

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: SOURCES OF PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE AND
SUSTENANCE FOR VETERAN AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS

By

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Dean D. Richards IV

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Dr. Heidi Hallman, Chair

Dr. Jennifer Ng

Dr. Steven White

Dr. Suzanne Rice

Dr. Douglas Huffman

Date Defended: August 28, 2017

The Dissertation Committee for Dean D. Richards IV certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

**SIGNS OF THE TIMES: SOURCES OF PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE AND
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Dr. Heidi Hallman, Chair

Date Approved:

Abstract

Recruitment and retention of high-quality educators remains problematic throughout our public school systems. This is particularly so for teachers of minority-identifications and in high-poverty, high-minority urban schools and districts. Recent research concerning teacher longevity has typically focused on large-scale investigations of factors of educator dissatisfaction, normative treatments of urban school contexts, and the perspectives of early-career stage educators. Relying on classroom observations and in-depth interviews in a research context with which the researcher had intimate access and knowledge, this qualitative study attempts to interject insight into the extant literature by investigating and featuring the described sources of challenge, frustration, and critique as well as the sources of motivation, encouragement, and satisfaction for four African American women with twenty-five or more years of continuous classroom teaching experiences in a large school district serving high-minority and low-income core communities in a major Midwestern metropolitan area. Through a constant-comparative analysis of participant responses and grounded treatment of theoretical work concerning perseverance in teaching, findings in this study are framed across five themes of professional and personal (dis)satisfaction identified in the participants' responses: *competence, commitment, candor and acknowledgment, agency, and connection*. Through these themes, normative presentations of professional "challenge" and "resilience," demarcations of sources of support and frustration, and professional-personal dichotomies encountered in the literature are critiqued and pushed. Findings from relevant, though, less-recent and smaller-scale research are bolstered. Through connections between deductive and inductive findings, two theoretical concepts are discussed as potentially useful frames for discussing teacher longevity and possible sources of encouragement: *life commitments* and *sustenance*.

For my wife, Shakeena, whose steadfast love and dedication have provided me with the
sustenance to see this work through.

To Shirley C. Hill, whose words of encouragement and wisdom sparked this journey.

To Freddie, who, like so many students, changed my life for the better.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In one of the original teacher-against-the-odds films, *To Sir, with Love* (1967), the experiences of the protagonist, known affectionately to his students as “Sir,” follows an oft-repeated pattern of plot elements typical to this genre: a tumultuous and unexpected entrance into her or his position, considerable challenges from within and without the school, a point of exhaustion or near-breaking, chance for removal, and of course, a profound turn of heart. Through Sir’s experiences as a teacher in a public secondary school in East London, the viewer is reminded of widely-held and persistent beliefs of life urban school classrooms. He encounters seemingly insurmountable challenges in the form of rowdy, disrespectful, immoral, and dangerous behavior from students. Administrative misguidance, apathetic and unethical behavior from colleagues, and rejection from the community-at-large also work against his purposes and passion, and appear to resign his trajectory as a teacher to an existential stop-gap or stepping stone towards a higher status career. As Sir passes through these various frustrations and trials, some in the audience, perhaps those with intimate familiarities with the teaching profession, are also reminded of similar, more positive, stories of teaching under challenging circumstances. They may see the newly-minted and determined teacher, battered by the challenges of the classroom and degradations of his colleagues, find a higher calling that supersedes the daily frustrations or rewards of a higher-paying career. They may see how through highly contested and hard-won successes within and without the classroom with students, Sir experiences transformations and realizations that lead him to an indefinite career in teaching by the film’s end.

Released a half-century ago, the accuracy, relevance and significance of the protagonist’s experiences in *To Sir, with Love* (1967) persist, even if many of the film’s pop-cultural features

do not, as they provide points of examination, both positive and negative, for common and personal perceptions of teaching in urban schools. Dominant portrayals of urban school contexts, exemplified and also introverted in this film, are part of the reason I chose to start off the introduction of a dissertation with a reference to an aged work of fictional cinema. Although the project at hand will not examine in detail other portrayals of urban school contexts in similar works of cinema and fiction, how such portrayals are mirrored in the scholarly literature concerning the work and career paths of teachers contexts identified in ways such as “urban”, “marginalized”, “hard-to-staff”, *et cetera* will. Quite obviously, considerable changes have taken place in schools since this film aired in theatres, but throughout these changes and persistent challenges, certain elements and their representations have remained. The other part of my reason for referencing this film goes beyond connections of representation to the wishes of one of this study’s primary participants, Ms. Oldham (pseudonym), a remarkable teacher with over 45 years of classroom experience in urban schools. Also an avid connoisseur of fictional films and texts, when asked by me about sources of inspiration during her entrance into the profession, Ms. Oldham described *To Sir with Love* as a work that defines the span, from initial inspiration to her current motivations, of her work as an educator. When I informed her that I had never seen this film beyond a few short clips, she strongly recommended that I watch and utilize it in my work as a university-level researcher and teacher educator. While transcribing the interview in which she discussed this film, I found myself compelled, for various reasons, to take some time out and watch it. I am glad I did.

Although Ms. Oldham’s and my first impressions of this film were formed lifetimes and life paths apart, hers in a movie theatre and mine via the internet, I also gained an immediate appreciation for this film as an inspirational piece beyond its relevance and presentation of

common perceptions of urban teaching. Including this film as both an introductory piece, and as will be seen later, in a framework for examining representations of teachers in “urban” contexts, comports with my belief that this study must remain true to Ms. Oldham’s, as well as those of the other participating teachers’, Ms. Eastman, Ms. Ford, and Ms. Mack (pseudonyms), advice, stories, wisdom, guidance, beliefs, and teaching. Recognizing that, ultimately, as researcher and author of this study I choose what to feature, and because of this I cannot avoid Othering these teachers in some sense through our relationship as researcher and participant (Segall, 2001), it remains at best my intention, or at least my hope, that throughout this work their voices and reflected installations within my thoughts provide not only useful content and theoretical direction. By drawing upon the guidance of their words in the construction of this work, I have hoped to not only bring the divide between “There” and “Here” (p. 579) a little closer but also gained the *sustenance* necessary to see this project through to its completion. I hope that through our collective efforts, you will not only gain some insight into the realities, beliefs, experiences, and approaches of these participants, and conceptualizations of teachers and contexts considered to be “urban”, but also some inspiration in the work to improve education for youth in challenging circumstances.

Shifting this reflexive enterprise into a more academic pursuit, I find it interesting that during the same years that *To Sir, with Love* (1967) and Ms. Oldham began her career in teaching, Lortie conducted research that would lead to his timeless (we hope) assertion that teachers remain as such not because of extrinsic rewards, such as pay or status, but because of the “psychic rewards” offered by the act of “reaching” (1975) students. The appropriateness of this connection between arts and academics lies not only in the contemporaneous conception of sources and stories, but also in its overall synchronicity with Ms. Oldham’s career and

perseverance as a teacher. In repeated interactions and observations, Ms. Oldham taught me how the intrinsic lessons and rewards of teaching have continued to manifest in her significant and ongoing career. Through interactions with all of these teachers with longstanding careers in urban schools, including my own experiences as a teacher, mentor, and researcher in the same district and schools, I have been continually reminded of not only the shifts and constants of the profession at both the local and wider levels, but also the ways and means by which individuals meet the demands of job while deriving the rewards that engender persistence, resilience, and satisfaction.

Background and Significance of the Problem

Seemingly innumerable problems may be encountered or derived when examining the individual career lives of teachers in marginalized contexts. From an individual and personal standpoint, however, one may fairly state that many of the problems encountered by teachers in such contexts lead to or may be situated within the greater problem of teacher attrition. That is, the challenges teachers face, particularly in schools serving lower-income, high-minority communities, whether they derive from the national, state, district, school, classroom, and/or personal levels can readily be considered as contributors to early and/or detrimental exits from their classroom positions and careers. In this case, as will be described further, “early and/or detrimental exit” refers to teachers leaving the profession relatively earlier when compared to other professions and/or in a fashion that is detrimental to the individuals and organizations they have affected or potentially could affect during their time as teachers.

The problems associated with teacher attrition, and thus teacher retention, serve as a backdrop for the more contextualized problems investigated in this study. They are presented on

a greater scale and then narrowed in relevance to the lived experiences of the participants. To begin, at the broadest level, teacher attrition may be viewed as a problem of national importance. The U.S. Department of Education (2014) reported that 7.7% of all teachers were “leavers”, i.e. they left the profession entirely, for the 2012-13 school year. For the purposes of this study, as it is in general, this phenomenon shall hereafter be referred to as *teacher attrition*. When combined with the percentages of “movers”, i.e. teachers who leave their schools but remain in profession, a combination hereafter referred to as *teacher turnover*, the total becomes 15.8% for the same school year. Trend-wise, while these percentages represent somewhat of a decrease from their respective highpoints of 8.4% and 16.5% in 2004-5, they remain part of an overall troubling trend of steady increases in annual teacher attrition and turnover beginning in the late 1980’s. When compared to traditionally high-status professions, such as lawyers, engineers, architects and professors, the annual attrition rates are significantly higher; notably higher than those for nurses; comparable to those for police officers; and only lower when compared to careers in child care, secretarial or paralegal work (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

As annual rates for single school years, these figures and comparisons do not adequately describe teacher turnover in terms of longevity over the course of teachers’ careers. Although exact figures for teacher attrition in terms of career longevity remain elusive for a number of reasons (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013), reasonable estimates paint a similarly disconcerting picture, with figures ranging from around 30% (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003) to 40 – 50% (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014) of teachers leaving the profession within five years. Although Harris and Adams (2007) concluded that the picture may be more complicated, and may possibly not reflect a situation where teacher turnover is a significant problem at all, they nevertheless found that teachers tend to formally retire, i.e. they begin

drawing from their retirement pensions, at younger ages than comparable professions. It will be the contention of this work, however, that despite the complexity of these phenomena, their causes, and effects, the problems incurred by states, districts, communities, and schools because of teacher turnover, including early retirement, are significant. In order to better examine the significance of teacher retention, underlying causes for relatively higher rates of teacher turnover will be examined through the literature as well as the findings for this project. For introductory purposes, it shall suffice to assert that reasons for teacher attrition and turnover rates have been attributed to a variety of reasons other than retirement (Ingersoll, 2001, 2003). Given this, one may safely contend that the combined effects of non-retirement and retirement factors, particularly given current population age demographics, which although decreasing in terms of teachers reaching retirement age over the last decade, remain significantly higher compared to previous decades (Ingersoll et al., 2014), contributing to teachers leaving the profession at undesirable rates.

The effects of teacher attrition are felt from the national and state levels on down to particular districts and schools. With elementary and secondary teachers comprising 4% of the national civilian workforce (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008), the cost of teachers exiting the profession in terms of human capital and associated financial expenditures at the national and state levels are indeed significant. On the national level, it has been estimated that teacher attrition costs the nation between \$1.0 to 2.2 billion annually (AEE, 2014). On the state level, for example, the cost of a 15.5% attrition rate in the state of Texas in 2000 was estimated to range from \$329 million to \$2.1 billion (Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2000). As will be examined later, the significance of these financial costs at the district-level, much like local teacher attrition rates, varies according to social and economic disadvantage. Thus, while looking

at the bigger picture does provide some sense of enormity of the problem, such a view may not adequately capture the burdens incurred by particular organizations and communities. As will be seen, this is particularly true for those districts already marginalized financially and considered “hard-to-staff.”

