduct that research in a setting other than my own school. As this current research draws to a close, my mind races toward follow-up studies that should be conducted in this critical area of career longevity and empowerment among K-12 classroom teachers.

REFERENCES

- Achinstein, B., Ogawa, R., Speigman, A. (2004). Are We Creating Separate and Unequal Tracks of teachers? The Effects of State Policy, Local Conditions, and Teacher Characteristics on New Teacher Socialization. *American Educational Research Journal*, 557-603.
- Apple, M. (2006). Interrupting the right: on doing critical educational work in conservative times. In G. Ladson-Billings, *Education research in the public interest: social justice, action and policy* (pp. 20-45). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Banks, J. (2006). Democracy, diversity, and social justice: educating citizens for the public interest in a global age. In G. Ladson-Billings, *Education research in the public interest: social justice, action, and policy* (pp. 141-157). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Barone, T. (2006). Making educational history; qualitative inquiry, artistry, and the public interest. In G. Ladson-Billings, *Educational research in the public interest: social justice, action, and policy* (pp. 213-230). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Boutte, G. & Jackson, T. (2014). Advice to White allies: insights from faculty of Color. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17:5, 623-642.
- Chapman, D. (1984, 21 (3)). Teacher Retention: The test of a model. *American Educational Research Journal*, 645-658.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. . (2005). *On common ground: the power of professional learning communities*. Bloomington, Indiana: Solution Tree.
- Fernet, C., Senecal, C., Guay, F., Marsh, H., & Dowson, M. (2008). The work tasks motivation scale for teachers. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 256-279.

- Flinders, D. J. (1988). Teacher isolation and the new reform. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 17-29.
- Glesne, S. (2011). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*. Boston: Pearson.
- Guarino, C., Santibanez, L., Daley, G. (2006). Teacher Recruitment and Retention: a Review of the Recent Empirical Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 173-208.
- Harris, D. & Sass, T. (2011). Teacher training, teacher quality, and student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 798-812.
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: a pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.
- Hyland, N. (2005). Being a good teacher of black students? White teachers and unintentional racism. *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 35 No. 4, 429-459.
- Ingersoll, R. (2001, 38 (3)). Teacher Turnover and Teacher Shortages: an Organizational Analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 499-534.
- Ingersoll, R., Smith, T. (2003). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 30-33.
- Jeffrey, A., Auger, R. & Pepperell, J. (2013). "If we're ever in trouble, they're always there": A qualitative study of teacher-student caring. *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 114 No. 1, 100-117.
- Job Corps . (2014). Retrieved from Job Corps: <http://www.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx>
- Kukla-Acevedo, S. (2009, 106). Leavers, movers, and stayers; the role of workplace conditions in teacher mobility decisions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 443-452.
- Michael, A. & Conger, M. (2009). Becoming an anti-racist White Ally: how a White affinity group can help. *Perspectives on Urban Education*, 56-60.
- Mount Holyoke College Diversity and Inclusion Resources Definitions. (2015, February 5). Retrieved from Mount Holyoke College: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/diversity/definitions>
- Noddings, N. (2005). *Educating citizens for global awareness*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical lessons: what should our schools teach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Santoro, D. (2011, 118 (1)). Good teaching in difficult times; demoralization in the pursuit of good work. *American Journal of Education*, 1-23.
- SC.GOV. (2013-2014). Retrieved from SC.GOV:
<http://ed.sc.gov/agency/slice/documents/STAFF-TeacherDemographics.pdf>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805.
- Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A., Hoy, W. (1998). Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning and Measure. *Review of Educational Research*, 202-248.
- Wise, T. (14, 08). Retrieved from timwise.org: <http://www.timwise.org/2014/08/hard-on-systems-soft-on-people-fighting-for-social-change-as-if-people-matter/>
- Wise, T. (14, 08). Retrieved from timwise.org: <http://www.timwise.org/2014/08/hard-on-systems-soft-on-people-fighting-for-social-change-as-if-people-matter/>
- York-Barr, J., Duke, K. (2004, 74 (3)). What Do We Know about Teacher Leadership? Findings from Two Decades of Scholarship. *Review of Educational Research* , 255-316.

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

Transcript of Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group Minutes

October 6, 2014

Thank you so much for helping me with this focus group discussion today! Feel free to just answer whenever you want to, or we can just go around the room. Nobody is going to hear it but me; so please don't worry about it.

Question 1: If I ask you about your educational philosophy, how would you describe it?

A: Learning friendly environment.

