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Factors That Contribute to Teacher Retention in High-Poverty Middle Schools

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Factors That Contribute to Teacher Retention in
High Poverty Middle Schools

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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ABSTRACT

Factors That Contribute to Teacher Retention in High-Poverty Middle Schools

by

Tracy Marston

Much research has been conducted on what can be done to retain teachers in education. This study is an examination of what keeps teachers in high-poverty middle schools. The purpose of the study was to examine why teachers choose to stay in high poverty schools. According to Ed. Gov.(1999) high poverty schools are defined as schools that have 75% to 100% of students on free or reduced lunch.

Eight teachers were interviewed from 2 high poverty schools located in the southeastern region of the United States. These teachers had been employed by their school for at least 5 years. Data were gathered and analyzed to reveal why teachers stay in high poverty schools even though the work can be extremely difficult.

This study showed that the teachers interviewed feel working in a high poverty school can be more difficulty due to issues such as behavior and lack of parental involvement. However, rewards such as student growth and the love they develop for the students are worth the extra labor they put into their jobs. The good they find in their jobs seemed to outweigh the bad.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband Aaron Marston who supported me while he too was finishing a degree.

To my daughters Rylee Anne and McKenna Marie who never became too frustrated with me for typing instead of playing.

To my mom and dad Eddie and Kathy Neal who helped me many times by watching my angels for me.

Lastly, to my incredible grandfather Cliff Doll who supported me in a number of ways and is very dear to my heart.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For many different reasons, employees have not been staying in their jobs for extended periods of time in the United States (U.S. Senate, 2000). It appears to be more apparent with younger generations who have fewer ties holding them to a certain location (Kellough & Osuna, 1995; Lewis, 1991; Stark, 2007) This increasingly high turnover rate is not only true for the business world, but also for the field of education.

Teacher retention is often discussed but rarely addressed (McLaurin, Smith, & Smillie, 2009). Glover (2013) described an increasing dependence on accountability mandates during the past several years. High stakes standardized testing has impacted virtually all schools in the United States. In high poverty schools, schools with 75% to 100% of their students on free and reduced lunch, the push is even greater to improve academic growth. Because of the attributes surrounding those in poverty, teachers' jobs tend to be more difficult and exhausting (Moore-Johnson & Birkeland, 2003a, 2003b). Discovering what factors contribute to teacher retention in high-poverty schools may be especially important.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine what factors supported a choice by teachers in high-poverty schools to stay in those schools. Data were gathered and the reasons teachers chose not to relocate to middle or upper-class schools were analyzed. Interviews with those teachers provided the data for the study.

Research Questions

The central question this study addressed was this: what factors attribute to the choice to remain in high-poverty schools? Therefore, I collected data from teachers in high-poverty schools related to the following questions:

1. What factors led to teachers accepting employment in a high poverty school?
2. What factors contributed to teachers remaining in teaching positions in high poverty schools?
3. What factors did teachers identify as incentives for leaving their schools?
4. What did teachers in high-poverty schools find difficult in their work?
5. Under what conditions would teachers in high poverty schools have chosen to leave?

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical foundation of the study was based upon a constructivist perspective. According to Bruner (1960) people construct new ideas or concepts based largely upon their current and past knowledge. The person takes in information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions relying on cognitive structure. This cognitive structure (or mental model) provides organization and meaning to a person's experiences and allows him or her to form opinions of what is taking place in their environment.

In this study, teachers were interviewed and data were analyzed based on each teacher's thoughts and opinions of working in a high poverty school and why they believed they chose to stay in that school. The researcher looked at the life experiences that played a role in their decisions to stay, and the researcher explored their views on their teaching environment and why they chose to remain in their school.

Significance of Study

This study offers strategies that school leaders might apply for improving teacher retention. It presents reasons teachers who are currently working in high poverty schools give for their commitment to the school. This study also suggests additional research opportunities related to teacher retention.

Scope of the Study

This was a qualitative study in which I gathered information by interviewing nine teachers from three different high poverty schools located in the southeastern region of the United States. The purpose of the interviews was to gather insight as to why these teachers chose to continue to work in high-poverty schools despite the high demands and the difficulties that come with teaching low-socioeconomic children.

Research Methods

A qualitative study was completed to try and determine why teachers in high poverty schools stay in their positions. Purposeful sampling was used to select teachers for the interviews. The interviews consisted of in-depth questioning of the participants.

Definitions of Terms

Retention refers to the act of keeping in one's pay or service (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

Middle School refers to a school including grades 6 through 8 (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

High poverty refers to a single family household making at or below \$11,490, two person household making at or below \$15,510, and three member household making at or below \$19,530 per year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013).

High poverty schools refers to schools with 75% to 100% of their students on free or reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to eight teachers from two different middle schools and their thoughts and opinions regarding decisions to stay in their high poverty school. It does not necessarily represent opinions and thoughts of all teachers teaching in high poverty schools.

Statement of Researcher Perspective

I have worked at a high poverty school for the last 5 years. This allowed me to see the difficulty of teaching students from a low-socioeconomic background. I observed firsthand why teaching low-socioeconomic students and raising their academic levels can be a difficult task. I have witnessed the high turnover rate in my school and heard teachers' discussions as to why they are leaving the profession all together or switching to a higher socioeconomic school.

I kept my thoughts and opinions silent during the interview to allow the views of the teachers in high poverty schools to be expressed honestly.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 is a description of the reasoning and significance behind this study, the scope of the study, research methods, definitions, and limitations. Chapter 2 is a review of literature

describing the turnover rate of jobs in the United States. Teacher retention in schools, especially high-poverty schools, is also addressed in the literature review as well as why teachers stay in high-poverty schools. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the participants used in the study and how the data were collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 is an exhibit of the collected data and the discoveries of the research. Chapter 5 is a summary, a conclusion, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine what factors contribute to teacher retention in high poverty schools. Issues related to job retention, employee motivation, teacher retention, and the special needs of students in high poverty schools (pertaining to teacher retention) were addressed. First, in Chapter 2 I examined job retention in the United States and how it has evolved over the last decade. Research and expert opinion related to employee motivation are also presented. This is followed by an examination of job retention within the school system. Finally, teacher retention in high poverty middle schools is identified. An analysis of how poverty affects families and students as related to this study is also included.

Job Turnover in the United States

Job turnover in contemporary society is substantial and appears to be growing. The reasons for this apparent growth seem to be largely negative. According to the American Psychological Association (2009) 69% of employees stated that their jobs are a profound source of stress in their lives. Rosch (2001) identified stress as a factor that has cost the U.S. industry more than three hundred billion dollars yearly due to absenteeism, turnover, diminishing productivity, in addition to legal and medical insurance costs. Fifty-one percent of employees said they are far less productive because of this stress, and 51% said that the stress levels push them to look for other jobs and even decline promotions within their own job.

An important stressor for working parents has been identified as time taken away from children. Almost one third of working mothers stated that they would be willing to take a cut in pay in order to spend more time with their children. Twenty-five percent of these mothers

reported missing at least two events they deemed important in their children's lives during the past year. Thirty percent of working fathers stated that they too would take a pay cut to spend more time with their children, while 31% claimed they would quit their jobs if their spouse were able to find a job that would support the family (CarrerBuilder Inc., 2009d).

Reasons for Turnover

According to Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez (2011), there are three categories that explained the high turnover rate in the United States: demographic factors, workplace satisfaction factors, and organization or relational factors.

Demographic Factors. Age appeared to have a large impact on turnover in private industry. For instance, older employees were much more likely to stay than their younger counterparts. Younger employees were more prone to leave because of changing career paths - possibly due to degree completion, a willingness to relocate, or fewer family and financial obligations (Stark, 2007). According to Lewis (1991), job turnover is at its peak during the beginning stages of employment then quickly decreases during the next 5 years. This decrease continues for up to 15 years. Change in turnover rate is attributed to the observation that employees who remain with a company gain a sense of loyalty. So, motivation to stay in one's job increases over time (Ippolito, 1987; Sørensen, 2000). However, in 2011 Pitts et al. argued that older employees are less likely to leave their field of work but are more likely to transfer positions within their field than their younger counterparts. Therefore, there may be a change in the trend of age and job turnover.

Workplace Satisfaction Factors. Along with the idea that age had effects on job turnover, a positive correlation was found between lack of job satisfaction and turnover rate (Barton, Hogan, & Lambert, 2001; Carsten & Spector, 1987; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Mobley,

Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Porter & Steers, 1973). According to Pitts et al. (2011), three main elements in job satisfaction affect turnover: pay, benefits, and opportunities for career growth and advancement. Their recent study in 2011 supported these early findings regarding workplace satisfaction factors. First, the low amount of pay is one of the strongest predictors of decisions to leave a company (Blau & Kahn 1981; Cotton & Tuttle 1986; Barton et al., 2001; Bishop, Ofori-Dankwa, & Park, 1994; Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998). Higher pay decreases employees desire to find a better paying job (Blau & Kahn, 1981). Anxieties about an employee's financial affairs are lessened by high pay - which in turn increases job retention (Barton et al., 2010). In more recent studies, however, pay has shown little positive correlation in job retention (Pitts et al., 2011).

The second element was benefits. Benefits include healthcare and retirement. Competitive healthcare and retirement may help a company retain employees (Shaw et al., 1998). Ippolito (1987) said the loss of pension benefits due to leaving a job early may encourage an employee to stay in his or her job.

Finally, opportunities for advancement within a company encourage an employee to refuse other jobs offered to him or her (Cotton & Tuttle 1986; Gaertner, Griffeth, & Hom, 2000; Porter & Steers 1973; Spector 1985). Promotions within companies lead to elevated satisfaction and greater job involvement. Promotions often also result in increased pay, which, as stated earlier, lead to a decline in turnover (Burton, Griffeth, Johnston, & Phillips, 1993). There are other findings that support these reports regarding pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. In a more recent study, each of these factors still had a positive impact on job retention (Pitts et al., 2011).

Organizational and Relational Factors. Lastly, organizational and relational factors have had an effect on job turnover. Kellough and Lu (1993) found that employees who are rewarded for their job efforts are more likely to stay with a company. Since the 1980s private firms and public agencies have been increasing job performance by encouraging their employees to be more active in decision-making. This empowers the employees by giving them a sense of ownership (Bowen & Lawler, 1992, 1995; Kim, 2002; Lawler, Ledford, & Mohrman, 1995; Peters, 1996). If employees believe the company values their efforts, they are more likely to stay in that job (Gaertner et al., 2000; Huselid, 1996; Barton, Hogan, & Lambert, 2001; Shaw et al., 1998). Increase in commitment, innovation, and involvement are the results when employees are allowed to be stakeholders within a company (Guthrie, 2001; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Lawler, Ledford, & Mohrman, 1995; Spreitzer, 1995).

Positive relationships with coworkers and supervisors within the workplace show a negative correlation with turnover (Barton et al., 2001; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Gaertner et al., 2000). Open communication between coworkers and their supervisors decreases the desire of workers to leave (Connaughton et al., 1999). Having a sense of trust in their supervisor is another factor decreasing employee turnover (Berman, Costigan, & Ilter, 1998). This view has been affirmed through leadership research showing trust between employee and employer increases subordinate satisfaction, high organizational commitment, and higher performance (Bass, 1990; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991; Yukl, 2002). Pitts et al. (2011) also found a positive correlation between relationship factors and job retention. They found that positive relationships with employers have a greater positive impact on retention than relationships with coworkers.

The preferred workplace which will decrease job turnover offers its employees flexibility (Nauert, 2011). Flexibility is given not only in work schedules but also in the location where the job is completed. In this flexible environment managers are encouraged to look at positive results rather than the amount of time it takes someone to complete the task or where he or she accomplishes it. This could reduce conflicts between the employee's families and work.

Is There a Relationship Between Motivation and Job Retention? Maslow's hierarchy of needs and motivation theories may help to further address employee retention. According to Darley, Glucksberg, and Kinchla (1991) a need is a requirement that is psychological or biological and urges someone to work towards a goal. Abraham Maslow said humans have a hierarchy of needs. There are four low-level needs and three high-level needs. The four lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy are the need for survival, safety, belonging, and self-esteem. The motivation to fulfill these four lower level needs decreases as each need is met. A person will not move past these four lower levels to the higher levels until the needs are met (Maslow, 1968).

The three higher level needs are intellectual achievement, aesthetic appreciation, and self-actualization. However, when these three higher level needs are met, the motivation to meet them does not decrease, as does the lower level needs. In fact, the motivation increases to seek out further fulfillment. Therefore, according to Maslow (1968), people who are professionally successful will continually seek additional ways of becoming more successful. They will keep adding new goals and will actively try to attain higher achievements. Their drive increases with each new level of success.

Harry F. Harlow, a professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin, discovered in the mid-1900s a great deal about a human's motivation and his or her need to achieve and push

himself or herself further (Pink, 2009). He discovered that motivation comes more from within a person than it does through rewards such as monetary compensation or other prizes. He first studied this while observing primates.

When the primates were given puzzles they worked steadily to solve the puzzles on their own with no applause or any other form of positive reinforcement from the scientists. Harlow labeled their motivation as intrinsic motivation. They had the desire within themselves to succeed which was contrary, according to Pink (2009), to what society believed at that time and on which society still largely bases its ideas of motivation.

According to Pink (2009) many companies thought that people were highly motivated by their salary and bonuses. The idea that people will increase their job performance for more money and extrinsic rewards has been proven incorrect by Harlow and later Edward Deci. Deci picked up Harlow's work almost 30 years later while he was studying motivation. During their research, both of these men discovered that extrinsic motivation enhances job productivity for a short while but not long term. Long-term motivation comes from the person's own desire, as Maslow stated, to improve themselves (as cited in Pink, 2009).

Ariely introduced another aspect of motivation in the form of market norms and social norms (Ariely, 2008). He stated that people are much more motivated by social norms than market norms. Market norms are defined as rules, self-reliance, individualism, and prompt payments. Social norms are defined as our need for community and relationships. Social norms are friendly and require no payment or immediate reciprocity. However, Ariely discovered that when money or any form of payment is introduced into an agreement, the conditions change and tend to be determined more by market norms. People are less willing to give of their time and

services under market norms. If someone is asked to move a couch, for example, he or she is more likely to offer assistance for free than if offered a small stipend.

Mixing market and social norms can cause problems (Ariely, 2008). In the industrial age, businesses practices tended to be guided more by market norm beliefs. Most people worked from 7 to 5 and were paid according to the numbers of hours they worked. There was no question what they would be paid and work ended when they left the doors of the building. This has now changed. Many more people today work for a salary rather than an hourly wage. Their jobs do not end when they leave work. They check their business e-mail at home, carrying work into their family lives. The market norms and social norms have become mixed. There is no clear line drawn between the two in a person's life (Ariely, 2008).