The financial cost of teacher attrition also correlates with a national teaching force that is increasingly less experienced, or “greener” (Ingersoll et al., 2014). This has resulted from a variety of economic and social factors leading to relatively high rates of turnover for teachers in their first five years, with younger generations of teachers tending to remain classroom teachers for increasingly shorter periods of time (Carroll & Foster, 2010), and persistent numbers of teachers reaching retirement age from the “baby boomer” generation. Additionally, as said, for many teachers, “retirement age” is relatively young compared to other professions (Harris & Adams, 2007), with the average being 59 years of age (Ingersoll & Perda, 2010). This occurs or may occur for a variety of reasons to be further examined later. As a brief example for consideration, had I continued on in my 13–year career as a classroom teacher in an urban public school district, which began at the age of 23, I would have reached my full retirement benefits within our retirement system at the age of 49. The effects of this “greening” are both economic and cultural. As the national teaching force becomes less experienced, considerations of human capital, such as losses of the accumulated knowledge, skills, and professional relationships individuals possess and take with them when they leave a school, district, or the profession, intersect with measurable financial losses. Districts expend and lose money invested in training new hires who quickly exit their positions while also suffering less tangible losses in terms available and shared knowledge for younger members within school communities and cultures. Fewer available experienced mentors and sources of contextual, community, and pedagogical

content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) for on-site collaboration with new and beginning teachers, though perhaps less measurable, nevertheless represent significant losses of potential resources for developing more effective teachers at the local level.

While our national teacher workforce has become less experienced, it has, in some ways at least, become more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity. With larger numbers of teachers entering the profession and programs across the country aimed at recruiting ethnic/racial minority teachers, the percentage of minority teachers has increased nationally from 12.4 in 1987-88 to 17.3 in 2011-12, at a pace greater than the increase in students of minority statuses. Additionally, given the dramatic increases in the overall teacher workforce between these years, the numbers of minority teachers has more than doubled (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Though promising, however, this trend must also be examined in light of historical and persistent underrepresentation of teachers of color within our national teacher workforce. Much progress remains to be accomplished before diversity in this sector reaches levels that may fairly be considered equitable on the national level. Evidence of such inequities, which constitute a key facet of our society's "educational debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) towards students and communities of color, abound. For example, one may simply consider the overall decline in numbers of African American teachers, with their overall numbers falling from 12% of the teacher workforce in 1970 to 7% in 1998 (Sleeter & Milner, 2011) to 6.7% in 2007-08. For comparison, in the same school year, 83.5% of elementary and secondary teachers were European American (NCES, 2009). Such gaps have become matters of increasing concern vis-a-vis increasing numbers of students of minority statuses. As Ingersoll et al. (2014) pointed out, for the 2011-12 school year, 44% of the nation's elementary and secondary students were of racial/ethnic minority status. Research has also pointed out that while teachers of color were

more likely to work in communities with higher numbers of racial/ethnic minority students, and indeed more likely to remain in such contexts (Villegas & Irvine, 2010), they were also more likely, and increasingly so, to leave teaching positions than white teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Later, possible reasons for this gap, particularly for contexts more specific to the research setting of this study, as well as the overall importance of racial/ethnic equity, and lack thereof, in lower-income, high-minority communities and schools will be further examined.

Facts, trends and realities at the national level present several reasons for investigating teacher longevity, and particularly the reasons why some teachers persistent until full-retirement and beyond while relatively large numbers do not. An overall need for further investigation into the reasons why teachers stay or leave is warranted due to the significant financial costs to educational systems, losses in terms of accumulated knowledge and human capital, and failure within the system to engender a teacher workforce that equitably addresses and mirrors the increasing racial and cultural diversity of our society. Addressing this need, however, with respect to the scope and methodology of this study warrants a shift in focus from national trends to more localized contexts, in particular, those community and school organizations struggling most with teacher recruitment and retention, where financial resources are relatively limited and the need for a highly trained, skilled, responsive and diverse body of teachers is greatest.

Urban school districts serving predominantly impoverished and racially marginalized communities often exemplify such contexts. For these districts, the problem of turnover becomes more acute in several ways. First of all, such contexts typically have higher rates of teacher turnover (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ronfeldt et al., 2012). Schools in such districts typically have less-experienced teachers while schools in higher performing and better funded districts are more likely to retain 20- and 30-year veteran teachers (Carroll & Foster, 2010). Higher turnover rates

have been described as contributing to significantly higher shortages of highly-qualified teachers in schools needing them most (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003), and, as previously described, the negative effects of higher turnover rates result in greater losses of human resources and financial capital (Donaldson & Johnson, 2010; Watlington, Shockley, Gugliemino, & Felsher, 2010), as well as lower rates of student achievement, for marginalized schools and districts (Ronfeldt et al., 2012). In one case, a third of the schools in the poorest, most racially segregated parts of Chicago, those schools designated as “turnaround” schools by CPS, retained less than half of their teachers from 2008 to 2012; and districtwide, 46 percent of CPS teachers left, about 12,000 teachers, between the years of 2008 and 2012 (Karp, 2014). The effect of such attrition has been drastic, with financial losses alone for the filling 4,000 teacher vacancies between the years of 2011 and 2012 amounting to \$71.5 million (ibid). In terms of capital, more significant monetary losses must also be taken into account with losses or failures to accumulate human resources available for providing mentors and meaningful collaboration to support and develop capable teaching staffs within schools and communities dealing more frequently with sources of educational “turmoil” (Tatum, 2005).

As with issues of financial and human capital losses, local school systems may also face greater detriment from teacher turnover because of inequalities stemming from underrepresentation and increased turnover among of teachers of color. Underrepresentation of minority teachers becomes increasingly significant as our focus shifts from national to local levels. As we know, racial/ethnic groups and income-levels are not uniformly distributed throughout American society, communities and schools. Thus, a national teacher workforce in which 16.5% of teachers were of minority status for a student population that was 41% minority for the 2007-08 school year (Ingersoll & May, 2011) while problematic in itself, does not

adequately address the racial/ethnic disparities found in more local contexts where percentages of minority students are even higher. Moreover, when examined at the district and school level, these gaps become even more drastic considering relatively recent trends in school re-segregation along ethnic and economic lines. School segregation for African American students has risen for the past two decades and for Latina/o students over the last four decades, with many students in segregated schools facing the threat of “triple segregation” along the lines of race/ethnicity, family income, and home language (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegal-Hawley, 2012). During the 2009-10 school year, 74.1% of African American and 79.5% of Latina/o students went to schools attended by 50 – 100% minority students and 38.1% and 43.1% respectively attended schools with 90 – 100% minority students (NCES, 2012). Despite the aforementioned increases of minority-status teachers to working in high-minority, high poverty, urban schools, the majority of teachers at these schools remain European American (Ingersoll & May, 2011).

Lower numbers of African Americans in the teaching profession are the result of various historical, social and structural conditions creating barriers for their entrance and retention in the profession. Although mainstream thought often dictates that race should not play a factor in the relationships that teachers have with their students, the reality presented in the literature, as well as my personal experiences as a parent of biracial children, teacher, and teacher educator in high-minority, impoverished schools, too-often demonstrates the contrary. The intersections of racial and economic discrimination in our schools, be they daily interactions and transgressions in classrooms or systematic oppression, become all the more apparent vis-à-vis obvious disparities between student and educator backgrounds and racial identities. Failure to interrogate one’s own cultural identity and perspectives by economically-advantaged, white teachers can lead to diminished educational success for students of different backgrounds and cultural identities

(Nieto, 2000). Educational benefits accrued by students of color being taught by teachers with similar racial and economic experiences have been extensively discussed and empirically evidenced in the literature (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Additionally, educational benefits, in terms of social growth, for white students, who are often minority groups in economically impoverished, urban communities, have also been well argued (Irvine, 1988; Waters, 1989) Such are the arguments and evidence for increasing the presence of teachers of color in impoverished, high-minority schools that this need has been described as a “demographic urgency” (Sleeter & Milner, 2011).

Purpose

Given current teacher attrition rates and the problems they present for school systems at all levels, particularly in economically-disadvantaged, high-minority urban communities, and given the potential educational benefits for students in such school contexts for recruiting and retaining teachers of color, a look into the career experiences, choices, and perspectives of teachers of color in a heavily-scrutinized and hard-to-staff urban school district may be of worth. Understanding how and why these teachers have persisted in spite of the trends and contributing factors may broaden our knowledge and conceptualizations of teacher retention, resilience, effectiveness, and pedagogy. Such knowledge may be of use to those seeking to recruit, develop, and retain a more culturally equitable, responsive, and educationally effective teacher workforce. In an educational world where the lifelong classroom teacher is increasingly the exception, for a variety of reasons and especially in our most disadvantaged schools, preserving the perspectives and stories of teachers with substantial years in the classroom may also have historical significance and serve as testament to their unique and extensive experiences. In an educational world where teachers in “underperforming” districts and schools have faced increasing and

persistent public and political scrutiny (Kumashiro, 2012), this work may give voice (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to teachers operating in the margins of our educational world.

Specifically, this study explores the professional perspectives, experiences, challenges, and sources of motivation and support for successful African American teachers with significant years of classroom experience in a large, urban school district, the Butterfield Public School District (pseudonym). During the data collection phase of this project, all of the participants were upper-elementary classroom teachers at one school in this district, Lowell Elementary (pseudonym). Using a qualitative methodology and employing in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and informal conversations, along with a constant comparative (Glaser, 1965; Merriam, 2009) scheme of analysis, the overall purpose is to describe how and why the participating teachers have maintained their professional and organizational positions throughout numerous and evolving challenges from multiple sources. At this point, several brief clarifications and indications of more detailed justifications to follow in subsequent sections are in order. First, although it is recognized that African American teachers represent one racial/ethnic group within a greater denotation of *teachers of color*, the decreasing representation of African American teachers in recent decades, as well as circumstances encountered during the selection of participants, to be discussed later in more detail, led to my sole recruitment of African American, female teachers for this project. Second, to describe these teachers' years of classroom experience as "successful" and "significant" begs multiple questions regarding definition and evaluation. For introductory purposes, the participants' willingness and abilities to remain in their classroom positions beyond the age of full-retirement and under challenging circumstances, while making positive differences in the lives of the members of their classroom and school communities, generally describes how these descriptors were qualified. More

thorough description for how this was accomplished and justified will follow later in a section regarding participant selection in the third chapter.

Finally, overall justification of purpose also depends on the requirement that any piece of research worth doing be considered in terms of its likely impact and importance in the grander scheme of things, i.e. its purpose must also answer the “Who cares?” component of conducting and sharing research. To answer this, the purpose of this work is best described in two ways. First, I believe the insights and knowledge constructed through the participation of these individuals contributes unique and substantial knowledge towards the problems already discussed regarding teacher turnover and retention, with particular attention to African American teachers in impoverished, urban contexts. Second, I believe this work contributes to a more equitable inclusion of the voices of teachers in the world of educational scholarship. For, as Nieto (2015b) truly pointed out:

See any news report movie about teaching, or read any public policy document, any slick commission report, any research study in an education journal, or even any article about “what works in education,” and you will be hard pressed to see teachers’ and students’ perspectives (p. 4).