B: I know it's going to sound cliché, but I want my kids to be happy, and I want them to learn something. 1. Are you making money? 2. Are you learning something? 3. Are you happy? And I truly think education needs to prepare them for life.

C: Math has to pertain to the real world.

D: I want to make history fun and interesting. Sometimes it is not possible.

E: I guess mine is to just be a facilitator.

A: Teaching is more than just teaching our subject.

B: I want them present, I want them organized, and then if I can give them some knowledge of history, that's great.

A: And just building their self-confidence.

C: I think teaching is an art and not a science.

B: The teachers who do extra duties should make more money.

We all do extra, but there are so many other teachers who don't.

B: I also think that the #1 problem in education is that the administration only talks to us when something has gone wrong. And if you're someone like me, who needs a lot of reassurance, I mean, education is not the place to go.

Questions 2 and 3: What are your favorite and least favorite aspects of the teaching profession?

C, E agrees: My favorite is the interaction with the students. But now with technology, the parents are emailing me within minutes of me putting grades into the computer.

B: I think what's really interesting is when we used to do pencil and paper grading, there were many times when I would look down and think "you know, Susan really has improved this quarter;" so I would go back and bump up the grade a couple of points. Now that parents are all in our gradebooks, we can't do that, because if you do, it's all over Sugar Creek (one of the larger feeder neighborhoods for our school). I also think that we are anxiously awaiting the children from the Reagan era parents. We've been

teaching the students from parents of the 60s and 70s, the hippie parents, and I'm including myself in this group. I'm excitedly awaiting the Reagan era parents, where when the children get in trouble at school, they'll also get in trouble at home.

A: So you're talking about my children.

B: Yes, can you imagine if SC gets a phone-call saying that her son did something at school (*he's in 3rd grade*), what would happen at home that night?

C: Now it's "if I get in trouble at school, my parents will take care of it."

Least favorite aspect of teaching...

D: I think the extra "BS" of teaching. The hoops that we have to jump through. That's what gets me fired up. I don't need affirmation from Mr. C.

See, I do. You (B) and I have talked about that we need to hear from him.

D: I love that he leaves us alone and lets us do our thing.

I need somebody to say "hi, how's it going". I don't need a lot of school stuff, but I need to feel that my walking in this door everyday matters.

B: I think the sad part about the administrator that we have is that I think he does care, he cares very much, but I'm sure he is also bothered by the BS of the things he deals with from the district office. Maybe it's because I've taught for 21 years, or maybe it's because I know I could get another job, but at this point, the BS of teaching doesn't bother me at all. I'm above the BS.

A: No, you're the main BS-er.

B: I am the main BS-er.

B: You know I do that 3rd evaluator thing for the district. I was evaluating a young teacher at Traveler's Rest, and the district evaluators wanted this young person to fail. I refused to fail the teacher because she had made her goals too high. It's all about playing the game, and this kid had not learned how to play. The assistant principal jumped in and took up for the teacher.

D: I take that back, I do need communication, but I do not need affirmation from the principal.

C: Evaluation does not affect me at all anymore. It doesn't change how I teach at all. I know how to teach effectively, and I am not concerned about what some administrator has to say.

Yeah, I'm not concerned with the observations, but I do need for you (the administrators) to be visible sometimes, and I need you to say "hi", and I don't think that's asking too much. And our principal needs to know our students.

B: L, my daughter, called the front office twice this summer, asking for a meeting with the principal because she's the junior class president. She was told that he didn't have time for her both times and to put her questions in an email. She went to Inter-High Council last week (at the district office), and there were 3 principals there. She came home and said "Mom, I just wish we had a principal who would talk with us. I know he's a nice man." But she's looking at possibly being student body president next year, and she says, "I've never talked to my principal."

So we've almost completely covered my number 6 question, which is what types of administrative support do you need to maintain and promote job satisfaction, but can we expand on it a bit.

D: I don't need much affirmation, but I want somebody to shield me from the BS.

That's the thing, there is no reason why we all had to sit in that meeting (wellness program), and listen to SO talk about something that none of us cares about. Put it in a memo and send it out.

B: It's hard for us to know. Is he a buffer principal and we don't know it, because like, I saw SE this weekend...he said "the kids are great at Blue Ridge, but you don't ever want to come teach here. You wouldn't believe all the crap I have to do every day." So I thought, maybe we do have a buffer principal and we just don't know it.

D: I think we have it easy here.

Administrative support?

A: I just need them to back me up. When I make a stand, I need them to back me up. I want 100% support.

E: I think in the past couple of years, I've started hearing from our administration "the district won't support us". I don't appreciate that.