According to Ariely (2008) many companies have been shifting more toward the use of market norm tools and away from social norms. Some ways employers have been doing this is by decreasing pensions or increasing insurance deductibles. Once market norms are more highly integrated, people reduce social norm mentality - including loyalty to a company; this in turn increases job turnover. Employees have less motivation to stay with a company under the umbrella of market norms if another company offers them better pay and better insurance. According to Ariely (2008) companies need to enhance social norm connections with employees to address this issue. Employees also need to have job security even if the economy weakens. Employees want assurance that their company will look after them and have their best interest in mind. This has been much more of a motivator to increase job retention and work ethic compared to pay or other forms of extrinsic rewards.

The type of motivation necessary depends upon the requirements of the job. Pink (2009) shared how in the industrial age most work was algorithmic - meaning there was little or no

creativity required. It was the same mundane unchallenging job day after day. People knew what was expected of them. Today, about 30 % of jobs in the United States are algorithmic and require little innovative thinking. This leaves the other 70% of jobs in the U.S. defined as being heuristic. Heuristic jobs involve creative thinking and innovation.

According to Pink (2009) algorithmic tasks and heuristic tasks within a job depend upon two different types of motivation. Employees who work algorithmic tasks require more extrinsic motivation such as bonuses or pay increases. Employees who worked heuristic tasks need more intrinsic motivation over extrinsic motivation. All jobs require both, but algorithmic tasks tend to emphasize extrinsic rewards and heuristic tasks more intrinsic. Pink argued that the problem with many companies is that they are using extrinsic motivations for people working heuristic tasks. The outcome was not the desired increase in job effort but actually a decrease in performance. Pink concluded that when extrinsic rewards are offered to people who need vision to do their jobs, creativity is stifled.

Offering rewards is also found to hinder employees in thinking outside the box. According to Pink (2009) studies have shown that people achieve a task requiring creativity much more quickly when no incentive is offered compared to people who are promised a reward. However, if people are offered a reward after they complete a task and were unaware of any incentives their performance is not hindered.

Pink (2009) also suggested that enjoyable tasks quickly become a chore if rewards are given. For instance, students who normally read for pleasure will actually read *fewer* books if told they will be given gift cards to their favorite store for every book they read compared to students who are not told they will receive a gift card. Pleasure is taken away when incentives are promised. When compensations are offered the autonomy people experience in performing a

task free of payment is lost. People lose the feeling of being in control of the situation and feel as though they are then— in a way—made to perform; and not by their choice. Their motivation is greatly decreased.

Offering rewards also leads to an increase in bad behavior, encourages cheating and short-cuts, incites addictive behaviors, and supports short-term thinking over long-term thinking (Pink, 2009). Pink (2009) also stated that once a reward is offered, people tend to do whatever is necessary to get the job done. This may include cheating, making poor ethical decisions such as using steroids to increase muscle mass or speed, or taking short-cuts to get the bonus at work. Once rewards are promised they then must always be given for that particular task – which makes them addictive. People are less likely to do the same task for which they previously received an incentive if the incentive is no longer offered. Consequently, Pink (2009) concluded that concrete incentives can actually reduce motivation.

Pink (2009) suggested that not all rewards will produce negative outcomes. Tasks that require no creativity will not be hindered by providing a reward. He suggested that employers should share three criteria with their employees following discussion of the reward: The employer should offer a rationale behind the task (he or she should explain why the task must be completed). Secondly, the employer should demonstrate empathy - possibly acknowledging that the task will indeed be boring and apologize for that fact. Lastly, the employer should allow the employee to complete the task in his or her own way. He or she should not take away the person's sense of autonomy. By allowing the employees to decide how they could best and most effectively complete the task, the employees may have a sense of ownership and freedom in the job.

Teacher Retention in the School System

Teacher retention, similar to employee retention in the business world, is one of the biggest problems in education according to McLaurin et al. (2009). On average, 30% of teachers leave the profession within their first 5 years of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2003).

According to Ariely (2008) schools are being pushed from social norms to market norms by having standards-based testing and implementing performance-based pay. The United States spends more money per student compared to any other western society. He argued that more testing and more money will not increase the quality of education in the U.S. Increasing teacher and administrative pay, he suggested, will only help short-term. It will not improve education over time.

Ariely (2008) suggested that an increased focus on policies that support social norms in school may be more likely to improve the quality of education students receive. He questioned the use of standardized tests as the only or primary measure of student learning. He suggested that the focus in education should be on how the standards being taught will lead to success in social goals like the elimination of poverty, a decrease in crime, an increase in human rights, and success in technological goals. Such technological goals may be saving our natural resources and the exploration of space or success in medical goals like curing diabetes, obesity, and cancer. Ariely argued that this would allow teachers, administrators, and even parents and students to see a bigger picture of education.

According to Glover (2013) education policies are stifling teaching creativeness by governing the school with market norms. Standardized testing and teacher evaluations are creating an equation that lead to children being viewed more like raw materials on a factory

assembly line rather than human beings with social skills and unique abilities that need to be shaped and molded. My experience as a teacher suggests that most teachers see their children the latter way. Many teachers want to take the time to teach the students life skills. Teachers want to teach students how to enhance their natural abilities, but the push to teach a standardized curriculum and increase AYP (Annual Yearly Growth) make the teacher put aside his or her desires to mold the students and instead create an environment similar to a factory.

Teacher Turnover in High Poverty Schools

Darling-Hammond (2004) stated that 40% to 50% of teachers in high poverty schools leave their school within the first 5 years. According to Planty (2008) 21% of teachers in high poverty schools compared to 14% teaching in low poverty schools leave each year.

Reasons for Turnover in High-Poverty Schools

Many teachers often times leave high poverty schools for better paying jobs because of the frustrations associated with the working conditions of high poverty schools (Birkeland & Moore-Johnson, 2003a, 2003b). When teachers transfer out of these high poverty schools, they typically move to schools with students of high income homes (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). This turnover in high poverty schools interrupts the schools' efforts to increase rigor in the curriculum, track students' progress from grade to grade, as well as promote healthy relationships with the community (Donaldson & Johnson, 2011).

High turnover has been reported to lend high poverty schools to newer, less experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Many of these teachers may also be teaching classes that are not within their licensure (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vidgor, 2006). These teachers reported feeling

a lack of knowledge and understanding in teaching students who are considered living in high poverty (Cochran-Smith, 2006).

Glover (2013) examined how problems posed by the push for increasing test scores and running a school like a factory are intensified in high poverty schools. He said that schools serving large numbers of high poverty students tend to exhibit lower overall achievement levels and have greater academic gaps than students from low poverty schools. Consequently, the frustrations felt by students who are behind academically can lead to behavioral issues. Dealing with these behavior issues causes teachers to become frustrated and overwhelmed.

Along with the added stress of discipline problems due to academic frustration, teachers also deal with difficulties of preparing students for end-of-the-year testing. No Child Left Behind has made it imperative that all children achieve, and teachers struggle to prepare academically low students who are already frustrated. The thought of being blamed for students' lack of growth is a heavy burden for many teachers who are teaching in high poverty schools (Anderson et al., 2011).

According to Donaldson and Johnson (2011) other reasons teachers leave high poverty schools are due to poor administrative leadership, poor working conditions, a lack of collaboration, and an inadequate amount of discipline. This lack of discipline, according to Chen, Paquette, and Rieg (2007), may have a positive correlation with students' achievement that would hinder their growth on high stakes testing. Poor working conditions may come in the form of leaky roofs, nonfunctioning bathrooms, a shortage in textbooks and library books, and inadequate computers. High poverty schools on average receive \$907 less per student. For a school of 400 students, that equals a shortage of more than \$350,000 (Machtinger, 2007).

Another factor contributing to teacher turnover in high poverty schools according to Smethen (2007) is an increased work load that stems from bridging the academic gap of low-achieving students. Scaffolding and interventions to bridge this gap taking extra planning on the part of the teacher. Finally, Inman and Marlow (2004) report teachers in high poverty schools often leave because they do not feel as though they are treated like professionals.

The Effects of Poverty on Students

Fifteen percent of the United States population is considered to be living in poverty. People of poverty are living at or below an annual income of \$11, 702 for individuals or \$23,201 for a family of four members (The Economist, 2012).

Poverty has been found to have a substantial effect on students' achievement (Jones, Ellistitle, Okpala, & Smith, 2012). Many low-socioeconomic status (SES) students begin school already behind academically and have less developed cognitive skills compared to students from upper- and middle-class homes. Low SES students tend to achieve lower test scores. These children also are enrolled in lower level course work on average and ultimately fewer of them are involved in higher education classes and receive fewer degrees (Aber, Gershoff, & Raver, 2007; Barker & Coley, 2007; Crosnoe, 2010).

When children are ages 5 to 12, they are engaged in a world outside of their family. Children deal with changes involving cognitive, social, emotional, and physical areas of development. They learn how to get along with peers and adults and discover respect for each. (Duncan & Kowaleski-Jones, 1999; Eccles, 1999). These years have formed the foundation for development in adolescence and adulthood through the social and cognitive skills children master (Brooks-Gunn, Chase-Lansdale, & Wakschlag, 1995; Duncan & Kowaleski-Jones, 1999; Eccles, 1999; Erikson, 1963).

Bradley and Corwyn (2002) found that positive home environments are crucial so children can be successful during these important years. A home that will increase a child's cognitive ability is immersed in warmth and affirmation. Reading to children, talking with them, helping them learn their numbers and letters as well as going to the library and supporting their academics should be embedded into their home life. These positive attributes increase a child's ability to regulate his or her own emotions, helps him or her develop secure attachments, and improves his or her chances of behaving properly in social situations. All of these abilities have also helped children be successful in a school environment. (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Families of low-income tend to lack the above necessities leading to deep negative consequences for the child's academic development (Votruba-Drzal, 2003).

Elder (1974), McLoyd (1990), and Conger, Elder, Ge, Lorenz, and Simmons (1994) formed the foundations for the studies that produced the family stress theory. This theory suggests that families living in stress as a whole experience an increased level of stress due to negative life events. These negative life events are seen in the form of violence, substantial sickness, and lack of jobs. This level of stress greatly affects how parents interact with their children. For instance, parents dealing with depression often have decreased communication with their children. When communication is present, it may be punitive in nature (Brody, Murry, Kim, & Brown, 2002; Diener, Neivar & Wright, 2003; Hoff, Laursen, & Tardiff, 2002; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002). Along with the lack of communication, these parents also spend less time being a nurturer to their children. Depressed mothers are inclined to interact less frequently with their children and the care given to the child is lacking, which, according to Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, and Garcia-Coll (2001) and McLoyd (1990) constitutes behavior problems from the child (Bradley et al., 2001; McLoyd, 1990.)

McLoyds (1990) also states that the quality of the marriage in a home is affected by the financial situation. Poverty puts strains on marriages and causes tension between the couple. This, in turn, according to Cummings, Davies, Goeke-Morey, and Harold (2002), may lead to a shortened amount of attention paid to the children. This absence of attention might come in the form of deficiencies in discipline – which can lead to insecurity and more negative behavior (Cummings et al., 2002).

In addition to a lack of parental support, poverty gives way to other problems starting at birth (Halpern, 2000). Problems for low SES children can come in the form of asthma and a lack of nutrition (Klerman, 1991) and mental health problems (Eckenrode & Gore, 1996; McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd & Wilson, 1991). Also, due to the lack of parental support and care previously mentioned, removal from the home because of physical and mental abuse may also be indicative of some homes of poverty (Halpern, 2000). These complications in a child's life have given way to deficits in the child's learning and a lack of cognitive development and academic achievement early on in the child's life (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Klebanov, 1994; Levin 1991).

High-poverty homes, moreover, suffer from a lack of food according to Berliner (2009). Berliner reported that an average of 13 million households have a difficult time providing the needed food for its members. One third of 13 million are classified as having severe deprivation, and in more than 20% of homes at least one member of the household says that during a period of 1 month he or she normally endures 3 or more days with no food at all. Families living in poverty are 3.4 times more likely to have these food insecurities. Lack of nutrition has greatly affected children's academic gains (Berliner, 2009).

The Effect of Literacy and Dialogue on Achievement

Many children of low SES status are far behind in their literacy skills (Brooks-Gunn, McLanahan, & Rouse, 2007). On average low-income students have decreased scores in receptive vocabulary and reading ability (Bradley & Corwyn, 2003; Duncan & Magnuson, 2003; Hoff et al., 2002). The levels of stress that are linked with living in poverty (such as unemployment, violence within the community, and often the status of single-parent) minimize the caregivers' mental capacities for effective parenting. This in turn affects the level of attention spent on literacy development within the home (Brooks-Gunn, Kohen, & Linver, 2002).

According to Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) these low-income homes often have minimal numbers of books, if any, due to financial strain. Families' insufficient access to materials account for about one third of the effects of poverty on young children's development and learning (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005). Low SES children are three times more likely to have very few books provided them in their home compared middle- and upper-class children (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). For instance, low-income students may start school without ever being read a book, while children from middle and upper class homes may have had over 6,000 books read to them (Moustafa, 1997).

Instead of adult interaction encouraging literacy development, Rush (1999) stated that there is a lack of adult supervision in the home. Instead of this much needed interaction, there is a substantial amount of free play and non-interactive periods of time spent engaged in television viewing. Stamm (2007) revealed that children should not watch TV before the age of 3. Watching television decreases a child's ability to focus and concentrate for long periods of time. Attention Deficit Disorder is greatly affected by the amount of television children watch from the ages of 0 to 3 years. Stamm stated that watching a program with commercials minimizes the

child's focus levels because the child watches a small portion of an episode, then a commercial, then another portion of the episode, and then yet another commercial. By the time the program is finished, according to the child's mind, he or she had seen many short episodes. This programs the child's brain to scan and shift instead of paying attention long term to one thing, which could inhibit his or her learning ability later in life. Some scientists believe that too much television viewing at an early age can lead to an increase in ADHD (Stamm, 2007).

This lack of interaction, as stated by Brody et al. (2002), Diener et al. (2003), Hoff et al. (2002), and Linver et al. (2002), is directly related to parents who are depressed because of their circumstances. Poverty has greatly increased stress on parents in low-income homes. Financial problems cause marital strife according to Cummings et al. (2002). All these stressful factors can lead to a decrease in positive communication with children, leaving more time for television viewing, as indicated earlier.

Along with providing literary materials for children, studies show that creating a verbal environment for children is positively correlated with increased language development (Hart & Risley, 1992). According to Stamm (2007) conversing with children at a very early age is a biological imperative and improves intellectual development and decreases learning problems in the child's future. The more parents interact and communicate with their children, the higher a child's vocabulary scores and reading achievement will be (Lekskul, Luster, & Oh, 2004; Linver et al., 2002).