With this in mind, this work attempts to situate the voices of these teachers in the wider world of educational scholarship focusing on the described dilemmas, trends, and inequalities in the hope of resonating with and engendering insight for anyone concerned with developing and retaining educators from underrepresented groups for bettering the lives of children in marginalized schools and communities.

Research Questions, Methodology, and Interpretive Lens

The following questions guide this investigation:

- Why have the participants remained classroom teachers for their respective tenures in marginalized, urban schools?
- What do they describe as the most significant challenges in their career paths and pedagogical practices?
- What do they describe as significant in their abilities to meet or navigate these challenges?

As said, answers to these questions were sought through in-depth, formal interviews as well as informal conversations with the participants during school visits. In the following chapters, findings from these discussions are described and situated within a greater context of past and current educational trends and theoretical stances. As a qualitative piece, this inquiry focuses upon interpretations of phenomena as described by the participants, researcher, and the literature. Although objective truth is not explicitly sought through research design, the relevance of ideas such as validity and reliability will not simply be ignored or discounted. Rather, these concepts, as they may be considered under the epistemological shifts that have indeed made qualitative work such as this even possible, will operate under a constructivist lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010) and find legitimacy through the expressions of credibility, transferability, trustworthiness and confirmability. Credibility, as it is analogous to internal validity, is expressed through this study's accuracy in recording and reporting of data. Trustworthiness and confirmability, as they relate to issues of reliability, are ensured through triangulation of participant and researcher responses and recollections as well as analysis of these

responses based upon constant comparative (Merriam, 2009) categorization and elucidation of themes. Finally, transferability, which often presents the most difficult leap between the underpinnings of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, as it deals with the fundamental problem of generalizability, is sought in this work as participant responses are interpreted and situated within relevant research and theory as a means to extend extant knowledge and thought. As Jackson (1992) noted, albeit regarding conceptions of curriculum in his case, but nevertheless retaining ontological-epistemological relevance, the shift away from attempts to objectively measure and describe experience has not diminished the usefulness of educational research, because the emphasis remains on increasing awareness. As he poignantly asked, “If we can get no closer to eternal truth than the concept of opinion allows, can we nonetheless become more “sophisticated” in our view?” (p. 10) Although this study engages the perspectives and careers of teachers, with only tertiary intersections with conceptions of curriculum, this work’s constructivist foundation remains relevant to Jackson’s assertion because of its reliance on interpretation and the situatedness of experience. Beyond this, the methodological stance of this work is not explicitly situated within a methodological genre of qualitative research, such as ethnography or narrative discourse (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Given the nature of the research questions and the possibilities presented, I decided to avoid containing its structure within the stances, methods, and assumptions with a specific methodology and to remain open to the possibilities of letting the participants’ responses drive my analysis and interpretations. (Carey, 2013). Through a generally constructivist lens into the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants and researcher, it is my hope to present a more sophisticated view of how teachers may persist in a context where many do not.

Remaining in line with a general constructivist foundation, however, has not meant that I attempt to avoid particular ethical considerations and stances for this work. Throughout this process, from establishing a purpose to conclusions, it has been my intention to take on a critical stance towards historical, social, methodological, and positional identities and forces at play in this project. Given this approach, which may be described as part of a “critical genre” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), my identities as well as the those of the participants are explored and interrogated with recognition that although they should not be essentialized, they nevertheless inform issues of power. Relationships of power between researcher and participant in my efforts to “depict the multisided and complex nature of a researcher’s methodology and interpretive process” (St. John Frisoli, p. 24, 2011) come into play as part of this critical lens as well as the participants’ positions and identities within various systems of oppression. Purpose-wise, as said, a primary thrust of this research is to bring voice to the often silenced voices of teachers and individuals in the greater body of research informing others about their work, struggles, triumphs, and failures. To ignore or objectify these teacher’s identities, positions and relationships, as well as their potentials, and to allow the structures and forces both they and I see as presenting the greatest challenges to their success with students to go un-critiqued, works against the fundamental intentions of this work to such a degree as to make it not worth doing at all.

Theoretical Frameworks

From a theoretical perspective, this project adheres to an emergent, constructivist approach to knowledge generation. Although it does not strictly take on a *grounded theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009) approach because it is grounded in both inductive and deductive findings and established theory from the literature, it does attempt to build upon these

conceptualizations to generate new, or at least furthered, theory, and, thus, a generally grounded approach pervades this project. Overall, this study is situated in literature related to teacher attrition, longevity, perseverance, and success in the face of adverse work conditions. As is delineated in the following chapter's literature review, such research engages a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and empirical frameworks. Although not of foremost importance in the outset of this project, conceptualizations of resilience in teaching (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011) as a theoretical construct, along with implications and limitations, provide some points for initial interrogations and later conclusions. As a brief introduction, the concept of *resilience* in the social sciences has gained a foothold, and notoriety, over the past several decades as a psychological construct for the ability or manifestation, whether inherent or environmentally conditioned, of some children to endure and prosper despite particularly difficult experiences, such as trauma or developmentally detrimental conditions.

Conceptualizations of resilience have shifted over the years from innate qualities to socially-constructed and complex processes (Gu & Day, 2007; 2013), e.g. a shift from using "resiliency" to "resilience" in the literature (Masten, 1994). Schoon's (2006) description for it as something that is "generally defined as a dynamic process whereby individuals show adaptive functioning in the face of significant adversity" will suffice for this study. As an explicit concept, resilience has been applied to "remarkably persevering" (p. 75) elementary teachers in struggling schools in our nation's capital (Stanford, 2001), experienced high school teachers in "inner city" schools (Brunetti, 2006), teachers and "teacher leaders" (p. 5) from urban schools with above average standardized test scores (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004), and veteran teachers in hard-to-staff urban schools (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011). The use of resilience as a theoretical concept, however, has been problematized and critiqued since its emergence (Luthar, Cicchetti,

& Becker, 2000), and remains debatable in terms of its application to individual experiences and life courses. Indeed, although referenced through particular citations, in a recent study by Kokka (2016) about urban teacher longevity, the term “resilience” is not even mentioned in the main body of text. Nevertheless, the emergence and promise of this idea within the field of education has been described with particular emphasis towards its applicability to the careers of teachers (Beltman et al., 2011; Yonezawa et al., 2011; Mansfield, Beltman, & McConney, 2012). Thus, the idea of resilience, even if in a loosely-knit, somewhat contentious web of conceptualizations and related-concepts, serves in part as a theoretical framework to be interpreted and interrogated vis-à-vis the perspectives, experiences and career trajectories of the teachers featured in this study. Further detailing of resilience as a concept relevant to teachers working in impoverished, urban contexts occurs in the following chapter.

A second theoretical construct of relevance to this study revolves around the concept of *communities of practice*, an idea initially proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) as a domain through which their situated model of learning, *legitimate peripheral participation*, occurred. As a model, communities of practice was further developed and described by Wenger (1998; 2000) to encompass notions of meaning and identity. According to Wenger, a community of practice is defined by three components or qualifiers. First, there must be shared domain of interest or commitments among the members of the community, i.e. members’ intentions as individual agents must align towards a common purpose or goal. Second, interaction among members of the community must occur within the context of their shared purposes. Third, members’ actions must constitute a shared repertoire of skills and abilities that legitimize their status in the group as mutually recognized practitioners. Learning, as situated in this model, occurs as new members enter a community of practice to engage in peripheral, though legitimate, activities towards the

group's purposes and progress through the assumption of increasingly difficult or higher-status practices to be recognized as expert practitioners within the community.

Various conceptualizations and components of the communities of practice theoretical model have been utilized for interpreting the experiences of individuals as they enter into and participate in various professional and trade groups, such as participation in a government-sponsored program for steelworker apprenticeships in the UK (Fuller & Unwin, 2003), Orr's (1996) ethnography of copier repair technicians or Jordan's (1989) study of midwives in Mexico City and the Yucatan (Brown & Duguid, 1991), and, of course, professional communities of teachers (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003; Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson, & Unwin, 2005). A theoretical framework informed by communities of practice serves several purposes throughout this study. As will be addressed in subsequent chapters, these interpretive systems of practice provided means for participant recruitment, and allow for interpretation of sources of support, development, connectedness and meaning described by the participants.

Limitations

When placed in the greater field of academic work concerning education, this study may be viewed as limited in several ways. These limitations stem in large part from the epistemological and methodological paradigmatic differences playing out in educational scholarship for the better part of the last four decades (Howe, 1992). First, from a positivist/post-positivist standpoint, this study, given its relatively small "sample size" obviously suffers from a lack of generalizability. Therefore, the findings of this work do not answer or discount answers regarding why teachers across school contexts leave their positions at disproportionate rates. Rather, it shows why the participants in this particular setting believe they have exercised

remarkable longevity and how these beliefs contribute to conceptualizations of teacher longevity. While the implications of this study may resonate in other contexts with the experiences others or problematize what has been and will be said about similar contexts or particular groups, it does not establish general truths about the lives and careers of teachers in urban communities.

Second, if we continue to view this study from its positivistic limitations, this study also contains obvious research biases and lack of researcher “objectivity.” As a qualitative piece, my methodological position, as well as the intersections of my socialized, gendered, cultural, racial, and other positions and identities, remain inherent in my interpretations and representational choices. As the primary “instrument” through which sought and collected data are processed, analyzed, interpreted, and featured, there is simply no other way but to embrace these “limitations” as part of the reality of this work. As a teacher of some years in the participant’s school of employment, I come into this study with established notions of this place and the challenges it has presented for teachers. Furthermore, I have the utmost respect for teachers who work and succeed in urban schools, and, therefore, have utmost respect for the participants in this study. Perhaps even beyond my role as researcher, I feel particularly obliged to act in a way that will cause them no harm, be it discredit or disrespect. Thus, again, this work will be limited in terms of discovering freestanding truths about the nature of teachers’ careers and particular school environments. Given the purposes of this work and depending on one’s methodological preferences and beliefs, however, these limitations may also be viewed as strengths, with the level of depth, situatedness, and intersectionality provided here making a contributions beyond the limitations afforded by post-positivistic approaches.

Content of Chapters

The layout of subsequent chapters and their sections will be as follows:

In Chapter 2, sources and contributing factors for teacher attrition and longevity are explored across a spectrum of contextualization, from large-scale quantitative studies to specific qualitative addressments of persevering teachers careers and perspectives in and of urban school contexts. Extant research is situated and problematized in order to establish knowledge and theoretical gaps in which this study may be situated.

In Chapter 3, considerations of this inquiry's research methods are detailed. Sections include descriptions of participant pedagogical lives and practices, researcher positionality, research context, participant selection, data collection, and response analysis method.

Throughout, issues of position and power are addressed and critiqued.

In Chapter 4, results from the data collected are described individually by participant and thematically across responses.

In Chapter 5, interpretations of results are situated within a theoretical framework and literature gaps described here and in Chapter 2. Implications for current theory are advanced along with recommendations for continued research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

As described in the previous chapter, the immediate purpose of this work is to investigate the career experiences and perspectives of teachers with longstanding careers in a high-minority, high-poverty urban school district. On a broader scale, this work also intends to provide readers, and particularly those seeking to retain teachers in urban public school contexts, with the perspectives and wisdom of teachers who have successfully worked in such a context for many years. I believe both of these considerations have been adequately supported and justified in the first chapter through relevant research and theoretical work. Issues and considerations for selection, context, and positionality will be examined in the third chapter. Nestled between these components, this chapter addresses potential problems and gaps within academic scholarship regarding teacher perseverance, sources of professional (dis)satisfaction, and career trajectories. Possible intersections and contributions of this work to the field are established through a review of what has been gathered, represented, and asserted regarding teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2001; 2003; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisals, 2007), career experiences and perspectives (Foster, 1993; Nieto, 2003; 2005; 2015a), and longevity and resilience in urban contexts (Brunetti, 2006; Kokka, 2016; Patterson et al., 2004; Stanford, 2001). In this way, the following review establishes empirical, methodological, and theoretical gaps through which this work may contribute, push, and establish new thought regarding sources of influence in teachers' perspectives, decisions, and career trajectories.