D: Even if you end up as a principal, if you have to fight it, and it wears you out and turns your hair a different color, I think you fight the school district.

If he is fighting it, I would like to hear that he is. Maybe he's doing a lot more than we know, but if we could just know a little bit.

C: It's like when Mr. C. was in the hospital twice recently, there was no communication. Nobody knew what was going on. I didn't even know he was out for about the first week.

B: See that makes the tender-hearted me want to cry. Are we that intrusive that he can't even tell us he's that sick?

A: I think he's just that private.

E: I can't imagine not wanting somebody to be praying for him.

B: I do think he supports us at the district, but if I've heard it once over the past ten years that I've been here, I've heard it a thousand times, we work for a monster. This district won't support us. The district is the problem, it isn't the administrators.

D: I think he does fight things with the curriculum and things like that, but I don't think he fights parents at all.

E: If we are playing a game, we should play it in academics too. We need the administration to take a stand.

D: If we're going to publish a deadline for dropping a course, then let's have a true deadline.

Can we move into collaboration, because this is part of my dissertation? The next two questions deal with collaboration:

Question 4: In what ways do you collaborate with your colleagues?

Question 5: How does collaboration with other teachers help you (or does it)?

A: We don't have many people to collaborate with in my area, but that's a good thing because we can collaborate with each other without a bunch of extra junk.

C: I couldn't live without collaborating. It helps me to be able to ask another math teacher, am I teaching this at the right level? (Her husband) has no idea what my day is like. It helps, even if it's just a shoulder to lean on, to be able to share things with other teachers.

D: To me, the best kind of collaboration is informal collaboration. If I'm grading something and I'm not sure, I can pass it to V because we grade the same way. I have never found anything beneficial about any of these scheduled collaboration meetings.

C: But there are teachers at this school who will not share anything.

E: I wish people would be more honest with their sharing.

D: What do you mean by honesty?

E: Um, I could probably go to S and say: you're not being hard enough. But she and I have that kind of relationship. We have other people who are not honest about their classes. I'm not comfortable having a conversation with them. I wish I could say they aren't being hard enough, but I can't.

Here there was a discussion about rigor in the math department, with those present in the group expressing concern about a lack of rigor among some of our new teachers.

A: I think that's a math teacher's problem.

B: I do remember the first year that I taught Global Studies 1—I had the Global Studies 2 teacher (SC) come to me and ask: “did you not teach the Rosetta Stone”? By damn, I taught the Rosetta stone every year after that. (Laughter).I do think part of the reason we don’t collaborate more is that we don’t have time to enjoy each other as colleagues. We need time to develop relationships. When we do, then we collaborate. For example, C came over this morning and told me that he had pulled something off of the internet about birth order, which is what I’m teaching in Psychology. He said, this is like someone sat in my home and observed my boys, and I think it would be great for your Psych class. It’s about being friends. If we don’t get help from each other, our teaching gets old and stale. This building is part of the problem. When I discuss the fact that this building is a product of Industrial Psychology which divides and conquers, my students laugh at me, but it’s true. Yes, we have a copier on every floor, but we don’t know all of the members of our faculty.

D: I don’t like that we are so departmentalized. There are people I never see.

C: If you two didn’t walk by my room every morning, I’d be lost. I know what time to start looking for you.

E: In the old building, we were pushed together, not by departments, but by planning periods.

The next part of my dissertation has to do with advocating for students. In my later years, I’ve started noticing injustices around here. (Last year there was a particular student who needed help. She is a problem child, and she was not getting the help from

our guidance department that I felt she needed. So I went down and said “pretend that I’m her parent”.) This situation prompted my focus on advocacy.

B: How many kids have we seen not get credit for a class due to attendance, and then other students with the same number of days missed, do get credit. I’ve already lost 3 out of my CP Psychology class. They lost homes, and had to move to other places. I’ve said that we need social workers, to the district person, and he was offended and said that we have social workers. I said, where are they?

So you definitely advocate for CP students, but do you ever find yourself advocating for Honors students?

D: Yes. I just went to guidance over a student who has all sorts of problems (autistic—Asperger’s), who cannot do the work in honors, but I think he wouldn’t make it in a CP class. So we’ve worked it out that he can stay in my honors class this year. One of the newer counselors didn’t know that this type of situation was a possibility, but I had a similar situation last year; so I got the counselor who was involved that time, to talk with the new counselor. I’ll alter his assignments, he’ll remain in my class, which is a safe place, and at the end of the year, they will change the code for the level of class that he gets credit for.