Upper and middle class parents usually provide a more enriched verbal environment than low-SES parents (Hoff, 2003; Hoff et al., 2002). When talking to their children, mothers in high socioeconomic homes communicate more by using longer utterances and a wider variety of words than mothers in low-SES homes. This, in turn, increases the vocabulary of high-SES

children (Hoff, 2003). Hart and Risley (1995) revealed that children born in high-SES homes are privy to approximately 11,000 utterances daily. Children in low SES homes, however, hear only around 700 utterances each day. The way this speech is used in the home also differs between low-income and high-income families. High-income families use utterances more often than not to encourage and provide affirmation to their children (Hart & Risley, 1995). The speech is less punitive than lower income families' speech (Brody et al, 2002; Diener et al., 2003; Hoff et al., 2002; Linver et al., 2002) Parents of middle class use speech to elicit conversations with their children (Farran & Haskins, 1980; Heath, 1983). Comparatively, parents from low-income homes often use speech to discourage and prohibit behavior (Hart & Risley, 1995).

The outcome of the lack of literacy materials and positive verbal communication according to Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) include a delayed ability to recognize letters and words as well as an absence of phonological sensitivity. Beginning school with these inabilities begets poor readers. The students who do not develop early literacy skills during their beginning years of elementary school are usually the ones who are poor readers at the end of elementary school (Torgesen, 1998). These weaknesses with which children begin preschool and kindergarten tend to increase throughout elementary school, and the gap between good readers and poor readers escalates (Badian, 2000; Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1998; Fletcher, Foorman, Francis, Mehta, & Schatschneider, 1999; Juel, 1988; Scarborough, 2000; Stanovich, 2000). These low SES children rarely catch up and are often referred to special education services (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). For instance, there is only a 25% chance that a student who finishes second grade without the ability to read will read at grade level by the finish of the following year according to Burns, Griffin, and Snow (1998). Additionally, students who struggle with their

ability to read in fourth grade typically struggle through high school. Their chances of dropping out of school are significantly augmented as well (Scarborough, 2001).

How Teacher Turnover Impacts Students.

Loeb, Ronfeldt, and Wyckoff (2012) found that teacher turnover negatively impacts student achievement. They suggested that turnover gives rise to a decrease in institutional knowledge among the teachers that is vital for boosting student learning. They also stated that turnover has a negative impact on the working relationships among teachers, which could affect the school environment.

Reasons for Teacher Retention in High Poverty Schools

Often teachers state that the reason they stay in high poverty schools where the most challenging, low income language learners and minority students are is because of the personal investment they have in the school (Haycock & Peske, 2006). They report feelings of love and hope (Nieto, 2003a, 2003b). Ingersoll (2001) said that teacher retention is also affected by the type of school community, how much support teachers receive from the administrators, and the level of input and decision-making teachers have in their schools (Ingersoll, 2001).

Resiliency. According to Jones, Singer, and Yonezawa (2011) teachers who stayed in high-poverty schools have resilience. Resilience has been defined as positive adaptation in the context of great trials (Bronwyn, Cicchetti, & Luthar, 2000). Resilience is affected by the social constructs and environment in which a person lives. Positive adaptations to adversity are often found within resilient people. Often, teachers who stay in high-poverty schools overcome challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and out-of-date textbooks. They also have faced issues with the community such as gang violence, homelessness of students, and impoverished neighborhoods (Jones et al., 2011).

Wolin and Wolin, (1993) stated that resilient teachers have characteristics of good relationships, insight, initiative, independence, creativity, humor, and morality. Gupton and Slick (1996) said these teachers also possess persistence, determination, and optimism. Whatley (1998) said that self-reflection is also an important characteristic of resilient teachers.

Lower-Class and Middle-Class Norms

Having knowledge of low income norms and rules may allow teachers an awareness of how to better teach students of poverty and how to develop relationships with them that can increase student retention. The norms for middle class and families of poverty are very different. Knowing these differences can be the first step that could lead to success in teaching students of poverty, which may in turn increase teacher retention in high-poverty schools (Payne, 1996).

These differences have come in the form of hidden rules (Payne, 1996). Middle class families view aspects of life quite differently from lower class families. For example, the middle class view things as possessions, whereas people of poverty view people as possessions. The middle class think of food and ask the question, “Do I like to eat it? Is the quality good?” The lower class thinks of food and wonders if they would have enough. With food quantity is important to people of poverty, not satisfaction. Education is valued but untouchable to the lower class; to the middle class it is essential for being successful and furthering oneself. Family structures of lower class individuals are usually matriarchal compared to that of middle class being patriarchal. People from lower class families are driven by survival, relationships, and entertainment, whereas people from middle class are motivated by work and achievement.

In order to reach low income students, the differences in norms need to be taken into account. Knowing these differences could allow teachers to understand why students act certain ways when issues arise in the class such as discipline or homework. Sensitivity in these

situations could greatly reduce the stress of students and increase their ability to make academic gains making the teacher successful (Jensen, 2009).

Milner (2012) presented another idea on education that could increase academic achievement and in turn raise teacher success. He argued that too much attention is placed on the achievement gap. Irvine (2010) suggested that educators should focus not on the achievement gap of the students but on the teacher quality gap, the teacher training gap, the challenging curriculum gap, the school funding gap, the income gap, the childcare gap, and the nutrition gap. From Irvine's viewpoint, if the education system would address these gaps that are fundamentally embedded into our school system, achievement may improve. Milner (2012) proposed that focusing on these gaps, rather than achievement gaps, may be a more productive use of time.

Milner (2012) also suggested that measuring achievement through examination of standardized tests may not be the best way to measure academic success. Standardization does not account for diversity because it proposes that all students live in a similar environment and have the same opportunities afforded them (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Milner & Williams, 2008; Tate, 2008). As already stated, students of poverty enter school disadvantaged because of factors such as inadequate housing, food, and verbalization skills. Standardized testing assumes that students are able to take the test with the same academic background and the same academic abilities when in reality this is not so for many students. (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Glover (2013) suggested that LTL, or the lead-teach-learn triad, is a way of thinking about education that may increase learning. Trust is a primary feature of LTL. This is equally true with low SES children who require trusting relationships before they are open to learning. This refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If low SES students do not have these lower level

basic needs such as safety and belonging met, they will be less apt to engage in academics. (Maslow, 1968) Therefore, building relationships with lower socioeconomic children is a key component to academic growth.

Summary

In this review of literature I have examined how job retention is a major problem in our country and pervades in our schools systems. Turnover in high poverty schools seems to be greater due to issues that interfere with learning, keeping students of lower income far behind middle class students. The demands on teachers to focus more on increasing test scores seem to interfere with teachers' natural interest in helping students learn to develop their individual strengths and abilities. This is especially true in high-poverty schools. There is a huge gap between student performance and expected performance for test scores. The literature presented in this chapter strongly suggested that efforts to improve student test scores with the use of extrinsic rewards for teachers such as bonuses and performance pay is not likely to increase success.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

In this qualitative study I focused on experiences of eight teachers who had chosen to stay in high-poverty schools for 5 years or more. Chapters 1 and 2 exhibited an overview of the study and a review of literature. Teachers were interviewed and the data collected were analyzed using qualitative research methods. This chapter involves the research questions, data collection procedures, participant selection, and finally strategies for analyzing data.

Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to collect and examine the views of eight teachers regarding their choice to continue teaching in high poverty schools. The teachers chosen were interviewed in the fall of 2013. The specific research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What factors led to teachers accepting employment in a high poverty school?
2. What factors contributed to teachers remaining in teaching positions in high poverty schools?
3. What factors did teachers identify as incentives for leaving their schools?
4. What did teachers in high-poverty schools find difficult in their work?
5. Under what conditions would teachers in high poverty schools have chosen to leave?

Data Collection and Procedures

The case study method was used to analyze why these teachers chose to teach in the high poverty schools. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) explain a case study method as one that analyzes data focusing on one phenomenon. The researcher will have a detailed understanding of this phenomenon despite the number of participants or sites used in the study. Interviews were

the primary source of data collection used for this qualitative study to understand the phenomena of why teachers stay in high poverty schools.

Recruiting Protocol

The superintendent of a school system located in the southeastern region of the United States was sent a letter describing the case study and requesting permission to contact teachers at two high poverty schools located within the school system. The superintendent gave permission for the researcher to begin the interviews with eight teachers, four at each of the schools. The principals at both of the middle schools were then sent letters for permission to interview four of their teachers who had been with that school for at least 5 years. The principal suggested four teachers who met the criteria of having been with the school for at least 5 years, and those teachers were contacted through e-mail. Each of those teachers agreed to participate in the case study. The research and informed consent paperwork were discussed over the phone with the participating teachers. The researcher met with each of the teachers at his or her school.

Interview Protocol

The interview was a face-to-face interaction with structured and semistructured questions. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) categorized structured questions as questions that are followed by a set number of choices. These questions are also known as limited-response, or selected-response questions. These questions set limits on what is being shared in the interview to allow for a focused conversation. Semistructured questions are those that have no choices within the questions from which the respondent selects. These questions helped the interviewee

to stay on the topic of the case study but also allowed the participant freedom to describe his or her own feelings and thoughts while not being manipulated by biases of the researcher.

Interview Logistics

The interviews were held at teachers' schools to make it convenient and comfortable for them. Interview times were selected by the selected interviewees to best suite their schedules. The relationship between the participants and researcher reflected that of an interviewer, a neutral medium, and respondent. Questions were asked of the interviewees and responses were recorded for later analysis in the case study.

Ethical Protocol

I gained approval to conduct this study by my dissertation committee in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department at East Tennessee State University. I was then granted permission by the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). These were required steps to insure ethical protocols were met. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) stated four aspects researchers must include in their studies to ensure ethical protocol.

First I sent a letter to the superintendent describing the study and requesting permission to conduct the study. After gaining the superintendent's approval, the principals were then contacted through a letter. The two principals were also notified of how data would be collected and were asked to recommend four teachers who had taught at their school for at least 5 years. Once I received approval from the principals, the recommended teachers were contacted through e-mail. Each of the participating teachers signed a letter of informed consent. A copy of the

informed consent is attached as an appendix. It was made clear to the participants that participating in this study was not required.

The second aspect was confidentiality and anonymity. The interview was conducted to ensure participant safety and confidentiality. Code names were used for participants and places participants mentioned in the interview in order to guarantee participant confidentiality. Participants were asked to review the transcripts and make any changes that would provide greater truthfulness and accuracy of their intended meaning.

The third aspect was privacy and empowerment. Privacy and empowerment were ensured by making participants aware that only what they wanted revealed in the interview need be relayed. They also were given time to look over the transcripts and delete any information they decided was private before transcripts were made public.

Caring and fairness were taken into account when interviewing by avoiding questions that would lead to too much emotional distress. Interview questions were created in such a way that a lack of fairness should not be considered an issue in this case study. I also maintained a calm and supportive demeanor during the interview.

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), is obtaining cases that will be saturated with pertinent information that can be studied in detail. This sampling cannot be generalized to all case studies. The researcher must choose samples he or she feel will have a quality and quantity of knowledge that will increase the reliability of the research. Purposeful sampling was used to collect data for this study because only teachers who taught in high poverty schools for 5 or more years were chosen.

Data Analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and analysis. I examined the interview data to search for themes that indicated similarities and differences in perceptions of participants. The following four steps were used to code and compare the interviews. The first step involved listening to and reading the transcript of the first interview for coding. These codes were then labeled. The second step was to analyze the subsequent interviews coding the same themes that developed in the initial interview. The next step was to code new themes that emerged from interviews not previously recorded. These themes were coded according to words or phrases that were key components of the case study. Themes were then compared for common or differing characteristics of each interview. The final step was to transfer coded themes into an excel spreadsheet for further analysis.

Quality and Verification

Validity, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), is the degree of similarity between the realities found in the world and data collected. Validity is assured by the types of data collection used and analysis techniques. Validity of the study's findings was increased in this study by member checking and participant review. Interviewees were frequently probed and questioned for further and complete meaning of dialogue given.

Participant review occurred in a follow-up meeting where participants interviewed were given a copy of the transcript to verify that the collected information was what they intended to say and represented their true thoughts and opinions. At this time participants were allowed to alter parts of the recording of the interview or resign from the study altogether.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the procedures used to obtain the qualitative data needed to address the research questions posed about the difficulties of teaching in a high poverty school. These procedures included: the research questions, procedures for selecting interviewees, interview procedures and steps to assure quality and verify the truthfulness of the data. In the following chapters I discuss the findings and recommendations for this case study. Chapter 4 provides a report of the data collected on emergent themes. Chapter 5 presents an analysis and interpretation of the meaning of the data provided along with recommendations for research and practice.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to examine why teachers stay in high poverty schools. Eight teachers were interviewed from two different schools in a suburban school district located in the southeastern part of the United States during the fall semester of 2013. There were seven females and one male each of whom had worked in the same high poverty school for 5 or more years. Their thoughts and observations were compiled and examined to reveal different themes that are stated later in this chapter.

In this chapter I address each of my five interview questions. I did not find particular importance to several of these questions. Question 1: “What led to teachers accepting employment in a high poverty school?”, question 3: “What factors did teachers identify as incentives for leaving their school?”, and question 5: “Under what conditions would teachers in high poverty schools have chosen to leave?” provided limited information from the interviews. Question 2: “What factors contributed to teachers remaining in teaching positions in high poverty schools?” and question 4: “What did teachers in high-poverty schools find difficult in their work?” provided important findings from the interviews. These questions are discussed extensively.

Each participant only briefly answered question 1: What led to teachers accepting employment in a high poverty school? Participant 1 explained how she had been out of the school system for 15 years and just wanted to get back into teaching. She stated, “I just wanted to get back in so when he offered me the computer position, I took it. So I was just wanting to get back in the education field after 15 years of being out.”

Participant 2 stated how she wanted to be in a school that had a computer program because that was where her interest laid. She said:

I was in sugar oaks as an elementary school teacher. I really like computers and was trying to get in their computer area at that time. They really didn't have one per se. So what I did was they had an opening here and a friend of mine put my name in and I came over here and interviewed. I got the job over here.

Participant 3 was just out of college when she began working at her high poverty school. She explained:

When I graduated in May of 2001, I graduated in May, got married in July, moved into our first house in July. Start looking for jobs. Got a phone call from Windy Trail Middle school. Interviewed there. And then got a phone call the same day from Silver Creek. Went to my interview at Windy Trail in the morning. Left there. Came to interview here at Silver Creek in the afternoon. It was my second interview. And then I made it to the parking lot and got a phone call offering me the position. So I accepted that one..."

Participant 4 said how she wanted to be at her particular high poverty school, not just because she needed a job or because the school offered a position in her area of expertise, but that she wanted that job because of the school's location. She stated:

I was asked to come over from Harvey middle. I was there for 10 years in the Southerland county and was asked to come over here and flip-flop with for another teacher. She wanted to go to Harvey and I took her position and since this is my home, I was born and raised here. So this is my community, this is my home, and this is where I wanted to be.