Large-Scale Studies of Teacher Attrition: Why do they Leave/Move?

In order to thresh out a situated theoretical framework for this work, this review begins with a general look into the literature focusing on the career perspectives of classroom teachers

and the reasons they give for leaving the profession. At the broadest level, Ingersoll (Ingersoll, 2001; 2003) and others (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll & Perda, 2012; Ingersoll et al., 2014) have provided ample evidence of and for the relatively higher attrition rates of teachers within the general workforce as well as more specific contexts. As already argued in this study's introduction, teacher attrition has and remains a problem in our educational system for various reasons. As further argued, this has not been due to insufficient numbers of teachers seeking to enter the profession or retirement (Ingersoll, 2003), but instead to failures to retain teachers in the profession at rates comparable to similar professions (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Although Kersaint et al. (2007) argued the contrary, that "it is erroneous and misleading to single out teaching as a career where retention is a special problem" (p. 777), supporting evidence for this assertion was provided solely through NCES data from 1993. Moreover, in the same study, Kersaint et al. also demonstrated how teacher retention has been particularly problematic through reference to things such as higher losses of teachers from high poverty schools and a retention rate of "only 61%" (p. 776) after the first five years in the profession.

Thus, if we accept teacher retention as an overall problem worth researching, we should also wonder why teachers leave. According to Ingersoll (2003), reasons for teachers leaving the profession can be separated into four major categories beyond retirement: personal-life-related reasons, organizational staffing actions, pursuit of another profession, and job dissatisfaction. Although Ingersoll noted that "Family or Personal" (p. 16) reasons comprised the single largest exiting factor, reasons of job dissatisfaction came in second and alone accounted for as many teachers leaving the profession as retirement. Moreover, when alternative professional pursuits and dissatisfaction were combined, this being reasonable because they both directly relate "to the

organizational conditions of teaching” (p. 16), these factors accounted for nearly half of exits from the profession. Ingersoll’s (2001, 2003) assertions relied upon analysis of Teacher Followup Surveys, voluntary surveys sent to teachers who left teaching positions during the previous school year. The data were disaggregated into two groups: *movers*, which may be recalled as referring to teachers who leave one teaching position for another, and *leavers*, or those who leave the profession entirely. At the time of this seminal publication, the most prominent reasons provided by leavers for dissatisfaction included low salary, lack of support from the school administration, student discipline problems, poor student motivation, and lack of teacher influence over decision-making. By admission (Ingersoll, 2003), such data, gathered from voluntary, self-reported surveys may suffer from investigational biases. Additionally, although this information captures a wide swath of the professional sentiments of exiting teachers, it does not investigate or illuminate possible complex and specific reasons teachers may leave the profession, particularly within specific contexts, and it relies upon data gathered well-over a decade ago.

Subsequent research, however, has asserted that these sources of professional dissatisfaction for exiting teacher have remained prominent in recent years and also established their relevance in contexts similar to the workplace environment for this study’s participants. Although less nuanced than previously described analyses, a look at more recent NCES data reveals that job dissatisfaction descriptors have continued to comprise a greater percentage of the reasons teachers left K-12 public school positions when compared to either personal life factors or involuntary organizational actions on the 2008 - 2009 (Keigher, 2010) and 2012 – 2013 (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014) Teacher Follow-up Surveys. Furthermore, it has been determined that in more recent years, minority teachers leaving their positions reported reasons

of personal dissatisfaction at higher rates than white teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Related research indicates similar findings within more specific contexts. Much of the investigation into teacher turnover, focused on attrition (Boyd et al., 2010; Gonzalez et al, 2008; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014) is centered around teachers' the early stages of their careers. Utilizing self-reported survey data modeled after the SASS and gathered from 4,360 first-year teachers during the 2004-05 school year, 1,587 second-year teachers during the 2005-06 school year, and 368 teachers who left their positions after the 2004-05 school year in the NYC public schools, Boyd et al. (2010) found that job dissatisfaction was the main reason teachers within this system left or considered leaving. While they found and compared similar findings to Ingersoll (2001) regarding reasons teachers leave, they added that among participating teachers their perceptions of administrative support were the strongest predictor of teacher attrition when all other teacher and school contexts were controlled for statistically. In another survey-based, statistical analysis of teachers' professional exit decisions, Struyven & Vanthournout (2014) found job satisfaction, with experience and other teacher characteristics controlled for, to be the most prominent factor in the decisions of teachers in Flanders with five or fewer years of teaching experience to exit the profession. Of these, classroom management, relationships with students, school management, and workload figured heavily and overlapped with similar studies. Although this study was conducted in a western European cultural center, given the political and policy-level effects of rapid globalization, such work bears increased relevance to this study.

Qualitative Studies of Teacher Attrition and Motivation

Interview-based, qualitative studies of teachers' reasons for leaving the profession also lend further support to the prominence of job dissatisfaction and the above-described specific components in teachers' decisions to leave. For example, utilizing in-depth interviews with eight

participants who left the profession after just one year of public school classroom experience in Texas, Gonzalez, Brown, and Slate (2008) related the familiar themes of lack of administrative support, struggles with student discipline and low salary as reasons for early exits from teaching. Kersaint et al.'s (2007) previously mentioned work, which relied on surveys as well as phone interviews of several large sets ($N > 800$) of teachers, one of those whom left and one of those whom remained in two large districts in Florida, likewise found lack of administrative support and low pay to be significant in the career perspectives of current and former teachers. This study is particularly interesting because it investigated and compared the views of both teachers who remained as well as those who left within two districts. Of added interest were their findings, echoing Ingersoll's (2003) assertion, that family issues/responsibilities represented the greatest single determinant in teachers' exit decisions, and factors associated with job satisfaction, such as "administrative support, financial benefits, and paperwork/assessment" (p. 787), closely following in second for importance. It was also determined that that stress from standardized testing factored equally for both leavers and movers, and that the intrinsic rewards of teaching were also of "relatively low importance" (Kersaint et al., 2007, p. 791) for both groups of participants. Specifically, low-prioritization of the intrinsic rewards, or "joy of teaching" (p. 791), among participants runs contrary to much of what has been said of teaching, e.g. Lortie's (1973) work. This may have been a function of Kersaint et al.'s methodological approach or research tools to reliably capture this less tangible and highly contextual factor.

In an essay spanning several facets of research concerning teacher retention, Cochran-Smith (2004) nuanced and drew several conclusions for various issues regarding overall teacher shortages and shortages of teachers of color. Citing Ingersoll's (2001; 2003) research, Nieto's (2003) work regarding teacher perseverance, and other relevant studies, Cochran-Smith provided

another affirmation, contrary to Kersaint et al.'s (2007) conclusion, of the importance of intrinsic rewards and motivations, or as she described them, "teaching's heart" (2004, p. 388), for effective and persistent teachers. Of unique interest, she suggested that terms such as "leavers" and "stayers" may require critique or revision considering changing societal conditions, perspectives, and generational expectations. She noted that in earlier generations, teaching was viewed as an admirable, accessible, and sufficient in terms of lifelong commitment, for women and especially women of color. Younger generations, however, may not see it in this way, particularly as a professional end unto itself, and thus, "we also need to rethink what 'staying' in teaching means as a goal for the educational community" (p. 391). Cochran-Smith furthered this argument by pointing out that career longevity as a classroom teaching requires a "flat career trajectory," with novices and veterans, unlike other professions, taking on the same duties. Through this, she introduced the idea of multiple trajectories and assumptions of responsibilities for educators who "stay" in the profession while moving beyond roles as classroom teachers. Support for reconsidering what it means to "leave" the profession is also seen in Lindqvist, Nordanger, and Carlsson's (2014) assertion that exiting the profession should be considered as potentially temporary within a professional life-course. In addition to re-conceptualizing professional expectations to better comport with workforce and generational realities as a means for increasing retention, Cochran-Smith (2004) made several recommendations for recruiting and retaining teachers of color. She described needs for supply-side changes in predominantly white institutions of higher education to reduce alienation and increase multicultural and life experience inclusivity. On the "demand side" (p. 387), conditions within "urban and other schools" (p. 390) should be improved to better retain teachers of color. Specifics for what these changes might look like were not described.

Teacher Perseverance and Career Longevity: Through Their Eyes and Voices

The preceding research serves as a backdrop for literature more specific to the purposes of this work. Reasons given for exiting the profession, provide useful investigational directions for guiding interviews and casting participant responses. Concomitant to literature focusing on why teachers leave their positions, and more relevant to the purposes of this study, are works investigating professional challenges, beliefs, motivations, and sources of support for public-school teachers with longstanding and ongoing classroom careers, particularly in socioculturally and economically marginalized contexts. In addition to focusing on *stayers* (Ingersoll & May, 2011), works to be reviewed here take on methodological relevance to this study because they also utilize, or borrow, an *emic* (Kottak, 2006) approach from anthropological traditions through their participatory nature of gathering information and privileging, or at least inclusion, of the first-person thoughts and perspectives shared by participants for evidencing researcher conclusions. In the following works, teachers' beliefs and perspectives were elicited, gathered, and featured via in-depth interviews with participants. Research in this vein focusing on teachers working in high-minority, urban, and/or impoverished contexts will be featured in the latter part of this review.

To begin, this section of the review will initially feature literature focused on individual teachers' attitudes, values, and beliefs in the face of professional challenges from across the national landscape of public schools post-NCLB. Within this body of research, works written and edited by Nieto (2003; 2005; 2009; 2015a; 2015b) are widely recognized as illustrative of the perspectives teachers in an intensely difficult professional field. Beginning with the question, "What keeps teachers going in spite of everything?" (p. xi), Nieto (2003) utilized interviews and written correspondence with teachers from diverse backgrounds and experiences to delineate

major themes regarding their values, beliefs, and attitudes towards teaching in the book *What keeps teachers going?* Although the geographical and temporal contexts of the participants' professional lives were not situated on a national scale pre-NCLB, with the core of this work's participating teachers being recruited in 1999 for an inquiry project involving a group of teachers in the Boston Public Schools and then expanding out to include long-time professional colleagues and a group of high school teachers from one Boston public high school in 2000, this work established methodological approaches and features of Nieto's subsequent and seminal works. Participating educators were regarded as experienced and excellent in their work with students. Their responses and words were featured in this work as means to bring the often missing, and even disregarded, perspectives of classroom and practicing educators into the wider conversation about schools and school reform, to "help all of us – teachers, teacher educators, parents, and citizens in general – rethink some of our assumptions about teaching in the most depressed schools and, in effect, about the future of public education" (p. 7). As seen in later works (2005 2015b), Nieto (2003) reflexively highlighted major themes in the participants' professional outlooks, as well as her own experiences and work as an educator and researcher. These themes included participants' emphasizing teaching as reflection through professional and personal autobiography, love for their students, hope and possibility, anger and desperation, intellectual work, democratic practice, and the power to shape futures.