B: That’s above and beyond for advocating for a student.

A: I don’t see it as much as y’all do. Sometimes I have students who don’t have computers at home, but we do everything in class; so it isn’t an issue.

B: My CP's right now have a laundry list of problems, but one thing I've found they can do, is they can formulate some original thought. So a lot of times their homework is just to write a paragraph. I'm not giving a whole lot of homework because they're working jobs.

C: It's almost the same thing with the students who play all these sports. That takes up as much time as a part-time job, but I don't look at them on the same level as I do students who have to work, and I probably should because many of them are so pushed by their parents to excel at sports, hoping to get college scholarships.

Basically, the last question: How does caring about others affect your attitudes toward your teaching? Does caring enter in? Caring is the lens through which I am viewing my whole dissertation; so I'm interested in how it might look to you. (Caring about students, about other teachers, etc.)

C: I act like I don't care, but it hurts me when my students don't do well.

A: Sometimes I'm too easy on them because I know they have some issues, or there are problems; when I should hold them accountable.

B: It's like that thing: kids don't care how much you know until they know that you care. Almost all of my conferences here have been because I've hurt someone's feelings. But it's because I go into my Mother mode, and my Mother mode can be mean. It seems overly mean because they see me as so caring.

D: It definitely does come in and I think when I teach the CP kids it's more. As I've gotten older, I think the students see me as a mom. Now I emphasize getting credit, but being nice.

B: but that's helping them for life. Being at work, being at school, and being organized, are all important things for these kids to learn. May I just say that SC doesn't like to be seen as caring as much as she really does. She really does care a lot.

D: Yes, but I'm not into hugging them. (MA is a hugger)

E: I think my CP kids realize that I do care because I try to treat them all the same. I think they see me as motherly too.

Thank you so much!! Thank you, thank you.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY OF VETERAN TEACHERS

Survey of Veteran Teachers

84 printed surveys were placed in teacher mailboxes during late May 2014. 54 surveys were completed and returned. (64% Response Rate). A copy of the survey appears here:

In preparing to write my dissertation, I hope to gain some understanding of what factors contribute to job satisfaction among veteran teachers through the following survey. All responses will be anonymous and will remain confidential. If you are willing to allow me to speak with you further concerning your ideas and experiences in the classroom, please let me know.

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey.

Sylvia S. Hodge 

Survey of Teacher Attitudes

Please indicate your personal opinion about each statement by circling the appropriate response at the right.

KEY: 1-Strongly Agree 2-Agree 3-Neutral 4-Disagree 5-Strongly Disagree

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. I am able to motivate most of my difficult students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I can help my students think critically. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I utilize a variety of assessment strategies in my classroom. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I assist families in helping their children succeed in school. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. My teaching motivates students who have little interest in learning. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I provide appropriate challenges for very capable students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. Teachers at my school work together for curricular planning. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 8. Teachers collaborate on planning and assessment at my school. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I have enough training to deal with almost any learning problem. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Teachers are a powerful influence on student achievement. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. Even with good teaching abilities, a teacher may not reach many students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I enjoy collaborating with teachers in my department. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. Teachers at my school care about their students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. I can get my students to believe they can do well in school work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. I help my students to value learning. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. Faculty at my school care about each other. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. Working with other educators is an important part of my job. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. Teaching is a caring profession. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. Helping other people contributes to my job satisfaction. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. I am an advocate for my students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 21. I contribute to the success of my students. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 22. I enjoy teaching. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 23. I am satisfied with my career choice. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 24. I enjoy attending extra-curricular student activities. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 25. My training and experience have equipped me to be an effective teacher. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Total years teaching experience _____

Please return your completed survey to my box in the mailroom. Thanks so much!
Sylvia

APPENDIX C: PERSONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal Interview Questions

The personal interviews began with these questions, and then developed into free-flowing conversations. Since the goal was understanding the lived experiences and attitudes of the participants, flexibility was warranted.

1. How long have you taught at this school?
2. How long have you taught altogether?
3. What are your favorite aspects of teaching?
4. What are some things that you wish you could change about the job?
5. How do you collaborate with other educators in terms of curricular planning and classroom management?
6. Do you find collaborations to be helpful to you? How?
7. Do you see yourself as an advocate for your students? In what ways?
8. Do you view teaching as a caring profession?
9. How do caring and advocacy contribute to job satisfaction?
10. What keeps you energized in your teaching?
11. Please elaborate further on anything that you believe might help me in understanding your experiences in the classroom setting?