Participant 5 also stated the location of her school being a reason she took the position in a high poverty school along with wanting to work with older children. She explained:

I had been a teacher at Tracker Elementary and Pেকে Heights Elementary and that was 14 years and honestly I was wanting older students. I was a little tired. It was fourth grade and I wanted older students. And so staying in South Knoxville and then Evergreen Middle School had openings and so I came here.

Participant 6 said he too wanted to be at his school because the location was desirable. He said, "Let's see I was teaching in California, but at the time my ex-wife was from here in

Knoxville and so we're trying it back for a couple years and so we moved here. We moved here in 92 and been here ever since.”

Participant 7 shared her transition from several different schools before she ended up in her current school. Several of the schools where she worked were closed. She also said that her kids were going to go through that particular school and she wanted to teach where they went to school. She stated:

I was hired at Hot Springs Middle School and I started as an art teacher. I was there for 5 years and then when the school was consolidated, actually it was closed and Blackburn and West were consolidated, I was given the choice of going to Northeast or Cedar Lane Middle School and I chose to go to Cedar Lane Middle and I was there for 10 years and then I got the opportunity to come here where my children were going to school and in my community and I really gave a lot of thought about that because a lot of teachers like to live outside of the community. They like to work outside the community but I decided it was time, that I could handle that. So I've been here 12 years now.

Participant 8 did not choose her school. She explained, “I was, the school that I was in was closed and they transferred me here.” It was not her first choice.

The participants did not reveal important findings from question 3: “What factors did teachers identify as incentives for leaving their school?” or question 5: “Under what conditions would teachers in high poverty schools have chosen to leave?” Most of them did not want to leave their school and had no intention of doing so. The main reasons given were retirement, location, or changes in staff.

When asked what would make her leave her position, participant 1 said, “Just retiring. That's it. I wouldn't leave unless I retired.” Participant 2 shared the only way she would leave

would be “only if they forced me out there. I can foresee nothing at this point that would force me to leave what I want to do.”

Participant 3 revealed that she would leave for an administrative position where she could make a difference but still admits she is content in her current school. She said:

The only thing that I would leave my current position for, would be an administrative position in this current building or at another school that I felt I could affect somehow. If I didn't feel like I had any strengths that would help in the areas they were struggling with. I would really have to look at the school and what I feel my strengths are and see if it would be a good fit. I've been asked before about leaving for certain positions but I just didn't feel it was a good fit. And so I think that's the thing. It would have to be either step up, which I really don't think I would do that because it would be a pay cut. I don't know. I'm pretty happy where I am now.

She also stated other reasons why should would leave such as poor leadership and negativity within the school. She explained:

I think two things. If we had an administration that came in that I felt did not hold students to high standards, I don't think I could work under that. And then it goes back to staff expectations or morale thing. If we get to a point, we have been at one time in my career past where the negativity of, of the staff started bringing the school as a hole down, I don't think I could work there. If no one was willing to change and only willing to complain that's when I would look to get out because I can't be surrounded by people who just want to gripe but don't want to do anything about it. If you want it to change you've got to be willing to do something about it. And so, those two things would probably cause me to move on.

Participant 4 shared the only reason she would leave her positing would be to retire:

No, I'm happy where I'm at. I wouldn't want to go anywhere. Unless go home and retire. I mean that would be my only alternative but I told my husband I said when I get out of bed and if it's a point where I don't want to get out of bed and I don't want to come to school because I love coming to school, then if I do that, it's time for me to retire and I've got 38 years and I'm still going, still as energized as I used to be.

Participant 5 said that she might change careers if offered a position in a field she would enjoy and receive an increase in salary. She stated, “I guess if somebody came up and asked me to join them in something if I was assured that it was, if I'd make more money. And I was assured of something that I would enjoy. Possibly.

Participant 6 shared how he would leave his current position to be closer to home or if he were coaching at another school. He said, “But a couple times I've tried to get a transfer to get closer to home so the drive wasn't as far.” He also explained that he would leave for coaching reasons as well:

Well for coaching too. I coached a couple years over at Karns high school and coach girls basketball over there and so as far as coaching wise its whole lot easier to be at the school your coaching so you can and watch your kids as far as grades and discipline keeping up with them. So as far as coaching, if there's a coaching opportunity here but as far as just making a lateral move for no reason, you know, unless it was closer to home or coaching reason to know. No.

Participant 6 shared that he may leave if there was a change in staff:

...but the whole time I've been here, it's still as far as teacher wise, it's a family atmosphere. A lot of us have been around and been together a long time so we all kinda know a lot of each other's lives. So we're a big family. And that's kinda, in the last couple years, because we've had such high turnover, kinda lost that family feel to it. So I think that might be a factor. If all those other people were gone and your kinda one of the last ones left then maybe it is time to go somewhere else so.

Participant 7 stated that she would possible leave in order to be able to focus more of her energy on a smaller group of students relieving some of her stress and being closer to home. She stated:

There was an opening as an art teacher at the high school and the fact that the person there would teach two classes a day of maybe 25 kids each. I would still go as a mentor which would mean I would still have evaluated my peers so it's not like, I would still move from a TAP school to a TAP school but it's five minutes from a house. That was nice but the thought that I could really focus on my attention on 50 kids in a day and have them every day for a whole semester and really invest myself more and their art content rather than teaching six classes a day with 200 kids a day, evaluating 14 teachers, coaching 4 teachers and being a mentor for more during the course of the week. See I teach, I teach 700 kids by the end of the year. Dialing back the pressure of just the number of things that I'm involved in looked real appealing. Just being able to focus more on my content, even if I was still an evaluator even if I was still having to be evaluated by the TAP system, that didn't bother me. That didn't bother me at all but the idea of dialing back so that at the end of the day I'm not just exhausted and having more of a mix of kids. That was appealing.

Participant 8 said the only reasons for leaving her school would be if the leadership began making poor decisions or if she felt physically threatened by the students. She said, “If I didn’t think something was being done fairly. If somebody, if it wasn’t fair. If it was administrative thing. Integrity, or played on my integrity or...” She also added, as far as the students, “I don’t think the students, unless it got to the point where I felt threatened personally, where I thought I was going to get hurt.”

Question 2: “What factors contributed to teachers remaining in teaching positions in high poverty schools?” allowed for substantial data from the participants. There were five different reasons given for this question: relationships with other staff members, relationships with the community, student achievement and behavior, having a “calling” or ability to work with high poverty kids, and love and thanks received from their students.

Four of the participants shared that caring for the staff with which they worked contributed to their staying in their current high poverty schools. Participant 1 shared that she didn’t want to leave because she felt as though she was in her comfort zone and knowing the staff contributed to that feeling. She said, “Well, I know, I know the people here.” Participant 5 shared the relationship she had with her hall team:

I’ve been with the same people, the four of us down here have been through a lot. We’ve been through birthing children and then grandchildren. That’d be me. And it’s just a great friendship and we deal with the kids together and it’s a great thing. The four of us, three of us have been together for, oh gosh 16 years. We were all good friends really before, I mean along the way we’ve, we’ve just developed a friendship that, we, has never changed. You know, we do things outside of school together.

Participant 6 explained how his school feels like a family when he said, “the whole time I’ve been here, it’s still as far as teacher wise, it’s a family atmosphere. A lot of us have been around and been together a long time so we all kinda know a lot of each other’s lives. So we’re a big family.” Participant 8 also explained that she enjoys her

school as well when she said, “I guess the reason I stayed this long for this first, was I enjoyed the people that I worked with and I enjoyed the principals and the kids.”

Some of the participants also shared that another factor that kept them in their current school were the relationships they had with their school community. Many identified how these relationships allowed them to be more influential with the students. They did not want to leave the community and leave those ties they had built. The participants shared how they lived in the school community and that it felt like home and was convenient.

Participant 2 stated how going to her school was convenient because that is where she lived. She said, “Cumberland was a big part of why I decided to change because it's close to home, it's convenient, it's not a bad school whatever everyone thinks it is.” Participant 3 explained how she enjoys seeing the parents in the community and hearing them discuss how the school has changed in positive ways. She said, “It's the community feel without being a community school.”

Participant 4, like participant 2 shared how she lives in the community which makes it easier to keep track of the students and be in better communication with parents. She stated, “...since this is my home, I was born and raised here. So this is my community, this is my home, and this is where I wanted to be.” She again talked about the number of years she has in the community and the difference she can make in her community when she said, “I'm 58 years old and I've been in this community for 58 years and I would not want to go anywhere else because if I can make an impact and make my community better than I'm going to do it and I'll give everything I've got.” She then stated how she sees her students and their families out in the community. She stated:

I probably see them more the grocery store and in church than I do here in the building and they holler at me, “That's my teacher!” And I'll just go down the grocery isle and

we'll just have our conference right there carting off my groceries or pumpin my gas. So I guess that's an advantage of being in the community that makes a plus there is that I know the parents. I know the generations and being in the community has made a good impact for me. It's a fit. I would want to go anywhere else.

Participant 7 shared her involvement in the community because she lives there and her children attended the school where she teaches. She talked about her involvement and the difference she can make because of her relationship with community members. She said:

Well, my children came through this school but more importantly I felt like I had something to give because, because my kids came through this school, I know so many parents through church, through Girl Scouts. I was a Girl Scout leader for six years. Through soccer, through band, through choir, through singers, through church. I might take the top kids in my class and most of the time I'll know four or five of the families already and sometimes that means that people can up to me in Walmart and go, "You know, I'm just having a problem. What should be the best way to go?" Or, "So and so's grades are not great. Can you check and see who his homeroom teacher is?" You know, it puts me in a unique position which is not always great but I've had a lot of parent conferences in the parking lot at Walmart and the parking lot at Food City At least one time in a package store. The lady checking me out was a parent and we had a pair conference right there. So I have felt like, being plugged into the community, I have a knowledge of this community and have a lot of ties at the high school. So I have a lot of friends of high school so I can prepare the kids for what they're going to go into. I can tell about the teachers they're going to have. You know I feel like, I feel like it's just a good place for me to be to be useful more so than at another school.

Student behavior and achievement was another reason many of the participants stated as a reason they stayed at their high poverty school. Participant 1 shared, "When you have those aha moments where they get it, it's very rewarding." Participant 2 also noted how it is rewarding the students remember lessons taught in her class. She said:

...there's a few kids that you do get through to. They go to another class and the teacher comes up and says, "You know we were talking about safety the other day and someone said, 'oh I remember that from this ***** class.'" And I think "Wow, they did, something did penetrate their head." Or they'll come in and will do something in here that we did last year, and they'll go over that from last year, and they are in so-and-so's class, we learned about OSHA, that if someone mentions OSHA, they've, they go, Oh yeah, I remember that." When it rings a bell in their head and that's what keeps me going. Just that little aha moment that they have. That's good for me.

Participant 3 said she enjoys teaching students on whom others may have given up. She describes the difference between the academic growth of high achieving children and her students. She said:

I'm in because I see the growth. I see the potential and I feel like I can affect that potential. Does that make sense? I don't feel if I was in West Valley, seeing a student who makes an 89 and trying to push them to 95 doesn't affect me like seeing a child is a second grade level that I can push to get to grade level. Seeing that potential in a child that no one has picked up on yet, and knowing that I can push that child and get them there and have success with that child. I have affected that child four years worth of learning instead of moving them from an 89 to 93. That doesn't, that doesn't motivate me. To take someone that I know someone is pushing them and someone is in their corner doesn't motivate me like someone I know everyone has given up on.

She gave an example of a student she had in whom she saw significant improvement in his behavior and academic level. She shared:

How does it make me feel when you finally get to that point, it's like, "halleluiaah." Angels are singing. I finally found it. He finally turned in homework and you actually feel successful. Last year, I'll give you a very good example, the student, you'll change the name right? I had David Austin King, which struggles with every teacher he has, is special ed in every way humanly imaginable. He is in an inclusion class with me and language! and the child could not maintain control for two seconds. It was challenging and what that I've always done is the first day of school I lay out my rules. I review my expectations and I give them a PowerPoint. He couldn't make it through that. So, I took him out into the hallway I was going, "Oh, this is going to be my one kid who is just going to push me." Every teacher starts out with that one kid and so what we started doing with him is we started marking every single time he would disrupt and literally we kept paper bracelets on our wrists and every time he would disrupt we would give him a mark. At first it was, how many he had, he had 94 the first day we did marks. And so we started setting goals for him. And we started, "Oh, what do you like to do? What do you like to have?" We tried different rewards. We tried different soft drinks and we tried different candy and we tried everything to try to reward this kid and we would try to get it down to 80 marks, try to get it down to 83 marks tomorrow. And so literally we kept him on all year long we went through this process of marks until eventually we allowed him to do a post-it on his desk and we would come by and do the marks on his desk. Eventually we went to where he was self-marking. We would say, "That's a mark." And he would self-mark. And at the end of the year he would, self-marking, would get less than four marks the class period. So we went from a kid, he was 94 disruptions all the time, could not do anything, to four, and was highly motivated, doing everything we asked him to do, passing every test we asked him to pass. But it was finding the little motivations along the way and changing them because mama would take away computer so we would have working computer time. So, "If you have this many marks we're gonna

work in computer time and you can be on the computer for 10 minutes.” Mom would take away something else and we will find a way to, because we would say on top of what was motivating that kid. We would find out threw him because he would come in and vent and we would use his venting for motivation. “Okay, so if you do this, we will do this,” and it just worked out we could find those motivations and it would switch, and we would switch it up but you gotta be very flexible to go with what works but we were able to mold his behavior so that he could be successful in that classroom so that was a big success story. Have a student this year who cannot read at all that I been working with and just found out that he has been special ed before and received no services last year and so we’re trying to work with him and reach him and some doing a ton of modifications to make him successful and he scored an 87 on his last test.

Participant 5 also described how she values the success of her students. She stated, “And seeing them succeed and whether from tests, you know, yes, obviously we all look at test scores but and I like to see did they do better.” She said she enjoyed seeing the “improvement and not only grade wise but socially.” She went on further to describe their improvement in social skills. She shared:

Definitely, there’s some of those kids that you finally feel like you’re making headway with them. They came in and were rude and that saying “rude, crude, and socially unacceptable.” That’s them. And then by the end of the year, have changed and many of them. We don’t ask for yes ma’am no ma’am but just simple things like we teach the boys to hold the door open for the girl or a lady. Just watching them do some things like that I feel like I’ve accomplished something even though that’s not school. It’s a social skill.

Participant 6 described how he is able to help the kids grow. He said, “I think, just like I said, giving the kids opportunities to be successful and do different things and you see them later on you know go further in something.” He too had an example of a success story where a child improved academically and behaviorally. He shared:

Well, he actually ended up writing me that letter up there talking about how much he appreciated afterwards when he left. Well then last year during spring break, his spring break. His mom popped up at my door here, was I like, “Oh hey, what are you doing?” and she said, “Oh we’re on spring break.” and he was hiding around the corner she goes, “Come talk to him.” Of course the first thing she wanted was, “Tell him what your grade point average is. Tell him what your grade point average is.” And he had transferred to, what you call it, shoot, forgot, but he 3.5 grade point average and he was all proud of that he was like, “All those times you told me...” So I think a lot of times for being a middle school teacher you get that delayed satisfaction.