Broadening the scope of this line of inquiry to include teachers from more diverse backgrounds and contexts, Nieto (2005) again brought the words and stories of practicing educators into the greater conversation of educational research and reform in the book, *Why we teach*. Although overwhelmingly drawn from schools in the Boston metropolitan area, Massachusetts, and New York, participating teachers worked in urban and suburban schools and

represented various levels of career experience. Placing even more emphasis on the voices of teachers, Nieto primarily took on the role of editor in this work and addressed the emerging effects brought on by the then recent passage and implementation of NCLB. Although individual accounts and reflections from participants will not be examined in this review, this text includes several points of mention for this review. Expressing concern about “rigid conceptions of good pedagogy”, Nieto cautioned, “with some trepidation, based on the essays in this book” she was willing to “suggest a few of the qualities that seem to characterize teachers who are caring and committed” (p. 202). Emerging themes delineated by Nieto from across participant responses included “a sense of mission; solidarity with, and empathy for, students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge; improvisation; and a passion for social justice” (p. 204). As will be seen, the beliefs reflected in these characterizations are represented, more or less, across much of the remaining reviewed works.

In her most recent iteration of participant-centered inquiry into the professional views of teachers, *Why we teach now*, Nieto (2015b) featured narratives of returning participants from the 2005 text as well as new participants from an even broader set of personal and professional backgrounds. The 22 participants included early-career, current, long-term and retired classroom teachers, as well as non-classroom educators, with professional experiences in a variety of urban, suburban, and rural community contexts. Despite Nieto’s assertion that “most” of the contributors “are not widely known outside of their schools” (p. 7), a closer reading of their short biographical accounts showed that a majority were known beyond their work environments through statewide and national awards, leadership positions in external organizations, publications, and other sources of public, professional, and credentialed recognition. According to Nieto, contributing teachers were selected because they were arguably “fiercely committed

teachers who care about their students and about the future of public education” (p. 7). In a complementary article featuring the same contributing responses, Nieto (2015a) further detailed how participants were selected based on nomination by teacher educators from across the country. As justification for selection of externally recognized educators, Nieto acknowledged that “we all know teachers who should not be in the profession and even some who do more harm than good” (p. 5).

According to Nieto (2015b), the most recent iteration of these teacher-voiced texts was warranted given the decade of changes wrought within our nation’s system of public education since the publishing of the 2005 text. Beyond pressures from increased accountability and standardization measures on students and teachers, she targeted predominant expressions of what it means to be ‘a highly qualified teacher’ (p. 5). She contrasted these with an ‘unofficial’ ‘discourse of possibility’ (p. 5) expounded by the participants, teachers whose voices and works exemplify endurance and care despite intensified challenges and failures of dominant reform policies to bring about equitable outcomes for all students. According to Nieto, their often silenced, yet persistent, discourse represents a shared understanding among educators and those with intimate knowledge of the realities occurring in our nations’ schools. It runs contrary to dominant measures of “good” teaching, “simplistic ‘fixes’ for the complex problems of teaching and learning” (p. 6), and is an ongoing discussion characterized by both hope for and critique of our system of public education.

Similar to Nieto’s (2003; 2005) previously described works, commentaries featured in *Why we teach now* (2015b) are divided into general themes reflecting teacher perspectives and beliefs. As she described, certain themes and “Lessons to be relearned” (p. 244) remained constant between the 2005 and 2015 texts. These include a repeated emphasis on the importance

of meaningful connections with students, through empathy or solidarity, and renewed focuses on achieving social justice within and through public education. My own, close analysis of featured responses revealed additional commonalities between these texts, such as recurring anecdotal descriptions of educator successes and general expressions of participants' professional self-efficacy. In addition to these commonalities, and as forewarned, the participants' essays in this more recent work will be detailed here. To begin, contributing stories in the 2005 text are not characterized by the negative effects of the predominant school reform movement of recent decades to the degree they are in the 2015 text. In the newer text, Nieto described how "the growing accountability and high-stakes testing mania in our public schools in the past decade" (p. 247) became manifest in participants' commentary through descriptions of challenges, failures, and inequities presented by dominant reform policies and practices. She argued that the effects of these "reforms" warrant a renewed "commitment to social justice in education" (p. 250).

Independent analysis of the various perspectives and stories in Nieto's 2015 text derived additional themes between and within participant responses. To conduct an analysis of themes within the narratives of these educators, I conducted an initial reading and secondary close reading of the text while taking notes. I then reread these notes, revisited the text, and used a constant-comparative method (Merriam, 2009) to demarcate emergent categories and themes. Several of these bear noteworthy relevance to the thrust of this study. Differences between contributing educators' backgrounds, life experiences, cultural identities, and professional contexts also presented distinctions in sources of professional challenge and purpose. While it is recognized that contributors' narratives represent a limited "sample" of long-standing or currently practicing teachers, particularly given the wider recognition many of them have

received, upon closer analysis differences in participant's expressed experiences, identities, values, and beliefs allow for comparisons between groupings, and provides useful points of connection for analysis of participants' responses in later chapters of this study. Of particular salience are participants' experiences with and perspectives of oppression in schools. For some, particularly those who identified as Latina/o or African American in their essays, personal experiences with racism in their own schooling as well as in their professional lives, served as both sources of challenge and purpose in their work. While many of the self-identified teachers of color in the text also reported things such as standardization and high-stakes testing as having concerning or frustrating impacts on their work and the lives of their students, discussions and critiques centered on these reform initiatives played lesser roles in the majority their narratives when compared to other contributing teachers and those identifying as white. Although general comparisons between groups of contributors by racial/ethnic or self-described socioeconomic background might be drawn, I think it more appropriate to represent these loose themes through two essays derived from this comparative analysis of the text. Through these exemplars, I hope to illustrate a certain "polarity" within the overall responses of the work's 22 contributors, but also hesitantly employ this term as I do not intend to necessarily describe a diametric opposition between them.

The first of these examples is the narrative provided by a white, male, secondary social studies teacher at a diverse suburban high school in Ohio. Unlike many of the text's (Nieto, 2015b) contributors, his narrative and biographical account indicate he is not widely-known outside of his immediate school community. He described his entrance into the field of education, after working for years as a psychotherapist, in the following way:

Helping to restore struggling or even ‘wounded’ clients as a psychologist was gratifying, but left me wanting to play a role in shaping the experiences of young people, not just helping to repair them.” (p. 148)

Thus, it becomes apparent that, like many other teacher participants encountered in later described research, for this teacher a career in teaching satisfied an existential purpose to serve others, to do good where it is apparently needed. As evidence of the power that satisfying this purpose had towards maintaining his professional trajectory, he presented several powerful anecdotes of connections he made and successes he witnessed while working with students, calling these the “invisible moments of teaching” (p. 153). Beyond these stories of challenge and success, however, his overall narrative is dominated by ethical and pragmatic critique of the “‘reformist’ framework” (p. 150) affecting his immediate and greater educational community. He described the effects of neoliberal reform efforts as not only detrimental to our democratic principles but also the intrinsic rewards of teaching and connecting with students. Language employed throughout the reflection conveys a sense of urgency and threat. Neoliberal reformers are described as “very powerful, well-organized” people whose actions come as “waves...crashing down around [him]” through “attacks” that “intentionally” marginalize “the most meaningful work that teachers do to the point of becoming invisible” (p. 148). As with all the contributing authors, he described how his work had been sustained through a desire to engage and enable students to experience educational success. He concluded with a description of a study he conducted with former students examining qualities and practices of ‘effective teachers’ (p. 154). Relying upon this work, he gave six points of advice for “Transcending the ‘Reformers’” (p. 154). These included things such as maintaining one’s enthusiasm for what one teaches, celebrating students’ lives, and utilizing class discussions effectively. Despite his

study's focus on teacher practices and student-teacher relationships, he clearly contrasted each of his findings with predominant reform initiatives and practices. For example, consider the following point of advice:

Rebeca and Dennis had much to say about class discussion. Rebecca said: "Discussion is a really important tool to get students to think, but some teachers neglect to guide the discussion...(in original) hold students to a standard...(in original) demand evidence and sound reasoning." The testing establishment will have trouble making money from this, but we should be nurturing citizenship, not producing bubble fillers. (p. 156)

In this way, his essay's conclusions remained focused on the negative effects caused by, and even purport sinister intentions of, those responsible for recent educational reform efforts.

By contrast, the second exemplar of my review and analysis, written by a black, female, elementary teacher from a school just outside of Columbia, SC, provides sharp contrast in terms of focus as well as existential orientation. This teacher self-identified as African American and a teacher with 17 years of classroom experience. A brief look at available documents and reports from her home district, the Richland County School District One (2012; 2016) reveals that at the time of the formulation and during the current implementation of a "Five Year Plan" for 2012-2017 school years, over 70% of the district's students were African American and over 70% of the district's families qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch. These reports also reveal that the students of this district and state participate in a common amount of standardized testing batteries. The district's scores on the state's most recent mandated assessments in all tested elementary grades were consistently below state averages for met and exceeding descriptors and above state averages for percentages of students not meeting expected scoring guidelines (SCDE,

2016). A look at the district's home website (RCSDO, 2016) includes language typical of many *characteristically urban* (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012) public school systems under pressure to produce results via corporate-style reform. Reference to the superintendent as a "chief executive officer," an increase in numbers of students taking tests being touted as an accomplishment, and a newsletter displaying selected data-points as successes "by the numbers," comport with rhetoric featured in districts experiencing increased levels of scrutiny and neoliberal reform.

Despite evidence for predominant educational reform efforts in her district, this teacher focused very little on them in her narrative. The absence of any serious critique or description of reform-derived prescription, particularly vis-à-vis its preponderance throughout the majority of Nieto's (2015b) book, in her essay prompted the independent investigation described above. In fact, at only two points in her reflection was her tone briefly similar to that taken in other essays regarding critique standards-era reforms. At one point, she briefly addressed "educational reforms and mandates that are beyond our control" that often "do more harm than good" (Nieto, 2015b, p. 104). Her words, however, do not carry the preoccupation with overwhelming challenge and detriment found in other accounts, and she even left room for a more complex and positive interpretation of recent trends, stating that those in charge "sometimes put mandated practices in place with sincere intention to help students" (p. 104). Despite describing the missed outcomes of these reforms, she immediately followed this description with words informing the reader of their minimal importance to her work and sense of agency as an educator, "From the walls of my classroom, I inform educational reform for the students and families I serve. As teachers we have ample opportunities to use our professional judgment" (p. 104). In another section, several pages later in her essay, she again addressed recent reforms with a reiterated sense of insulation and professional resilience:

Over the years, I have seen the pendulum in public education swing back and forth, forth and back. I have learned a very important lesson, and that lesson is “duck and cover.”

Decisions and reforms in public education often harm children in ways that we see long after the damage is done. As a teacher, I passionately stand on my foundational beliefs about teaching and learning so that even though my flame may flicker, it never goes out. (p. 108 – 109)

This teacher’s account stands in stark contrast to the previously reviewed essay’s portrayal of school reform post-NCLB, not only in terms of brevity and attributions of intentionality, but also affective response. Additionally, when compared to reflections of other contributors, mention of high-stakes testing, diminished teacher curricular input, models of efficiency, constraining administrative actions, and/or prescribed curriculum in her essay is conspicuously missing. Instead of focusing on *education reform* as it is described in many academically progressive circles today, and certainly the way it is presented throughout this book, she re-conceptualized this term to address her own educational experiences and empathy with her students: “Reclaim, in one dimension, means *to reform*. I want to reform and *re-form* the education I received as an African American in the public school system” (p. 103). Instead of focusing on the intrusiveness or detrimental effects of high-stakes testing or constraining curricula, she recounted her experiences with racism, low expectations, and malicious teacher behavior as a student, as well as her experiences with an armed robbery while making copies the night before the first day of school. These anecdotes establish her connection to her students and community, in which the concerns wrought by political and bureaucratically imposed prescription have little relevance to

her pedagogical values and motivations. This is particularly illustrated as she related her story of survival during the robbery at the copy store through the following “sobering thought” (p. 107):

‘If I can make it through this situation alive, I will always remember this day. Maybe one of these young men recognized me or one of my colleagues as his former teacher or maybe one or more of them noticed the instructional materials and realized that we were teachers and didn’t want to harm us.’

As teachers, we will all see our students again. The question becomes, ‘How do we want to see them?’ Do we want to see them as successful college students with goals and dreams, or do we want to see them as criminals who conceal their identities behind guns and bandanas? (p. 107 – 108)

Thus, instead of an internal need to help others or transfer abilities in one field into another, as other contributors expressed (Nieto, 2015b), her expressed purposes as an educator here do not establish her individuality before or separate from her students or community. Even those internal motivations and actions expressed in her reflection impress a sense of individual expression derived through a greater connectedness:

...before engaging in action research with my students and families, I explored my own beliefs through a self-inquiry project. I began to study myself through a reflective journey focusing on what energizes me as an educator. I began to pay attention to myself as a teacher of color. I strongly believe working in education is my divine purpose. (p. 104)

As seen, this elementary teacher's sense of connection here extends beyond personal experiences shared with her students and community to include a spiritual element. In addition to this, and in contrast to her negative experiences as a student, she also described foundational experiences with excellent teachers in her formative years, teachers who loved their students no matter what social and political shifts were taking place at the time. Coupled with her descriptions of inviting in family and community members for moments of cultural, curricular and social connection, her narrative conveys a direct line of purpose and practice. Instead of expressing a sense of being worn down by, preoccupation, or anger towards curricular prescription, her essay conveys a sense of remaining situated, of *centeredness*, and a level of care in which the perceived tumults and vicissitudes of educational reform are, to some extent at least, metaphorically defanged. This is particularly captured in her concluding words, in which love supersedes the inevitability of change, "As we also 'fly to the east and fly to the west,' I want each of them to know *I love them best*" (p. 111)

Adding to this corpus of work, Nieto (2008; 2009; 2015a) has also authored several articles of continued relevance to this work. In one article (2015a), she re-cast the reflections of contributing educators, from the recently retired, very experienced, to those in the early stages of their careers, in a call-to-action-themed piece about the privatization of public education. As she stated, "Remaking public education in the image of business has been on a fast track for at least a couple decades" (p. 58), and if this tide is to be turned, the best teachers must be included. In this piece, she attributed high-rates of teacher attrition to struggles faced in attempting to meet the competing demands of standardization and growing sociocultural diversity of our classrooms. In an earlier, brief essay regarding the concept of "critical care" (p. 3), Nieto (2008) interrogated dominant notions of "care" in education and common assumptions about the importance of being

“nice” as sufficient for mitigating systematic and personal enactments of racism against students of color in school. She offered expressions of frustration by early-career educators, who were predominantly, but not exclusively, white, regarding how simply being “nice” or saying they cared for their students of color did not lead to expected outcomes. Mention of these assertions here intersect with considerations of care and effectiveness, and, therefore, add further critique to dominant assertions of teacher quality, and particularly so for socio-politically marginalized, urban schools. As with much of the literature about teacher perspectives, however, this text focuses on the beliefs of beginning teachers.

In a final article, “From surviving to thriving,” Nieto (2009) continued to push the intersection between teacher longevity and effectiveness. Relying on her work as teacher educator and researcher, she presented two sets of “conditions” (p. 10) for increasing teacher retention for both organizational and teacher perspectives. For organizations, she recommended they “give teachers choices,” “encourage partnerships,” and “foster an open climate” (p. 10-11) as strategies for increasing teacher success and retention. For teachers, she recommended “learning about themselves,” “learning about their students,” and “developing allies” (pg. 10-12) as means for thriving and remaining in the profession. Regarding standardized assessments, Nieto stated that “Although these tools and techniques may be helpful, truly ‘highly qualified teachers’ have never viewed them as ends in themselves” (p. 9). Her recommendations express particularly assumptions about teachers through the conditions they address. They are primarily aimed towards new teachers with differing backgrounds from their students. For example, under the section stressing the importance of learning about one’s students, she expressed the latter in the words, “Teachers need to learn about the sociocultural realities of their students and the sociopolitical conditions in which they live” (p. 12) Although, she anchored this section around

the perspective of a teacher who attended urban schools, and, therefore, closely identified with his students' life experiences, this teacher's level of empathy was presented as an example for other teachers to follow.

The works featured here by Nieto (2003; 2005; 2009; 2015a; 2015b) provide a variety of useful perspectives and theoretical intersections for this study. Methodologically, her privileging of teachers' voices and experiences and the useful counters these provide against dominant notions of teacher success and quality further guides the conduct and write-up of this study. Although featuring a relatively wide sample of participants and contexts, particular contrasts between participants featured in her works establish both foundation and need for further investigation into the backgrounds and connections of teachers within their working contexts and the influences these may present regarding their sources of challenge, perseverance, values, and pedagogical practice.

Perspectives of persistently successful African American teachers

As Foster noted (1993) in a still-relevant argument, research specifically focusing on the pedagogical perspectives, understandings, and beliefs of successful and experienced teachers of youth in marginalized contexts is lacking. Specifically, contributions of African American teachers, who make up the largest group of the "minority teacher workforce" (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 42) and are more likely to work in high-minority and lower-income schools, in educational research remain underrepresented despite relative improvement in recent decades. Extant research delving into the pedagogical and career perspectives of teachers in marginalized urban contexts may present diverse cross-sections of participants in which African American

teachers remain a representational minority, or may simply not address racial, ethnic, and/or cultural differences among participants.

Two studies, by Foster (1993) and Stanford (2001), however, offer some light amid the dearth of research focused specifically on the perspectives of African American teachers working with socio-culturally marginalized youth. The first of these works, Foster's article addressing the experiences and perspectives of 18 "exemplary African American teachers" (p. 374), provides an anchoring point for situating this review despite its creation prior to NCLB. Relying on case study and "career history interviews" (p. 375) conducted with 18 teachers of significant years of teaching experience, ranging from 17 to 66 years, Foster sought to counter negative depictions of black teachers in the literature at the time. Foster's narrative in this piece centered around the community connections, kinship, and shared perspectives and experiences of the studies' participants with their students. She described the effects of legal desegregation of public schools on the practices of African American teachers with African American students, and illustrated how teachers' perspectives and reported pedagogical practices shifted when presented with racially/ethnically diverse classes. Although only a portion of the participants' years of teaching spanned previous to the landmark *Brown v. School Board* decision, many of the participants shared their own experiences as students in segregated classrooms. From these and other childhood schooling experiences, they "consciously fashioned philosophies and pedagogies" and incorporated "classroom activities that [were] based upon African-American community norms" (p. 384). In this way, as with several of the teachers' reflections in Nieto's (2015b) most recent book, cultural congruence between students and teachers featured respectively successful educational and professional outcomes for each. Foster (1993) found that "participation in church events and pageants where 'everyone had a part – even if it was a lamb' influenced the

way [the teachers] currently structured their classrooms” (p. 384). Evidence of aligning classroom practices with those of predominantly African American churches included teachers employing choral reading, poetry, and modeling their teaching, or direct instruction, after sermons of black preachers. Participants offered that these church-aligned practices held people’s attention by concomitantly entertaining and delivering content. In this way, spiritual practice informed pedagogical practice. This connection resonates with the link between spiritual purpose and professional purpose found in the previously described essay by the African American elementary teacher in S.C. from Nieto’s (2015b) text.

Similar to Ladson-Billings’ (1994) findings regarding the practices of effective teachers of African American students, Foster (1993) found that participants emphasized shared responsibility through group learning, saw themselves as another member of their classroom communities, and placed cooperation and support for one’s peers over competitive behavior and individual achievements. Furthermore, participants in Foster’s article stressed the importance of interpreting and deriving meaning from texts collectively with students. A collective curricular approach “concerning the education of African-American students that was marked by a philosophical orientation that extended beyond the humanistic education others have proposed” (p. 388) was a theme throughout their responses collective. Foster described this shared perspective as a ‘hidden curriculum’ pushing “personal value, the collective power, and the political consequences of choosing or rejecting academic achievement” (p. 388). Participants recognized the need for “educating the mind” (p. 391) of their students, i.e. building academic content and skills, while also teaching for character development, personal fulfillment, community norms and values, and greater economic success. Social, emotional, critical, and academic growth were viewed as inseparable, with “cognitive and affective growth” being not

only “interdependent, but neither is achievable nor desirable without the other” (p. 386). Participants expressed and exemplified “cultural solidarity” with their students and were successful because they were “able to communicate with students in a familiar cultural idiom” (p. 391)

Through participant responses, Foster (1993) offered a critique of predominant theory and preponderant research featuring African American teachers and students. She criticized adherence to either the “cultural mismatch hypothesis” or the hypothesis attributing alienation of black students in schools to social, political, and economic inequalities, problematizing each as independently inadequate, “for explaining what the teachers described in this article know and do to achieve success with their students” (p. 390). She furthered, that, at that time, the successful careers of the participating teachers would be regarded by some as, “anomalous cases – individuals whose successes are idiosyncratic and result mainly from some elusive and unique qualities or a special charisma rather than from well-reasoned understandings” (p. 390). Foster added that despite a large body of research concerning the beliefs and practices of effective teachers, little research had been done to research and “systematize the understandings, beliefs, and practices” of teachers who successfully work “with students who are currently and pejoratively labeled as ‘at risk’” (p. 390). How such teachers define their task, their “teaching situations” (p. 390), and what they understand to be goals of successful teaching remained are also described as largely unexamined.

In the second study focusing on the careers of veteran African American teachers, Stanford (2001) described sources of career satisfaction, support, and perseverance for ten African American, female classroom teachers with long-term commitments to working “in elementary schools in two of the most distressed environments in Washington, D.C.” (p. 75), Six

of the participants had taught at the same school for between 28 to 33 years. The remaining participants had careers spanning ten years or more. Nine of the participants taught at the same school. They were described as “well-educated, with seven continuing their studies past the bachelor’s degree” (p. 77). Citing Schubert (1991), Stanford emphasized the importance of seeking and voicing the knowledge, perspectives and experiences of teachers with decades of classroom experience and personal reflection, i.e the *emic* side of things mentioned earlier in this review, vis-à-vis mainstream educational research’s focus on and “marvel” (p. 211) for non-practitioner researchers spending extensive periods of time in the classrooms of others. Relying on in-depth interviews and an inductive, grounded theory approach, Stanford, a self-described outsider to urban classrooms and the study’s setting, situated and featured the participants’ responses from the perspective of a “*naïve learner*” (italics in original, p. 77).