Participant 7 shared an experience she had when she saw a couple of her students a few years after she taught them and they had been positively affected by her. Both of them had actually chosen to study art after being in her art class. She stated:

I was at the Dogwood Arts Chalk Walk two years ago and had a group of students for the middle school there working on a chalk drawing. It's a competition at the Dogwood Arts Festival and I had a group of kids working on it. In the process of helping and going to see the project, I was walking around the whole thing and there's like 150 people all doing different chalk drawings in Market Square and I came around the corner and I saw one of my previous students and I said, "It's so good to see you." And this is someone who was in high school and she came up and hugged me and said, "Oh Ms. Henderson, oh it's so good to see you." and I said, "What year are you?" And she said, "I'm a senior." and I said, "What are you gonna do?" and she said, "I'm gonna be an art teacher." and I said, "Really? That's awesome." She said, "Ever since I was in your class." It was so cool. I was like, "I made a difference," you know, "here's one where it worked." So, I went on to the next one. I went on to the next chalk drawing and it was a young woman he was in her 20s. She said, "Ms. Henderson, do you remember me?" and I said, "Yeah, I do." And said, "I was one of your interns and now I'm getting a job as an art teacher." And it was like two right in a the row and I thought, "It's worth it." You know, it's worth it when you see and it's not just because there were art teachers. It was because they had, for whatever reason, they loved what I did and they went on. They decided to do something similar or they found their niche where. There found where they were going to be happy and I guess another way, on the opposite end, those are my successful students that have come back and said, "You know I decided when I was in your art class that I wanted to be an art teacher."

Participant 8 described how she feels as though she impacts her students. She shared:

And the students and I feel like I make a difference. I can see students grow. That they appreciate, lots of times, that you've done a lesson or the light bulbs that come on after you've taught something and, "Oh, that makes sense." "That's good." And just those immediate rewards sometimes because there's not any long-term rewards for me from individual students.

Some of the participants said that they remained in their current schools because they felt they had a calling or gift to be able to work with high poverty kids. Some of them also shared that they enjoyed being with the kids. Participant 2 said, "I enjoy being with the kids, being up in front of them, giving them information, talking to them and them talking back to me and

telling me what they think. So I enjoy that interaction between me and the kids.” Participant 2 described how she finds humor in the students. She said:

I’m going to stay here to get those little things from the kids and have fun with them because a lot of times it's fun. They're crazy they're funny and if you see that in the kids that can keep you going for a long time you know. I don't know how much longer I'll last in this job with all that goes on in it but I think they'll keep me going for a long time. Just finding the kids that are funny and interesting because even some of the most obnoxious kid that you can find are funny and if you just find the funny in them.

She also said that she felt called to be where she is. She said, “I think the major stuff that I want to quit, those some things don’t matter and my mom’s always telling me, ‘God’s put you where you're supposed to be for some reason and if you're not, it can change and He will give you something else.’”

Participant 3 shared her passion for the kids as well when she stated, “I love the kids. I love the fact that even though I teach one class right now, of 18 children, but somehow I walk in the hallway and 60% of the kids the building know who I am.” She stated how the children in the hall knew who she was simply because the relationships she makes with them and the time she invests in them.

Enjoying the children is important to participant 4 as well. She shared, “I enjoy being with children and making a difference in their lives.” She also feels as though God called her to be where she is. She said, “I just felt like this is where God wanted me to be.” Participant 7 described his calling as well when he shared, “I just felt like that was what I was called to do so. I enjoy working with kids and try to make an impact.” He further said, “Well to be honest, personally, I believe this is where God put me.”

Participant 7 shared, “...overall it has always felt like the right choice for me. It was the right place for me to be.” She stated that she has the ability to teach high poverty students when she feels as though not everyone does. She said:

There are not enough people who can love middle school. There are not enough people to work successfully with inner-city kids. So I just felt like, it seemed to be something, I don't know that I have a gift for it but I have an affinity for it and I've been able to be relatively successful at building relationships with those kids. So I feel like they deserve to have somebody who wants to be here, not somebody who's waiting to go to high school or somebody who just got tired of elementary. So that's, how I feel.

She also said she sees her students out in the community and feels like she has made a difference in their lives when they recognize her and talk to her. She shared:

95% of the kids working the window at every fast food place in South Knoxville is a kid that I've had because I've either had them in rotation or I've have them in the gym supervising them or I've had them in the lunch room or I've had them in art class and I know when my daughter was about eighth-grade, and we pulled up somewhere, and she said, and the person in the window said, "Ms. Henderson, is that you?" and I said, "Yeah, it's me." And they said, "Do you remember when I was in your class?" And I said, "Yeah." and we pulled off and she said, "Mom, you know every kid in South Knoxville." Sometimes it seems that way because I and that's in the feeling. It's a neat feeling to think you've touched that many people hopefully to the positive side.

Participant 8 described her ability to work with high poverty students as well. She said:

I was able to make a real big difference during the time I worked with migrant children. So, I took a lot of those skills and went right into, you know, high-risk, high poverty school and I had success and I just stayed in it because I had already done suburbia and that was easy. It was just easy and rural, that was where I met a lot of migrant children and so it was, I enjoyed it.

The love and relationships developed with the students was the last important factor the participants noted as a reason they stayed in their school. Participant 4 said that even though she goes home tired she is energized when the students show their love for her through a hug or being interested in her life. She stated:

I go home but it's worth it in the long run knowing that when I come back the next day I get a hug. "How's your day," "I hope you have a great fall break." They want to come to my class. They like coming. They'll say, "It's my favorite class." and that I care about them. I get these little notes all the times and things like that to show that I am appreciated and they know I care about them and I think that's the reason why, that's what gets me here every day is knowing that I can be with the group of kids that show their appreciation for me and I get there, and I can be that mama.

She also said, “That makes it rewarding every day and that big ole smile. And they say, “Good morning!” And I say, “Good morning!”

Participant 5 shared how her students are appreciative of her and that is rewarding to her. She said, “I think at the end of the year when they walk out of here or those kids that come around Christmas and they've made your Christmas card, you know. Just that piece of paper or they tell you thank you. So I guess that's it. There's not any monetary payment”.

Participant 8 said she enjoys seeing her students out in the community, and they recognize her and talk to her. She shared:

Oh, like a, students will come back or I'll see them in the mall or I'll see them at a ball game or I'll see them somewhere and they'll yell for me and they'll say, “Remember when we did such and such?” or “Boy, I took such and such and now I'm in college.” “I told you you could.” And, those kinds of things. When I'm out, like if I go to a UT football game I'll see lots of kids.

The last question in my interview that is question 4: What did teachers in high-poverty schools find difficult in their work? This question gave meaningful data from the participants. There were six themes found within this answer. Participants shared that the students' low academic level, the requirement of extra planning, the emotional toll teaching high poverty kids can take, difficulty keeping the students engaged, the students' poor behavior, and the lack of parental support made teaching in a high poverty school difficult.

High poverty students tend to be low academically. All of the participants shared that this made working at a high poverty school more difficult. Participant 1 shared her students' reading and math levels. She said, “Well their learning needs are basic learning needs in math and some of them are, I've looked at their reading scores, and below basic and reading, so, they tend to be unmotivated.”

Participant 2 stated the school's growth was affected by the low academic levels. She said, "Because I think it's extremely stressful when you're a school that does not make AYP and you're the one with the TVASS scores." Participant 3 talked about her students' learning needs. She said they are "below grade level," and have "spelling needs, writing needs."

Participant 4 shared:

I have a lot of special ed, special-needs kids. And I have a lot of IEP kids. The majority, the majority of them are very low-level readers. A lot of individualized learning difficulties. A lot of them is in reading and math. Which that affects my teaching in American history. And I taught reading for a while but I can see that once when they fall behind in third grade they fall further and further behind. So by the time I get them in eighth grade, I would say 60% read below grade level.

She also shared how her class time is spent because of the students' poor reading skills. She shared, "I would say 99% of my time is reading with them and discussing with them because they don't know the words."

Participant 5 shared that her students are "very low academically, very low academics." She shared, "You've got them reading on a second grade level learning to count by twos."

Participant 6, as well, shared, "I think overall we have a lot of kids who were just lacking basic skills. When you hear language! or, do you know about? When we first started language!, we had 13 sections of language!" He said, "...the kids are on their basic math and reading and are so far behind already."

Participant 7 said the students' low academics affect her teaching. She shared:

I think the inner-city, high poverty schools are at a disadvantage because if I could move to Green Valley or Southwest, and I'm not pointing my finger just at them, but if I can move to an affluent school where the kids basic needs are being met, I should be able to move those kids a year doing what I'm doing but instead I have to jump higher and harder and longer and sometimes they show improvement and sometimes they don't. I think the odds are stacked a little against us.

Participant 8 shared other gaps in the students such as their practical experience. She claimed her students have “gaps in their practical experience.”

Extra time in planning for their classes was another factor the participants stated that made working in high poverty schools difficult. Some reasons for the extra planning were because the students are so low academically and they had to make sure the lessons were engaging and would keep the students motivated. Participant 1 shared that she spent a lot of time searching on the internet to find resources for her classroom. She said, “I’m searching every day. I spent 3 to 4 hours on the Internet between every class trying to find different things I could do with them.” She also said:

I am constantly looking for things that I can do with them that's going to keep them engaged. I spend hours looking for games that have activities, any kind of worksheets that is relevant to them. Because you just have to keep them engaged and so for me, because they get off task so very quickly, I have to find something that's going to really just, for the majority of them, nothing can reach all of them, but for the majority of them, something is going to actually get them to where they know they can get part of it, and if they're a part of the activity they can stay on task better.

When she was asked specifically if she felt as though planning for a class of high poverty students took more time than planning for a middle or upper class group of students she said, “Yes, I think you have to work harder in the class and out of class. You have to work harder out of class to get things to find activities to find things that are going to be motivating to the children.”

Participant 8 shared a perspective of someone she knew who quit a high poverty school. She said the reasons she quit was due to the extra amount of time it takes to work in a high poverty school on paperwork and in planning in order to reach all the students who have such a wide diversity of needs. She said, “She quit a high poverty school because of the demands of her time. You know that, I think most of my math teachers is that there’s so much more time, there’s

so much more stuff that has to be done that you can't get it done and so you're always 100 steps back." When asked if she believed there were more tasks involved in working in a high poverty school she said

Yes. Paperwork or lesson structures or data where you have to collect all this stuff and because someone's always watching you so those things have to be done all the time. ... Because you're a high risk school and they don't want you to, they think it's the teacher all the time is why the school's not progressive and I'm not sure, I know I don't believe it.

Another factor that contributed to these teachers stating their jobs were difficult was that their jobs were emotionally draining. This was supported by the fact that the students were so needy. Many of the students needed clothes, food, and emotional support. These teachers took on the role of more than simply the academic teacher. They knew that in order to teach the whole child they would need to meet their other needs as well. A hungry student will not learn as well as a satisfied student. This feeling of being emotionally drained is also connected to factors the teachers shared that made their jobs challenging. These factors that I mention later in this chapter are difficulties keeping the students engaged, the students' poor behavior issues, and the lack of parental support. These last three factors contribute to making the teacher feel exhausted.

Participant 1 described the effects of the demands of her job when she shared, "So, to me, teaching this class is very tiring. It's very trying." She also said, "To me teaching in this situation is very tiring and you come out some days and you're going, you know, 'That was a, that was a wreck.'" Participant 2 also shared frustrations about getting through to her students. She shared, "It makes it tougher. It, it makes it to where there are days that you just don't know what to do. You don't know. You're dumbfounded as to how to get across to the kid." Participant 3 talked

about the needs of her students when she said, "...emotional needs, maternal needs, you name it and we have to be it, counseling needs."

Participant 4 similarly shares how getting content taught to kids with needs drains her of energy. She said:

I go home exhausted every day because I give them 110% and I feel like I try to provide every aspect for them, different teaching strategies, every avenue to get them the information and the content and if I don't get it then I find another way for them to get it. If I can't do it one day then I'll figure some way to get that information across but it is exhausting. It takes all my energy, all my energy to come into the classroom because it's so overwhelming with so many kids that are in need and it's my responsibility as a teacher to do the best I can and that's my job. To get that information, to get that level of content to a level of content to them where they can feel successful and I can feel successful knowing they're getting it.

Participant 5 shared how the needs of her students sadden her and she tries to meet more than just their academic needs. She explained:

I mean, especially around holidays and stuff. You know, there's times I want to go home and cry. I mean, I've brought my girls' used closed for others kids. All of us, three of us have girls and we've brought in clothes and you spend our money on brushes and hair stuff and socks and underwear for these kids that don't have.

She explained that along with teaching her subject area she performs the duties of being a "guidance counselor, social worker, mom, dad, grandma, whatever you got. It's everything, it's everything but teaching."

Participant 6 described the needs of his students as well and the effects that those needs had on him. He said:

Especially for my kids too, you get a little closer to your basketball kids you know when your closer you get closer to them and I've had to deal with kids on drugs, you know, just being honest with them saying, "Hey, I'm going to have to turn you in myself if I have to." You know, I've had kids, basketball players, with weed and had to turn them in and stuff like that. So of course it's a lot tough love for some of them, but yeah, we're just. For a lot of them you're their emotional support too because some them come to school and there so needy as far as wanting their attention, "Coach Jersey, coach Jersey, look at me!" So they're just constantly wanting your attention especially when you're playing a game or costly wanting your attention. So our roles are, and people complain about us

having our summers off but if you had to do what you had to deal with every single day and understand sometimes it's the reason you don't burnout. You're exhausted all the time.

Participant 7 described how she feels as though she has to be stronger to work with high poverty students. She said:

There are so many that need so much, it's just kinda, it can be a little overwhelming sometimes but that's what, you know, I guess that is what has kept me in the inner-city population is that it's hard. It is emotionally draining. It's not for everybody. Not everybody, you have to have a strong, you have to develop a tough veneer, but then you have to still care about them.

She also said the amount of energy required to teach high poverty students is affected by their lack of motivation. She said:

I think it's just that you pour so much more energy in the classroom. I think it just takes so much more song and dance, so much more entertainment value, so much more, "Let's make it. Let's make it entertaining. Come on. I've got a jolly rancher if you just do two more." You know, you just, have to do so much incentivizing, incentivizing, like, offering incentives. "If you can just do a little more. If you can just raise your score.

Participant 7 said, as well, the amount of stress her job added to her life when she shared, "Because this is very stressful. This atmosphere is very stressful." She went on to discuss how the low achievement levels of many of the high poverty students can make a teacher feel. She said, "People who just get drained doing it very long." She also shared, "you're not going to make as high scores, your kids are not going to look as good, your bonuses are not going to look as good. You know, you're always the scapegoat. You're always the stone keeping the county down and there's not a lot of respect." She added, "There's pressure on everybody to perform and to be accountable but I think the pressure on inner-city schools is we know. We want to measure up. We want to get our kids up to that bar but we don't you know."