Unlike the literature reviewed up to this point, Stanford (2001) provided detailed description of the immediate working environments for participating teachers. She contrasted one school’s “rough surroundings” (p. 78) with its “attractive and welcoming” internal environment and noted similar differences between external and internal conditions at the second school. Her initial unfamiliarity with either place is manifest in her rich, yet impressionistic descriptions and metaphors for the sights, sounds, and feelings elicited during her entrance into each surrounding community and school:

The entry was lush with exotic green plants, like a terrarium...The steady noises of construction next door and traffic whizzing by on the street in front of the school were muted in the high-ceilinged, fortress-like interior...On the climb up to the fourth floor, I noticed signs directing people to walk up the stairs on the right of the center rail, and down the stairs on the left. Though more institutional in feel than the other school, due in

large part to its greater size and modernity, the classrooms themselves reflected the same flurry of student work. Students' artwork and reports were attractively displayed on walls in the halls and classrooms. (p. 80)

In further description of the study's school context, one that rang familiar to my experiences as a parent and teacher in a heavily-scrutinized urban school district, Stanford (2001) described the distress and public scrutiny faced by the participants' district through headlines in local news outlets, speaking of it terms of "Failure" and a "Takeover Plan" (p. 78).

According to Stanford (2001), data for her study were gathered from a variety of sources and activities. Unlike previously describe work, which relied primarily on one or two sources, such as survey data or written reflection, she utilized four methods for gathering information: semi-structured interviews, structured ranking activities, researcher field notes, and group discussions. Of particular interest to my work in this project, the ranking activities delved into teachers' "sources of satisfaction, metaphors for what being in school was and should be like, and perceptions of the ideal and worst possible teaching life" (p. 80). Once data collection was completed through these methods, Stanford found five patterns "to help explain why the teachers had persevered for so long" (p. 81). These included, like responses in other relevant studies (Foster, 1993; Nieto, 2015b), profound commitments to students, and particularly, connections to the African-American and Latina/o community in which they lived. Another pattern emerged around teachers' "active involvement in their work" (Stanford, 2001, p. 82), which included creatively engagement, curricular decision-making, and continued academic study. Ranking activities reflected teachers' optimism as well as recognition of professional challenges and educational inequalities. As seen in previous work, the participants reported collegial support among peers as a source of satisfaction, and as shared by African American teachers in other

teacher-voiced literature a “dominant source of support was the teachers’ church communities and personal spiritual lives” (p. 83). Finally, relying upon a metaphor-based activity, Stanford found that teachers most prominently described their time at school as like being “*in a family*” (p. 83, italics in original), as well as a mix of positive and negative metaphors, such as “*in a garden*” or “*in a prison.*”

Stanford (2001) concluded her work with a discussion of two overall themes drawn from her work with the participating teachers and response patterns. The first theme centers around the deeper sense of meaning derived by the participants through their work. As she described, “the teachers’ talk was not of dazzling success stories but rather of seeing growth occur month to month and receiving occasional thanks from former students” (p. 84). She furthered that these responses extend the participants’ resiliency beyond efficacy. From this theme, Stanford connected the need for and possession of a sense of meaning in one’s life or work as essential to perseverance. She suggested that Nietzsche’s idea of “he who has a *why*, can bear almost any *how*” (italics in original) bears relevance to their motivations and longevity, and that “*striving for meaning* may be an essential survival tool for teachers who choose to teach in distressed urban environments” (italics in original, p. 84). She connected their levels of community-centeredness and familial commitment to students with relevant concepts found in Dewey (1902) and Noddings (1992). Extending upon this theme of deep meaning, Stanford elucidated a second theme around the importance of religious faith and community for the participants, connecting this to Mother Teresa’s “concept of *poverty of spirit*” (p. 85, italics in original). She expressed that the participants relied upon their wealth of spirit as “a means of renewal,” and shared the words of one participants’ religious experiences and connections as an African American, ‘You have to understand. It’s part of our culture...I didn’t even KNOW anyone who didn’t go to

church when I was a child' (p. 85). Stanford concluded from this that those seeking to enter into teaching in urban communities might also benefit from personal spiritual faith or value set, as these may serve as "a reservoir of strength" and move beyond mere educational philosophies. As a parting thought, she asked and suggested the following:

While such guidance is well worth the research journey, I found the real treasure in this study was the discovery of the group of remarkably strong, wise, positive, compassionate, and persevering teachers. How many others like them are in schools across the nation, battling "the plight of children and youth in our decaying cities," and doing so, unnoticed? Their days in the classroom are approaching an end. We need to listen to their wisdom before they go. (p. 86)

Foster's (1993) and Stanford's (2001) works represent the extant literature focusing explicitly on the perspectives and sources of professional perseverance for African American public school teachers. Of these, Stanford's is the only one specifically situated within an impoverished, urban school context. As a brief note, although significant work has been done describing the beliefs, perspectives, and practices of successful African American teachers and teachers of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2009; Delpit, 1995), such works more so focus on pedagogical orientations and considerations. While such considerations obviously intersect with career longevity and indeed provided guidance in the participant selection process of this project, works more directly addressing teacher perseverance, and as Stanford tentatively introduced, resilience, in impoverished, urban contexts will remain the focus for the remainder of this review.

Sources of Professional (Dis)Satisfaction for Teachers in Urban Contexts: Themes, Theory and Representations

Given the dearth of literature specifically focusing on career success and longevity of African American teachers in urban school contexts, I expanded selection criteria for reviewed works to encompass qualitative research investigating career success, perseverance and resilience of teachers from various or unidentified racial/ethnic identities in high-minority, urban and impoverished schools. As will be seen, these works presented multiple points of connection and contrast for literature reviewed thus far, and in certain points, provided moments for interrogation and critique.

In a recent study, Kokka (2016) qualitatively investigated and described reasons for teacher longevity at an “urban public school” (p. 169) using in-depth interviews and a framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT), which “explores how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are regulated by three basic psychological human needs – feeling of competence, autonomy and relatedness” (p. 170). Citing particular teacher shortages in these content areas, Kokka recruited sixteen math and science teachers’ and inquired into their sources of job satisfaction as well as factors influencing professional classroom longevity. Of particular uniqueness within the literature, her study grouped participants by racial identifications, with one group of eleven participants described as “teachers of color” (p. 169) and the remaining five as “white” (p. 171) and drew comparisons between these group’s responses. In terms of their longevity, the participants had taught at the same school, whose population was described as “100% socioeconomically students , 98.5% of whom [were] students of color, approximately 35% African American, 40% Asian American, 20% Latina/o, 3.5% other, and 1.5% white” (p. 171), for a range of seven to 24 years of classroom experience.

Kokka (2016) described various sources and conditions that contributing to or were detrimental to the participants' longevity at the school. For both groups of participants, "competency, autonomy, and relatedness influence[d] their longevity" (p. 177). Leadership instability, described as recent changes in administration, were described as advantageous for providing motivation by increasing autonomy and detrimental towards teachers' feelings of competence. Specifically, reported lack of administrative support, particularly in terms inadequate schoolwide behavior management or "support for disciplinary issues" (p. 172) undermined teachers' senses of competence, while lack of administrative support in terms of oversight was determined to be a source of encouragement because it was viewed as increasing individual autonomy. "Administrative support" (p. 175) is presented in terms of administrators role in applying external structures and reinforcement throughout the piece. Kokka described this source of support in the form of "disciplinary supports," such as removing or punishing students for misbehavior, and "instructional supports," described as "administrative oversight of curricular decisions, frequent classroom observations" (p. 176). Alternative administrative approaches and practices, such as modeling lessons, encouraging teacher collaboration, or teacher-selected profession development topics, however, were not addressed.

A certain amount of conceptual rigidity pervaded other aspects of the study as well, particularly in terms of connections and conclusions. Kokka's (2016) described and relied upon characterization of the participants' school community as "urban." Although arguably so by common usages, such fixed representation, at least without more thorough detailing of contexts, overextended possible connections between and assumptions about school communities identifiable as such. For example, when attempting to connect findings at her research site, Kokka cited a study by Jones (2015) in which it was found that "urban teachers identified

tangible, measurable, results when asked about ‘teaching high points,’ whereas suburban teachers described emotional moments and experiences of warmth...The results of the present study contrast Jones’ findings” (p. 176). In this example, the term “urban” was applied and utilized as a generalizable descriptor for teachers and their work contexts, around which ostensibly meaningful connections and comparisons might be drawn without further detailing. Likewise, individual racial identities, though critically engaged in places, were also represented as fixed and, therefore, extractable and a source of behavioral attribution:

Half Latino and half white teachers Mr. Panetta and Mr. Murphy also did not explicitly express a desire (sic) ‘give back to their community.’ This may perhaps be influenced by how they experience and navigate their multiracial identity. They both have Latina mothers and white fathers, and therefore have surnames that are not Latino. From the researcher’s observation, they both also have phenotypic characteristics that may allow them to ‘pass’ as white (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). (p. 176)

Moreover, as seen in this excerpt and elsewhere, failing to express a particular sentiment during data collection was tenuously applied in points of connection with other literature. In a similar example, two other “teachers of color” not expressing a desire to ‘give back to their community’ (p. 176), was contrasted with findings from a study by Villegas and Irvine’s (2010) in which “teacher of color” (p. 176) did express such a desire.

Despite apparently over-drawn assumptions and possible over-reifications, Kokka’s (2016) study nevertheless provided continued evidence for sources of motivation and challenge for persevering teachers working in an impoverished urban context. As with other studies, she described “Social emotional rewards from student interactions”, “‘Aha’ moments” (p. 173), and receiving of thanks from students as prominent sources of motivation and satisfaction for

participants. Teachers of color related experiences with racism, expressed “awareness of stereotypes of black youth” (p. 175), found satisfaction by serving as role models, and expressed empathy with students, with one participant stating that the school felt like his ‘home away from home’ with “‘home’ meaning Sierra Leone where he grew up until his high school years” (p. 174) before moving to California. Additionally, Kokka described how some white teachers utilized “race evasive discourses” (p. 175) when asked to identify their racial/ethnic identities, while also reflecting upon transformative experiences while working at the school. From responses shared by both groupings of teachers, Kokka concluded “Recruiting teachers who grew up in, currently live in, or student taught in the community, may increase longevity in urban schools” (p. 177).

Finally, similar to previous study’s assertions regarding connections with students and contrary to descriptions of teachers’ utilization of greater community and school colleagues as sources of support described in previous studies, Kokka asserted that participants’ needs for connectivity were “met primarily through their interactions and relationships with their students, rather than colleagues and certainly not with administrators” (p. 177) She did, however, note that support from colleagues was mentioned by five out of 16 participants and recommended further investigation in this area. It should be noted that items pertaining to support from peers did not appear in the provided interview protocols, while relationships with students, which figured more prominently in her conclusions, were mentioned in several interview items.