Participant 8 stated that the needs beyond academic ones add to her job. She shared:

Just making sure those needs are met. Like, lots of times, making sure they have a chance to do homework, that I give them a chance, if they have trouble with problems

that were for homework. Or that I make that or make sure that they've been fed. We have breakfast in the classroom now but years ago we didn't and so making sure they had something to eat before they started school that morning. Making sure they all look healthy. You're looking over your classroom and you know the kid that's got bags under his eyes. You just become attuned to those types of characteristics in your classroom.

Participant 8 felt as though because of the lack of motivation, she has to have more energy in the classroom to motivate her students, which drains her. She said, "There's no motivation to make an A or a B or a C. It's not there. It's nothing for lots of kids. So, you have to be the cheerleader all the time. You, as a teacher in this building you have to be up 90% of the time because if you're down that can spot ya and there on ya and take advantage." She also talked about how she feels when teaching her low achieving students. She said:

And if you're being told all the time that, "You go to do this, and you got to do this." And it still doesn't work but you're still saying that you do it and so you do it but it still fails. So they're telling you what to do and you're doing it but it makes it like, "You're failing because you didn't do it right." So, it's just like a vicious cycle.

When asked how this made her feel, she replied with, "Discouraged."

Another factor teachers reported as making their jobs challenging is keeping their students motivated. Participant 1 shared, "As long as you can keep them motivated and engaged they're fine but the minute one gets off, it's like the whole 19 of them get off so." She also reported that they have difficulty listening and staying on task because of their lack of motivation. She said, "They tend to be to not be good listeners and they tend to get off task very easily. And that's probably the reason they're in here. They tend, they tend to be totally unmotivated because everything just kind of goes over their head up in the classroom. So I've always pulled things to, to motivate them."

Participant 3 said she feels as though she needs to make her class interesting to compete with everything else the students are thinking about. Many of the students have their home lives

at the forefront of their minds. They might be worried about the fact that they have no food. She said:

It has to be more relevant than that. So when I'm planning I have to think about what do I have to do to make what I'm saying relevant to them so they can see that, "I need to focus on this for a minute." because it's not the forefront of their mind. It is not the most important thing going on in their life right then and so I know that and I understand they are dealing with other things, but we also bring why when I'm teaching is important at the same time.

She also shared how different it was to teach in low poverty schools compared to high poverty schools in regards to keeping the students on task. She said:

And so I worked in some way more affluent schools when I did some of my student teaching and the teacher didn't have to talk, "How am I gonna make this relevant?" It was just I'm teaching my lesson on this. They didn't have to focus in on getting that kid to buy-in, to sit in their desk and, and listen. Or, "How am I gonna keep these kids on task?" because it was just part of that culture to stay on task. It didn't have to be the teacher's responsibility keep them focused because their parents would keep them focused. And so to come into this culture, where the parents, that is not the expectation when you come to this school. It's a much different.

She again stated the challenges of getting the students to grow when asked what was challenging her job. She shared:

Challenging, getting the students to grow. Finding what makes a student tick and what motivates them. And some of them it's, it's so hard to do. And so I think that's the biggest challenge is to find what motivates, to find works, and do it. And it might be going through 14 different plans before you figure out that behavior plan eight is what finally works with Johnny that never does anything in my class but I'm in a find something that works for him. And it might be 12 weeks into school but I will find something that works for him. I've had lots of kids that it's taken, I have no idea. I've tried everything.

Participant 5 also shared the challenges of keeping her students' minds in her lessons. She said, "So yeah, it makes it that much more tough trying to find a way to keep them, keep their mind on what's going on in here and see what. Makes it much more tough obviously. Like I said, just trying to keep them focused on what we're trying to do here school."

Participant 8 said the level of thought that must go into the lessons because the students often times cannot work individually is enhanced. She believed this to be true because the students feel as though they cannot accomplish the task without help. This connects back to a previous factor stating the students are low academically. She explained:

Because students have a hard time doing individual practice time. Where you gave a practice time that was independent where it was an occasional practice problem where they would sit there and do that work and that doesn't happen because they all, these students, especially your, not your high students, but you middle and low students, they have this inferiority complex that they can't do anything and they need someone there to go step by step by step by step.

The next factor the participants stated that contributed to the difficulties of working in a high poverty school was the students' behavior. Many of the participants stated that the students' behavior interferes with their learning and the teachers' classroom management skills have to be extremely effective in order to have a learning environment where progress is being made. Participant 1 shared that her students sometimes do not learn because of their behavior. She described a lesson she had recently taught and explained why they did not learn by saying, "It was mainly because of their behavior today. They tend to be real talkative." She further explained, "They do not have good listening skills. You have students who don't have really good listening skills and it doesn't matter how many times you go over your expectations and all that, and they really don't listen to you and take that in."

Participant 2 described a situation she was in when teaching was extremely difficult because of the lack of discipline at the school with her high poverty students who needed that structure and discipline. She shared, "I couldn't teach anything because the children. The children weren't paying attention. They weren't doing what they were supposed to do. And it just got really was hard to deal with that."

Participant 4 shared why she feels teachers leave high poverty schools. She also pulled in a previous factor of having to be a special type of person to teach high poverty students mentioned earlier in this chapter. She said:

Maybe because of disrespect. Maybe becomes discipline becomes an issue but you have to work at it. I've never had any trouble with that but I think that when you're in a high poverty school, I think sometimes you have to be a special individual just to be able to teach in it, personally, I think so because you have to be understanding.

Participant 5 also stated how behavior in her classroom affects her teaching. She said, "We've got the behavior issues." She mentioned again what is challenging when she said, "And keep the discipline...discipline issues down the minimum. That's just the hardest part right there." She also noted, "...but if you were to look at the majority of our discipline issues from the suite, most of them are from high poverty."

Participant 7 shared reasons she felt students had behavior problems. She said students need to get to the root of their anger before they can build a relationship with them, which is often needed before they can be taught the content. She said:

They're just angry. They come in angry. They come in hostile. They come in hateful and you know, that's hard to work through sometimes, to get a kid to see, to get him hooked on what your content is in your a classroom because they're just angry. You know, they're hungry and no one ever pays attention to them and they don't have enough clothes and they can't tell you that. They can't tell you why they're angry but they just come in angry every day and you've got to chip away at that before you can. You have to build a relationship before you can start working on content. You know, and once the relationship is there sometimes you can get them hooked into what you're doing and then the next year you have to start all over again and you might have a teacher who doesn't get angry when a kid gets angry and cusses him out. The chances are you're gonna have a teacher who's going to get mad when they do that. There's no guarantee that they're going to get somebody who sees he's angry because he's missing something. You know, that's a hard thing to teach so.

She also described the verbal hostility she had dealt with in her classroom. She shared:

Student who come in verbally assaultive every day. Students who come in and say, I have had a student say to me, "I'm gonna shoot you in the throat and watch the blood run done your body." I've had a girl say, "Fuck you bitch. Go to hell." Run out of the classroom

and slam the door. Kids who are physically or verbally threatening and you know, you just bluff threw it as best you can and you hope, you hope you don't get the one, you know, you just have to hope that you don't get the one that doesn't respond to a relationship and every now and then there's one whose just dead in the eyes. And you know, you know there's no banking on a relationship. You can get along great Monday and Tuesday but if something flips his switch on Wednesday he's going to come into your room ready and you know what you're going to do. You're doing to get verbally assaulted or you're going to get physically threatened and that's not every day but there are kids that are hostile. . The thing that got me the most depressed last year as I had a string of kids who I just knew every day coming, they were to be hateful and mad and angry and destructive. Every single day. And you can suspend them for two days or put them in ISS for three or four days. You follow the policy but they're right back. They come right back after two or three days and you just count your time with them. You know, "Well I have two more weeks before they go to the next class. I've got 2 or 3 days until Christmas and I'll see if I can make." That's the thing that has debilitated me the most. Is just the kids who are just, they keep everybody else from learning and they keep you from doing your job.

Participant 8 stated the level of classroom management skills teachers in high poverty schools must have. She said:

Well, I think they biggest challenge is just that they all want to be heard so classroom management skills have to be, you have to be so much harder in classroom management that you can't hardly relax and let them talk or whatever because they don't have those skills and even though you try to teach those skills, they fall right back into what they're used to or what they bring from home or they don't always realize that they're competing against each other but that's what they're doing because they get louder and louder and louder and louder.

The last factor identified by teachers that they felt made their jobs challenging was the lack of parental support. This lack of parental support came in the form a lack of academic help the parents give and the lack of discipline the parents give at home. They felt as though this lack of support also contributed to some of the other factors such as making their job emotionally draining, getting the students to focus, and the low academic levels of many of the children.

Participant 1 explained how she felt the lack of support at home affected her students' academic level. She said, "A lot of that probably is the reason they're in basic or below basic because they don't get that help at home." She went on to further discuss how the lack of support

at home affects the students' learning and how that looks different in a higher socioeconomic home. She shared:

I think that interferes with their learning because they go home without a support system in most cases. The parents don't care, they don't do anything. The parents may not be able to, they may not have education to help them. I think anytime you have kids coming from poor economic situation that you don't get the, the kids don't get the support at home that they need as far as learning goes. A lot of these kids go home and take care of smaller brothers and sisters. I don't know that they've ever had instilled into them the work ethic or a, you know, "you should bring home your homework." Whereas in upper-middle class parents would be asking, "where is your homework" or "what did you today" and I don't know those communication skills happen in a low socioeconomic group. I mean when you watch these kids leave the building at the end of the day you don't see them taking home homework.

Participant 2 stated how behavior and lack of physical care was affected by an absence of parental support. She said, "...the children in the inner city school were a lot of times not well taken care of by parents. Medicine wouldn't be given. Parents didn't believe that their children could do any wrong. There was a lot of conflict with where they were situated at different homes." She further added, "Because they have no discipline. They have no discipline at home. They have no discipline here." She went on to discuss how the way the students talk to one another and yell at one another reflects the kind of language that occurs in their own homes. She said:

My opinion with that is that a lot of this starts at home. Their behavior is, a lot of the kids that you see that are obstinate defiant or that are out-of-control usually have a home life that's out-of-control. I've even had one of the kids in one of my classes tell me, because we were having a discussion in class with the philosophical chairs, what this teacher does, and she was very aggressive in her manner, very loud, very boisterous to the point of being almost hostile towards the other children when they didn't agree with her and I talked to her about it afterwards and her thing was this is the way it is at home. "This is how we discuss things at home. This is what goes on in my house." Other children have told me the same thing, you know, "Would you use some of that bad language? Would use that language at home?" and they say, "yeah," or they'll say, "call my mom," and, "I don't care if you call." And, "I'll call your mom and dad." And you know, it's, "I don't care. They use it all the time. My dad gets mad and he uses all the time." I think a lot of what they do is, what they hear, a lot of what they do is what they see. We have a lot of

the projects, we have a lot of fights that go on between parents and these kids just deal like that.

Participant 3 shared how her students often times are thinking about meeting their needs instead of focusing on the course content, which relates back to the factor of keeping them engaged. She said, "...thinking about what they're going to have to do when they get home or thinking about what am I going to eat tonight, or thinking about whose going to take care of my little sister because mom's not going to be home and I've got to cook dinner for her, and what am I going to do." She further explained how the responsibility of motivating her students becomes her responsibility because the parents are not doing that at home. She said:

...we don't have the parents side-by-side with us. Some of them they do. But the majority of our students the parents the parents are not side-by-side saying to the kid, "Learn it or else. You're going to college, so you need to know this. You're going here, so you need to know this." They don't have that cheerleader. I've got to be their cheerleader. I've got to tell them why they need it. So, it falls on me, it's not the delivery of instruction. I've got to deliver the motivation and all of that as well.

Participant 3 explained a time when she tried to call a parent for support and learned that the parents would not always be the best way to get the student to behave. She shared:

I came into the school and one the first parents I called, week 2 of school, said, "It is 11 o'clock. I'm asleep. When they are at school there your problem." And so that was a real eye-opener of I have to figure out a way to reach these kids when they don't have parents who care what they do and so from that point on, that was my first year teaching, parents weren't my first route. You know, my relationship with that child is my first route of defense. Because if you use your parents as a route of defense, and the parents don't care, then you've lost the kid because it's like, "You said you were calling my? My momma doesn't care. Go ahead, call em." I have to have a relationship with the child the fall back on, not the relationship with the parent.

Participant 4 shared how the lack of support at home increases the demands made of her. She said, "There's more that are demanding of me this year than I've ever seen before just based on the individual needs." She went on to say:

And I guess that's the majority of the environmental part that I see more so in inner-city school is because there's not a mom and a dad and there's not any quote true role model. I

don't think there's a lot of discipline in the home. I see a lot of disrespect. I just see a lot of anger in a lot of kids. And that's, that's a concern for me.

She then said academics are affected by home life. She said, "So I'm seeing a lot of that environmentally that affects their academics. You know, there's no set a time at home they don't specify specific times for study. A lot of parents don't have a clue." She then went on to discuss discipline problems. She said, "Well, if they're not being held accountable at home then what can we expect here. And I think that's why there's a lot of discipline problems because, you know, they're doing this at home so they do here at school." She then said, "That's what I see every day and that worries me because if kids are not accountable for home and what goes on at home it's really hard for teachers to have to deal with that on a daily basis because we have to have control."

Participant 4 shared how she also provides many school supplies for students who do not receive these supplies from their family. She shared:

I know a lot of them don't have notebooks. I get no books from businesses. I get them notebooks. Also I go to Home Depot. I go to different places across, I go to Office Depot. I go to Staples. I get pencils and pens and markers and all kinds of additional supplies knowing that they probably can't afford it and especially more so with a lot of parents being unemployed. So I do go out and get all that more so this year. Instead of giving one box of notebooks away, three-ring, I ended up two. So it's sort of doubled and pencils and pens as just they come unprepared. So I found myself providing more materials for them and more individual time with them.

Participant 5 identified the need her students have because of their home lives. She said:

Needs, as in, their home- life, not, their great-grandparents are raising them. They're living with grandparents or a single-parent home or they don't know where they're going to asleep. They may be sleeping at an aunt's or uncle's or grandparent's. Often times they're looking, it's, their meals are right here. This is it. Some of them, but then the others are not. They know they're going home. They know exactly how they're getting home. They know who they're going home with and what they're going home to. So there's both, but the needy, they need, they need a hug. They need some guidance as far as manners. They just need a lot of things. They need clothes and shoes. They, they just, sometimes I wish they could be taken other places and somebody may take them in. Which we have some of those too.

She went on to describe some of the worries her students have. She shared:

When you're sitting there worried about where your next meal is gonna come from you're not think thinking about school. When you're worried about what just happened in the neighborhood. The mothers are fighting or whose gonna jump you or who, who said what on the bus. Then that definitely has an impact. I've taught so many that don't, I mean some that were sleeping on the front porch. And because the mom kept them walked out because they were afraid, and the mom worked worked night shift, and so we had one sleeping in a hammock and that was it. He would hang out in the hammock on the front porch at night and that was it. And so he was definitely not one of your higher functioning kids because school just didn't matter to him. And I can see why. And you got so many of those that haven't been taught social skills and so therefore they've got the behavior issues because they don't know how to act in classrooms but one of our assistant principals said to me he said, "Well, on TCAP, I had one time that a kid had their hamster died the day before and so they really did have their mind on it," and I thought, "hamster?" Our kids are wondering where they're going to get a meal some of them and so that's definitely a little bigger than the hamster issue. Not to that child the hamster was a big thing, obviously, but in this setting with these, with a lot of these children, it's not.

Participant 6 shared his thoughts on why students are not learning at schools. He shared:

I think a lot of our kids because we have so many lower-income kids that just resources at home aren't there and so a lot of what you're trying to accomplish here at school may kind of get lost at home and I think that's one of the reasons some of them are so far behind. Well, it's parents are busting their butt trying to work and working a couple jobs, or they just, whether it's the parents themselves don't have the background knowledge to help them though. I think that's an issue.

He further explained how students may struggle with getting class assignments completed at home because of the lack of resources. He also stated what teachers do to counteract that. He said:

You know I think a lot of our kids don't have computers or things like that at home so if you're giving them an assignment where they have to do research or have to look something up, they don't get it done at school, they don't get it done. I think a lot of our teachers are accommodating for that stuff. You know what my friends is a science teacher. They do a cell project that they have to make cells and he'll actually provide some of the materials for some of the kids because he knows some of them don't have it at home and basic, in a basic supplies like papers and pencils and things like that.

He then shared how the lack of parental involvement increased his workload when asked if teaching high poverty students made his job more difficult. He said,

I think so just for the fact that you're more than a teacher to a lot of kids. Even back when I coached basketball. I was constantly giving kids rides. For some of them that was the only way they were gonna be able to play or arrange a ride for them or I would have to go get them myself. I paid for kids to go to basketball camp, or you know, playing fall league or help them out with their shoes all that kind of stuff, so.

He also added the lack of support with behavior he receives when he said, “

You know, I think we have, it always surprises me when we have quite a few kids that are being raised by grandparents which I think is really hard for a lot of them because the discipline, the control. You have a lot of them, we have parent meetings and grandma shows up and she says, “I can't do nothing with them.”

Participant 7 stated many of her students are lacking secure and stable homes and do not get many of their needs met. She states how the school tries to meet some of these needs. She shared:

Well, I've had students who have lived in the car. I've had students who have been shuffled from one house to another. I have kids who have been in seven schools in seven years. I've had kids, I regularly have kids who struggle. You know, if you on a field trip, they don't have the three dollars to pay for the bus to go to on the field trip. If you, there are just so many needs. They don't have paper. They don't have pencils. They don't have shoes. We have the angel backpack program where we try to provide food for students on weekends. We provide lunch. We have a clothing closet. We have had several students whose houses have burned down and it have had no resources, no other resources. So they come here to the clothing closet and we gather up you know we have ways of gathering up things for those families. We provide Christmas for several families. We provide Thanksgiving baskets for families. To me it's almost, it's almost overwhelming the number of students who have needs. Not everybody has all those needs, but I'm gonna go out on a limb and say that 70% of the kids need something. They either need an emotional stability. They need personal things. They need basic supplies. They need, in some cases, food, clothing, housing, stable home life, you know.

She then stated some of the support systems the students are lacking. She explained:

... you have children who don't have paper at home, don't have pencils at home, somebody takes their homework, somebody takes their medicine and sells it . Mom and dad are getting beaten up. They're getting snatched up in the middle night and taken somewhere else. They don't have enough food to eat. Or they're living with grandma for three days and they're living with aunt for three days. Mamma's boyfriend is coming over and there's nobody to check their homework. There's nobody to put them in bed at night. There's nobody to make sure there not playing video games all night long...

Participant 6 shared a scenario showing how teachers can sometimes be responsible for students even after school hours because the parents are not picking their children up from school. She explained:

I don't know how many times, at the end of the day, or field trip and had kids still standing here with nobody to pick them up and nobody to take them home. I've had to send a kid home in a taxi one time. We pulled our money together and sent the kid home in a taxi because there was no one, they were home but they just weren't going to pick him up. "We don't have transportation. We don't have a car. We can't get them. It's your problem." Of course we can't go home, we weren't going to go home and leave the kid standing in the dark in the parking lot. Somebody's always here. There's two or three waiting on kids at the end of the day. Kids who they don't know who they're going home with.

Participant 8 explained her thoughts on why parents do not support and push their children academically. She explained:

...in a poverty area, the children are the assets and so they don't want to lose that asset and so, they don't encourage them as much as middle class families do to become independent and to do good and to prosper because if they do they may leave their parents and that would leave a gap and they parents would have anything. They wouldn't have that asset. It's something they can hold on to. "I've at least got my children."

She further explained:

Because they don't have, they parents don't talk to them academically or they don't point out every day occurrences or their parents are too tired. I mean they work all the time. So, they don't really have time to participate in their learning. They want to but they also have, their first priority is to put food on the table and a shelter over their heads and keep them clothed. So, that education is on down the road. It's not a top priority.

Summary

Several themes emerged from the interviews with these eight teachers who chose to stay in their high poverty schools for 5 or more years. Questions about how they came about working in their schools and what would motivate them to leave did not provide meaningful data. However, the questions regarding why they stayed in their current school and what made

teaching in a high poverty school did provide substantial data that was shared in detail in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine why teachers choose to stay in high poverty schools. Eight teachers were interviewed from two different schools in the southeastern region of the United States. They were asked five research questions. Data were gathered and analyzed from the interviews.

Research Questions

1. What factors led to teachers accepting employment in a high poverty school?
2. What factors contributed to teachers remaining in teaching positions in high poverty schools?
3. What factors did teachers identify as incentives for leaving their schools?
4. What did teachers in high-poverty schools find difficult in their work?
5. Under what conditions would teachers in high poverty schools have chosen to leave?

Questions 1, 3, and 5 did not reveal important findings. Teachers shared little on how they came to work at their school and why they would choose to leave their school. These teachers communicated few incentives for leaving their current positions.

However, interestingly questions 2 and 4 provided data that allowed me to identify 11 central themes. Five of the themes related to why these teachers stayed in their high poverty schools. These five themes were: relationships with other staff members, relationships with the community, student achievement and behavior, having a “calling” or ability to work with high poverty kids, and love and thanks received from their students.

The other six themes were revealed when teachers were asked why they felt working in a high poverty school is difficult. These six themes were: students’ low academic level, the

requirement of extra planning, the emotional toll teaching high poverty kids can take, difficulty in keeping the students engaged, the students' poor behavior, and the lack of parental support.

Question 1 was: What factors led to teachers accepting employment in a high poverty school?

Most of the teachers accepted positions at their schools because of location or because they simply needed a job and were offered a job at their particular schools. One teacher did discuss how her high poverty school offered a teaching position in her field of interest when justifying her decision in taking the position. A couple of the teachers shared that their previous school had been closed, requiring them to find employment elsewhere.

The following themes were revealed through Question 2: What factors contributed to teachers remaining in teaching positions in high poverty schools.

Theme One: Relationships with Other Staff Members

Half of the participants shared that a reason they stayed in their current position was because they enjoyed working with the staff members at their school. One participant said the staff contributed to her feeling comfortable at her school. Another said the staff felt like a family, while another shared that her team had been through so much together allowing them to be friends inside and outside of school. It seemed as though these relationships were an integral part of how the teachers were able to cope with the hardships of teaching high poverty students. Being able to talk with other staff members and encourage each other helps when teaching in high stress situations.

Theme Two: Relationships with the Community

Participants shared that because they lived in the community there were able to see parents and students out in the community at Walmart, for example, and were able to build those

relationships more effectively. It also seemed that because they were so involved in their community they knew the struggles many of their students had and this allowed them to relate better to them and provide more for their needs.

Participants also stated the convenience of being so close to home as far as the drive to and from school. Some also shared a passion for wanting the school in their community to thrive and be successful. Several shared that they wanted to change the attitude some had about their school wanting their school to be known for its successes and not looked down upon because it was a high poverty “bad” school. Haycock and Peske (2006) seemed to support this when they claimed that a reason teachers stay in high poverty schools is due to their own personal investment within the school. Another participant said that she wanted to teach at the same school where her children attended so she could be more involved in their education.

Theme Three: Student Achievement and Behavior

All the teachers shared how watching their students succeed and learn, having those “aha” moments, made them want to stay in their current position. Seeing students grow academically going from basic to proficient is worthy of celebration to many of the teachers interviewed. Knowing that their students do not have much support at home and knowing the odds are against them gives some of these teachers the extra motivation to push their students to grow and believe in them. This gives them a sense of accomplishment and drive to stay in their job.

Several teachers said seeing students of the past come back and relay stories of how the teacher motivated them or inspired them to succeed in high school or in college. This seems to be extremely rewarding to the teachers and gives them deep satisfaction. Other participants said

observing poor behavior changing into respectful behavior by the end of the year brings great joy in their job.

Theme Four: Having a “Calling” or Ability to Work with High Poverty Kids

Many of the teachers shared that it takes a special person to be able to successfully work with middle school alone; adding the status of “high poverty” adds to the difficulty level.

Knowing this, the participants said that because they felt they had this special ability to work with and love their high poverty students, they needed to stay in their school because there were not many people available to fill their positions who could teach in their situation successfully.

A few of the participants said that they stayed in their job because they believed God had called them there. They felt that if they were to go somewhere else then a “door would be opened.” Because the “door was not opened” for them, they felt that their current position was where they were supposed to be.

Another factor in this theme was that many of these teachers love the children. They revealed a passion for them. The participants enjoy seeing the children every day and being around them. One participant shared the fact that the students teach her aspects about technology while in class. This connection brings meaning to her job. Nieto (2003a, 20003b) seems to support this attitude when saying that teachers who stay in high poverty school report possessing feelings of love and hope for their students.

Theme Five: Love and Thanks Received From Their Students

Participants enjoy the camaraderie between themselves and the students. One mentioned the Christmas cards her students give her bring her joy. Another mentioned enjoying when her students see her outside of the classroom and shout her name to say “hello.” Others mentioned receiving joy when the kids say “good morning” and smile. This relationship that develops

between themselves and the students encourages them to stay in their positions. Glover (2013) stated that this type of loving relationship teachers can have with their students when he presented the lead-teach-learn triad. In this relationship trust is extremely important in getting students to feel as though they are in a safe environment to learn.

Question 3 was: What factors did teachers identify as incentives for leaving their schools? Question 5 was: Under what conditions would teachers in high poverty schools have chosen to leave? Neither of these questions revealed important findings. The incentives and conditions teachers gave for possibly leaving their school mostly revolved around retirement, being closer to home, an ease of stress, or changes in staff.

One participant spoke of location stating that he lives further away from his school than he likes and would change schools to be closer to home. Other participants mentioned that they would leave when it was time to retire and only then. A couple participants said transferring would be considered if there was a change in staff and it did not feel like a family anymore or the administration began making poor decisions that negatively affected teachers and students. This seems to support the findings from Donaldson and Johnson (2011), who said poor administrative leadership was a reason teachers leave high poverty schools.

One participant said she considers leaving when thinking about being able to work with fewer students but of the same socioeconomic background. She claimed this would decrease stress in her life. Her stress level is caused by her tremendous workload and the large number of students she teaches. Smethen (2007) seems to support her thoughts when he states that increased workloads of teachers in high poverty schools affect the ability to bridge the gap of low academic students.

The following themes were revealed through Question 4: What did teachers in high-poverty schools find difficult in their work?

Theme Six: Students' Low Academic Level

Every teacher stated that students' low academic level was a factor in making their jobs more difficult. The teachers shared low math and reading levels. Many of their students are reading far below their grade level. Jones et al. (2012) seems to support these teachers' findings when they claimed that poverty can have a substantial effect on a student's academic achievement.

One teacher stated that she believes that when the students fall so behind in elementary school that leads to fewer gains when they reach middle school. Torgesen (1998) said that students who do not acquire the literacy skills early on in elementary school are much more likely to be poor readers at the end of fifth grade. Scarborough (2001) stated that students who have deficiencies in their reading abilities in fourth grade typically have these struggles all the way through high school. Teachers felt as though much of their time is spent teaching reading skills so students can understand the course content in subjects such as science and history.

Another teacher said that she felt her students were lower academically because their needs were not being met at home due to their high poverty situation. When the students are lower academically, more work is required by the teacher to reteach the students. Maslow (1968) seems to support this teacher's thoughts in his theory of hierarchy of needs. According to his theory, the students in high poverty schools may not be able to learn as well academically until their lower level needs are being met. For example, expecting students to memorize the different phases of the moon when they are hungry because they haven't eaten in over 24 hours may be an impossible task.

Theme Seven: Requirement of Extra Planning

One teacher said she spends hours searching on the internet for activities that her students will find interesting. She said that if the lessons are not exciting then her students will not be engaged and will not learn. Another teacher concurred with her when she said that working in a high poverty school requires more time in planning due to the amount of paperwork and data you have to collect because you are a high risk school. Smethen (2007) said teachers in high poverty schools have increased workloads because of the time it takes to bridge the academic gap for the students who are behind academically.

Theme Eight: Emotional Toll Teaching High Poverty Kids Can Have

Some teachers mentioned that they are emotionally drained because they spend so much energy in the classroom in order to keep their students' attention on the material being presented. They feel as though they are on stage so their kids will stay focused. One teacher said that she gives 110% every day and goes home exhausted because she is trying to meet her students on their academic level and support all their many needs.

Other teachers stated that the students have so many needs that it is exhausting trying to meet them all. Several teachers described meeting some of the needs like clothing and a lack of food. The participants described having to be aware of who had not eaten before coming to school. They make sure the children have a full stomach before trying to teach them. David Berliner (2009) claimed that high poverty homes suffer from a lack of food. He said that there has been an average of 13 million households that have difficulties providing the food each member of the family needs. He also claimed that a lack of nutrition has tremendously affected children's academic gains.

Another teacher said that she feels emotionally drained because her school is so low academically. She feels as though her school is always looked at because of their low scores and no matter how hard she and the other teachers work to bring up the students' test scores the students have difficulties meeting those academic gains.

Theme Nine: Difficulty in Keeping the Students Engaged

Many of the teachers stated having to make their lessons extremely interesting in order to overpower what the students already had on their minds. Many of these teachers said their students were preoccupied with the worries of how they were going to eat that night or how they would be getting home. Therefore, focusing on the science lesson, for example, was extremely difficult for them.

Other teachers shared that their students have a short attention span. They shared that their students have difficulties paying attention in class. Many of them have Attention Deficit Disorder. Rush (1999) said that the lack of supervision at home for many of the children in high poverty homes leads to long periods of television viewing. Stamm (2007) explains this when she said that the amount of television children watch when they are years 0 to 3 years and how this can affect their ability to focus and pay attention.

Motivating the students enough to keep them engaged is another obstacle mentioned by the teachers. One teacher stated how she may try 14 different things in her class to motivate certain students before finding a motivation that works. She shared how this is more difficult when working with high poverty students because in middle class homes the parents motivate the children, whereas in high poverty homes the children often times may not have parents pushing them to succeed in school. That task is left to the classroom teacher.

Theme Ten: Students' Poor Behavior

Most of the teachers stated how the students' poor behavior makes it difficult to grow students academically and makes their jobs more draining. Teachers addressed the fact that their classroom management skills have to be extremely effective. One teacher stated that teaching in a high poverty school requires constant focus the entire lesson or the students may take over the learning environment. There is no time for the teacher to have down time during her lesson.

Other teachers shared that the students come into their classrooms angry because of situations in their home life. They demonstrate that anger through arguments with other students or fighting with other students. Some students can be extremely hostile towards the teachers as well because of their deep rooted anger. The students claim that the behavior and hostility they show in class is what they see in their homes. Research supports these teachers' thoughts. It has been found that in high poverty schools, when communication is present in the home, it is often not encouraging communication but punitive. (Brody et al.; Diener, Neivar, & Wright, 2003; Hoff, Laursen & Tardiff, 2002; Linver et al.2002)

Theme Eleven: The Lack of Parental Support

Lack of parental support revealed itself through the interviews in three main categories: academics, behavior, and physical care. The teachers shared that many of the parents do not support the teachers in regards to the students' academics. Often the students go home to an empty house where they have to watch younger siblings. The parents are not there asking them if they have homework. These students are also often without school supplies like paper and pencils. The teachers must provide these materials for the students. One teacher reported that if the teachers do not allow students to do the research for their reports at school the research will not be completed because many students do not have access to computers or internet at their

homes. Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) seemed to support these teachers when they stated that low-income homes many times are lacking in books, and this can affect the child's development and learning.

Teachers also noted the lack of support in the area of discipline. One teacher reported trying to call a parent early in her teaching career and the parent told her that when the child was at school he or she was the teacher's problem. This teacher reported that she has to count on her relationship with the students' and not rely on support from the parents. Some of the teachers also stated that the behaviors that are seen at school are the behaviors the students are accustomed to in their home lives.

The students' physical needs are also not being met, according to these teachers, by the lack of parental support. Some of the teachers reported that the students are often lacking in clothes and other items they need. One teacher said that sometimes the students would come to school without their medicine because the parents would have taken it and sold it. This complicated the learning environment especially if the medicine the student lacked was their ADHD medicine.

These findings suggest that reasons the teachers gave for staying in their current positions outweigh the reasons it is difficult to teach in a high poverty school. Even though the teachers feel they work harder, longer hours and are exhausted at the end of the day, they believe it is worth it to see the kids they love grow academically and socially. One participant, when asked why she kept coming back to her job even though she reported being exhausted, said:

I go home but it's worth it in the long run knowing that when I come back the next day I get a hug. "How's your day," "I hope you have a great fall break." They want to come to my class. They like coming. They'll say, "It's my favorite class." and that I care about them. I get these little notes all the times and things like that to show that I am appreciated and they know I care about them and I think that's the reason why, that's what gets me here every day is knowing that I can be with the group of kids that show their appreciation for me and I get there, and I can

be that mama. I can be that nurse. I can be that person, that role model for them because if they, they go home, they have that environment, they know that they can come to me and there's that light, that light of spirit and energy where they would probably go home and no one ever care about them. And I feel that just being able to show that love for them and they show that respect in the classroom and it's just why I love it and this is my home.

Glover (2013) distinguished between accountability and responsibility. Accountability, he suggested, is based on power relationships: a worker is accountable to a manager. However, responsibility comes from within the individual. A teacher, like a parent, is responsible for another human being. What makes teachers successful in any school is their sense of responsibility. It is this human characteristic that enables teachers in high poverty school to define their own success.

Maslow (1970) may also have revealed reasons why some teachers are successful in teaching students of high poverty backgrounds. Maslow stated the last level of a person's hierarchy of needs as self-actualization in which a person looks to reach self-fulfillment and personal growth. Teachers working in high poverty schools may be at this level and seek to fulfill themselves by caring for and teaching students who tend to be viewed as being more difficult to teach. By successfully teaching these children, teachers may be meeting their own needs of self-actualization.

Summary

The statement by the teacher in the preceding paragraph provides the core reason that teachers I interviewed stay in high poverty schools. They believe that the good outweighs the bad. The difficulties presented to them when working with high poverty kids such as poor behavior and lack of parental support are dealt with because the rewards like seeing academic growth and the love they have for their students is far greater.

Recommendations for the University

The following recommendations might contribute to better teacher preparation for the adjustment to working in a high poverty environment. These recommendations may help to better prepare aspiring teachers for such work and enable them to make informed decisions about accepting employment in such a school.

- Provide classes specific to working effectively in high poverty schools
- Require student teachers to work in a high poverty school for at least one of their school placements

Recommendations for the School System

The following recommendations for school districts may enhance the quality of teaching for children of poverty.

- Develop better ways to engage parents in the school and in their children's academics
- Improve teacher abilities to provide more extensive services by decreasing the teacher-to-student ratio in the classrooms of high poverty schools
- Meet with new teachers (in the first and second year) working in high poverty schools that would allow them to discuss the difficulties they may be having with other experienced teachers.
- Hold meetings before the school year begins with new teachers (in the first and second year) to discuss ways they could increase learning in their classroom with high poverty students. Provide follow-up meetings throughout the year.

Recommendations for Teachers Working in High Poverty Schools

Teaching in a high poverty school requires special talents, abilities, and energies. The following recommendations are designed to support teachers in this environment.

- Develop expertise on the unique characteristics of impoverished students by reading texts such as Ruby Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*.
- Meet regularly with experienced teachers in your school to discuss ways in which they are successful and ways you are struggling.
- Build relationships with the students as much as possible inside and outside of the classroom. For example, talk with them in the hallway or during breakfast or lunch.
- Find ways to praise students beyond their academic achievement.
- Learn and become knowledgeable of the home life of your students so you can better understand what their lives are like when they leave the school.
- Place great value on yourself as a teacher who accepts responsibility for engaging students in ways that enable them to challenge the extra obstacles they must overcome to find success

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to determine why teachers choose to stay in high poverty schools. Eight teachers were interviewed from two different schools from a suburban school district in the southeastern region of the United States. The following are recommendations for future study:

- Since only teachers were interviewed and their perceptions studied, principals could be interviewed in order to gather data on why they chose to stay in a high poverty school.
- A qualitative study could be conducted by interviewing teachers of high poverty schools to gather data on their thoughts about how well prepared they felt to teach in their high poverty school.
- Little research is available on how teacher turnover affects student achievement (Guin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2004). Therefore, research could be conducted to see if there is a correlation between teacher turnover and student achievement.

High turnover in jobs has become a concern for employers. This is true in the field of education as well. Finding ways to strengthen teacher retention is an ever increasing predicament that school principals and other school leaders strive to achieve. The teachers who do decide to stay in high poverty schools where the need is great have found ways to meet the needs of their students and gain some sense of satisfaction in their jobs that encourages them to stay. Nurturing that characteristic these teachers have in other teachers may help to decrease the amount of turnover in high poverty schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter to Superintendent

Dr. James McIntyre
P.O. Box 2188
Knoxville, TN 37901

Date

Dear Dr. McIntyre,

I am currently a doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am conducting a qualitative research study of teachers who teach in high-poverty schools. These teachers will need to have stayed in their position for at least five years. I will ask the interviewees questions regarding why they have stayed in their positions. Their responses will be collected and analyzed in hopes of developing a theoretical framework depicting what keeps teachers in high-poverty schools. I plan on contacting Dr. Karen Loy, Mrs. Beth Blevins, and Ms. Nadriene Jackson for permission to interview three of their teachers.

With your permission, I would like to conduct three confidential interviews at each of the following schools: Northwest Middle School, South Doyle Middle School, and Whittle Springs Middle School. The participants will not be referenced in the study or their schools in order to ensure privacy. When my study is complete, you will receive a copy of my research and findings about reasons some teachers in Knox County are choosing to stay in their current positions in high-poverty schools. Thank you in advance for allowing me the opportunity to increase the knowledge base related to teacher retention in high-poverty schools. If you should have any questions or concerns, we can discuss those at your convenience. You may contact me by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX(mobile) or email at tracy.marston@XXX.edu.

I would greatly appreciate confirmation of your permission to conduct three confidential interviews at each of the previously noted schools by returning this letter with your signature. For your convenience, I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Tracy Marston
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

Appendix B

Letter to Principals

Principal's Name
Street
City, State, Zip

Date

Dear (Principal's Name),

I am currently a doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am conducting a qualitative research study of teachers who teach in high-poverty schools. These teachers will need to have stayed in their position for at least five years. I will ask the interviewees questions regarding why they have stayed in their positions. Their responses will be collected and analyzed in hopes of developing a theoretical framework depicting what keeps teachers in high-poverty schools. Your superintendent of schools, (Name), has granted approval for me to contact you to ask if you are willing to allow me interviews with three teachers with whom you recommend.

The participants will not be referenced in the study or their schools in order to ensure privacy. When my study is complete, you will receive a copy of my research and findings about reasons some teachers in Knox County are choosing to stay in their current positions in high-poverty schools. Thank you in advance for allowing me the opportunity to increase the knowledge base related to teacher retention in high-poverty schools. If you should have any questions or concerns, we can discuss those at your convenience. You may contact me by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX(mobile) or email at tracy.marston@XXX.edu.

I would greatly appreciate confirmation of your permission to conduct three confidential interviews at each of the previously noted schools by returning this letter with your signature. For your convenience, I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope.

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Tracy Marston
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

Appendix C

Letter to Participants

Teacher's Name
Street
City, State, Zip

Date

Dear (Teacher's Name),

I am currently a doctoral student in the department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at East Tennessee State University. I am conducting a qualitative research study of teachers who teach in high-poverty schools. These teachers will need to have stayed in their position for at least five years. I will ask the interviewees questions regarding why they have stayed in their positions. Their responses will be collected and analyzed in hopes of developing a theoretical framework depicting what keeps teachers in high-poverty schools. Your superintendent of schools, (Name), and principal (Name), has granted approval for me to contact you to ask if you are willing to be a participant in my qualitative study.

Within the next several days, I will be calling to request a confidential interview with you in regard to your experience as a teacher working in a high-poverty school.

After the interview I will deliver a transcribed copy of our discussion to verify accuracy of its content. To guarantee confidentiality of the information shared during the study a pseudonym will be given to each participant. When my findings are complete, you will receive a copy of my research conclusions in an effort to enhance your knowledge base.

Thank you in advance for allowing me the opportunity to increase the knowledge base related to teacher retention in high-poverty schools.

I look forward to discussing this with you further.

Sincerely,

Tracy Marston
Graduate Student
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Fall 2013

Please read carefully the following Informed Consent specifics and sign this form if you fully give your permission to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent for your personal records.

Researcher: Tracy Marston
Graduate Student, Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University
XXX-XXX-XXXX (mobile)

Dissertation Title:
Factors Which Contribute to Teacher Retention in High-poverty Middle Schools

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate thoughts and opinions of why teachers working in high-poverty school stay in their current position. Data about why teachers have chosen against transferring schools will be collected and analyzed.

Request for Participation: The researcher requests your voluntary participation in this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, you have the right to withdraw your words from this study at any time.

Research Method: The researcher will interview teachers in the Knox County Schools system who have taught at the same high-poverty school for at least a duration of five years. The researcher will ask the interviewees questions related to their teaching positions and specifically why they have stayed in that position. Data collected from the interviews will be used to develop a theoretical framework depicting the thoughts and opinions of teachers' retention in high-poverty schools.

Duration of Research Participation: You will participate in one individual interview during the fall of 2013 that will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes.

Confidentiality: Your name will not be used on the digital recording, on the final printed transcript, or in the final research report. Only the researcher will know of your participation in this study. The digital recording and corresponding transcripts will be secured during and following the data analysis of this study; these items will be secured in the researcher's home office for five years per IRB guidelines.

Method of Recording Interview: The researcher will digitally record your interview to ensure complete accuracy of your responses. The digital recording will be secured during and following the data analysis of this study. The recordings will be secured in the researcher's home office for five years per IRB guidelines.

Right of Refusal: You may refuse to participate in this study at any time.

Right to Withdraw: You may withdraw from this study at any time. You may withdraw your words from this study at any time.

Feedback and Benefits: You will receive a copy of the study's research conclusions to review. The benefit of your participation in this study is to share with colleagues and university professors what you learned about teacher retention in high-poverty schools. This information could be used to strengthen teacher retention in high-poverty schools.

Copy of Consent: You will receive a copy of this Informed Consent for your personal records.

Permission to Quote: Your words may be used in the final research report to clarify or further explain a component of the theoretical framework. The researcher will not identify the source of the quote. In addition, the researcher will take precautions to ensure that there are no identifiers within the body of the quote.

Signature of Voluntary Participant

Date

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Interview Preface

I. Introduction to the study and welcome participant

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The purpose of this study is to gather thoughts and opinions of why teachers working in high-poverty schools choose to stay in their current positions. Data revealing why you chose to stay in your position instead of transferring to another school will be collected and analyzed. The data from this study will be used in a dissertation and your participation will remain anonymous. This interview session should take about one hour. Do you have any questions before I turn on the recorder?

2. Ask the participant to sign the informed consent form.

3. The interview questions will begin.

II. Main Interview Questions for Mentors

1. How did you come about working in your current position?

2. Was your current position one of your top choices for employment?

3. Why have you stayed in your current position?

4. What do you find rewarding in your current position?

5. What do you find challenging in your current position?

6. Do you find success in meeting these challenges?

7. What challenges do you find especially stressful and debilitating?

8. Have you thought about leaving your current position? If so, why?

9. What would make you leave your current position?

III. Conclusions

1. Any additional questions?

2. Turn off the digital recorder.

3. Thank the participant for her or his participation in the study.

VITA

TRACY MARIE MARSTON

Education:

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
Bachelors of Science in Psychology
2002

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
Master in Arts of Teaching
2005

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN
Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership
2014

Professional
Experience:

2006 – Physical Education Teacher, Unicoi County Schools, Unicoi,
TN

2006 – Language Arts/Science Teacher, T.A. Dugger Middle School,
Elizabethton, TN

2008 to Present – Language Arts/Reading/Science Teacher, Knox
County Schools, Knoxville, TN