Continuing in the vein of investigating the perspectives and longevity of experienced teachers working in urban and/or high-minority schools, Patterson et al.’s (2004) qualitative research study of 16 teachers added to this review through its explicit engagement with a formal definition of *resilience*. Although addressed as a general adjective in Sanford’s (2001) work,

resilience as a theoretical concept in Patterson et al.'s study was explicitly defined as the participants' ability to use "energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions" (p. 3). Despite various applied and academic conceptualizations of *resilience*, for the immediate purposes of this review, Patterson et al.'s given definition will be accepted without interrogation. Participants for the study (Patterson et al., 2004) were drawn from four schools in four "large urban districts" (p. 5) with relatively high student achievement scores compared to statewide averages. They included teachers and teacher leaders with at least three years of ongoing experience working in an urban school where "despite poverty and other indicators of chronic adversity, score above the state average in reading or mathematics" (p. 5). No other description of selected school contexts beyond general assumptions of challenges associated with urban schools. Standardized test scores for individual teachers as a means for selection were not reported, with final selection occurring through nominations by district and school staff members. Unlike previously described studies of teacher perseverance and success in urban contexts, makeup of student populations at participating schools and identities of participants by race/ethnicity were not described. Justification for the study drew upon literature relating shortages of "quality teachers" in urban schools and recast this problem from a matter of recruitment to one of retention. The authors argued that teachers in urban schools, which "suffer far greater complications than rural or suburban schools" (p. 3) struggle to remain resilient in the face of such challenges. Policy and beliefs about "social issues" (p. 4) are described as contributing to these challenges. According to the authors, 'burn out' among teachers had "exploded in urban schools due to a variety of factors" (p. 4). Citing a previous study by Patterson et al. (2002) conducted in "schools that refused to fail", the authors described how

resilience was strengthened in school leadership through “seven key strengths” (p. 4). These included things such as remaining positive, staying focused, being flexible in meeting goals, etc.

Patterson et al. (2004) noted it had been hypothesized that personally resilient teachers, who “see themselves as having a positive capacity to cope with stress and direct their own lives are less likely to leave urban environments” (p. 5), but stated that no data has been shown to support this contention. To investigate this idea, they sought reasons why, described as “drives”, and how, described as “strategies” for “coping with adversity”, resilient and “successful teachers stay in schools facing the toughest challenges” (p. 5). In their findings section, the authors described how resilient teachers have a guiding set of personal values, seek professional development, mentor others, express agency over victimhood, persistently focus on children and learning, “have friends and colleagues who support their work emotionally and intellectually” (p. 5), are open to new pedagogical ideas and approaches, and choose their battles wisely. Several of these conclusions clearly connect with points found in other literature. As found in works by Nieto (2005, 2015b) and will be seen in the following study by Brunetti (2006), a component of social justice figured heavily in teachers’ responses. As seen in previous studies (Foster, 1993; Nieto, 2015b; Stanford, 2001) spirituality in some form provided a source of professional connection and strength for some participants. As a point of contrast to Kokka’s (2016) somewhat problematic findings regarding relationships with colleagues, Patterson et al. described these as a significant source of professional support for participants.

Patterson et al.’s description of a “theme of a commitment to social justice or a ‘calling’” (p. 6) presents a point of problematization (Foucault, 1983) regarding perceptions of students, race/ethnicity, and society. As evidence of this theme and commitment, the authors provided the following exemplar from one of their participant’s responses:

There were all these kids that would ride to the city on the bus. They'd sit in the back, and there was cursing, bravado, and whorish behavior from the girls. There was never a book. Nobody talked about lessons or what they were learning...On Fridays, they would release people from the penitentiary that would come over to the bus stop...There were all these guys at the bus stops in their tan suits, and they're all black and Latino guys. Some of the kids on the bus would talk to them.

And I thought there's something wrong with this picture. I'm off to my engineering job, and all these black kids are going to school and it looks like they're not even into it. God knows why that is. Isn't somebody there making them into it? It just got to me. I felt there was something wrong with a society that doesn't make kids learn and then sends them to prison. (p. 6)

As may be noted, however, while ostensibly illustrative of notions of a personal "calling" and commitments to social justice found in other literature, this excerpt does so through a troubling deficit-orientated perspective. While the participating teacher provided some allusion to the *school-to-prison* pipeline for marginalized youth (Wald & Losen, 2003) or perhaps a structuralist interpretation of life outcomes in a racist society, the outcomes she described are ultimately situated within essentialized and deficit-oriented representations of black students and incarcerated black and Latino men. Applying generalized descriptions such as "bravado, and whorish behavior" to children of color effectively *others* (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012) them, positioning them as internally different from the observing teacher and lacking in academic knowledge, interest, moral character, agency, etc. The students were thus described as requiring external guidance or control from someone in an economically and academically superior position, i.e. "somebody there making them into" school, in order to avoid the fates of the "black

and Latino guys” wearing tan suits on the bus. Presentation of such a clear deficit orientation is something unique in the literature reviewed thus far, and particularly so given that the researcher-authors presented this as an exemplar for how teachers’ “personal values” may positively contribute to their professional resilience and commitments.

In a final study of teachers as *stayers* in an impoverished, urban public school context, Brunetti (2006) also utilized an explicitly described emic approach for investigating the perspectives and sources of professional resilience for teachers working in an impoverished, urban school context. Life-history interviews as well as a more quantifiable Likert scale survey developed by Brunetti served as tools gathering responses from participants. Although differing in methodology from Patterson et al.’s (2004) study by describing racial/ethnic characteristics of participants and relatively detailed descriptions of school context, like Patterson’s et al.’s study, deficit assumptions towards students’ home communities are observable and go un-critiqued. For example, in his outline of definitions, Brunetti presented and justified a generalizable, reified and stigmatizing description of “inner-city schools”:

In this article, the term “inner city” refers to a *particular kind* [emphasis added] of urban high school: one that serves largely poor, minority students (African-American, Hispanic, Native American, immigrant Asian)...and that is situated in or draws its students from economically depressed neighbourhoods. (p. 812)

Essentialized, normative, and tertiary description was also applied to the participants’ school context, where typical indicators, such as stores and food, were provided as evidence of neighborhood’s cultural diversity, and indications of substance abuse, despite being relatively constant across all economic strata, were accepted as attributable to lower-income communities:

The neighbourhoods match those described earlier: While culturally rich with a variety of restaurants and shops, they also show undeniable signs of poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, crime and violence. The ethnic composition of Presidio High...(pp. 813-814)

Deficit orientations and normative viewpoints were also featured in participants' responses, all of whom were described as "Caucasian" (p. 815), and went without interrogation by the researcher:

All I can tell you is that I feel so blessed to have spent all of my years, not only in the inner city, but I think specifically with the students of Presidio High School, because I think there's something very unique about our kids. Despite the students' attempts to be outwardly threatening, the vast majority of our students have great lessons to teach all of us—in terms of what it means to be a human being and the capacity of compassion. (p. 816)

Beyond this presentation of "inner city" students as "outwardly threatening," additional deficit-oriented participant responses likewise went un-questioned by Brunetti. For example, consider the following misrepresentation regarding levels of substance abuse across various groups:

And I like working in this school because they [the students] don't have as many opportunities, for many reasons. They don't have people to imitate; they often have to work and they can't study; they have to take care of brothers and sisters; there's the plague of violence and drugs and alcohol and all the social ills that they feel to a larger extent than most segments of the populace. (p. 818)

If we consider that differences in levels of illicit drug use remain insignificant between ethnic groups and rates of alcohol use increase with education level in the United States (SAMHSA,

2013), the picture painted by this participant, and researcher, may be considered as inaccurate and subject to interrogation as representative of mainstream stigmatization associated with high-minority, low-income communities. Furthermore, beyond a statistical description of the school's population by race/ethnicity, other considerations of race, experiences with racism, and racial oppression remain conspicuously missing and unaddressed when describing the experiences and realities of "inner city youth" for both researcher and participants. Race is only briefly addressed in two excerpts, when one participant said she could not "imagine teaching in a white suburban school" (p. 818), and in a more drawn out response from another respondent that echoes the "teacher as savior" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 93) perspective presented in previous excerpt from Patterson et al.'s (2004) study:

My anger and frustration over what we've done as a country to our students and to a large segment of our population. I'm outraged half the time. So this is what I can do [i.e., teach at Presidio High]. I really don't mean to sound like I'm some sort of like savior (sic), like—you know, white knight. It [just] bothers me that our students don't have the resources and the funding. (p. 819)

Brunetti (2006) provided several themes for participants' responses regarding their professional resilience in "inner city teachers" (p. 812). Of primary importance to participants, whose careers as teachers spanned between 14 and 36 years and tenures at Presidio High from 2 to 33 years, were "deeply seated respect for their students", which included "being accepted by the students and earning their trust" and recognizing the "difficult lives that [students] were forced to live" (p. 816). In a second theme, Brunetti featured sources of personal and professional fulfillment, and divided these into social justice and "*giving back to society* in response to privileges they had enjoyed" (p. 819). In one example of this, a teacher expressed

that if she “was of that mind, [she] would say, ‘Gee it seems like a conspiracy in a way’, you know to keep certain people downtrodden” (p. 819). The third and final theme revolved around sources of support, be they interpersonal, administrative, or organizational, for participants and how these represented “a powerful factor in teachers’ decisions to remain in the classroom” (p. 820). These findings support previous work involving teachers who left their positions regarding the importance of administrative support in their exit decisions (Boyd et al., 2010; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Kersaint et al., 2007).

From these themes, the Brunetti (2006) concluded, that in order to continue “productive work in the inner city classroom” teachers must utilize resilience “despite the serious problems and setbacks they encountered on a daily basis and despite their feelings of heartache, discouragement, and frustration” (p. 821). In addition to previously mentioned examples of tragic events in students’ lives described earlier in the article, several other examples of apparent sources of teacher frustration were also provided in his discussion: a “promising student” being deported shortly before graduation, another’s family leaving moving to “Central America with a cult leader” (p. 821), and another dying by gunfire. Throughout this section, unlike studies previously reviewed here, tragedies in the lives of the students were presented primarily as significant sources of professional challenge for teachers, e.g. the “heartache” they produced was presented as a significant professional challenge for the participants. This orientation in Brunetti’s work may be compared with Patterson et. al.’s (2004) work because these problems are likewise situated as inherent in the *other*, i.e. the students and their community, and also serving as a source of motivation in terms of social justice initiatives, but may also be contrasted with this work in that they also serve as obstacles to the participants’ professional longevity.

Beyond examples of tragic events in the lives' of students in this study (Brunetti, 2006), other challenges to teachers' work were also situated within the students and essential to a normative reality constructed around the study's framing of "inner-city schools." For example, things such as students being "ill-prepared to succeed in their classes because they were English Language Learners or could not read or did not have the discipline or the skills to focus on academic issues" (p. 821) are presented as additional adversities against which participants displayed professional resilience. Only in a brief conclusory note is a *top-down* source of frustration, in the form of the effects of standardized testing, mentioned as a source of professional challenge for the participants. Even then, this external source was situated within the students' experiences through the "demoralizing" effects and "pain and humiliation" students experience as a result of such testing. As extensions to this research, Brunetti (2006) furthered the idea of resilience as something that "can be strengthened and honed through experience in the field" (p. 822), but stopped short of describing it as an "inherent personality characteristic or predisposition" (p. 822). Nevertheless, he called for continued research under the assumption of reified resilience as something that might be identified as a demonstrable trait in teacher candidates.

Conclusions, Research Gaps, and Directions for Investigation

Relying upon the works examined, compared, and contrasted in this review, justification for this study has emerged through what has been said about teacher perseverance, success, and longevity in impoverished urban school contexts; what has not been said sufficiently; and what has been said problematically. Methodological, empirical, and theoretical considerations, including the intersections and gaps between them, have been examined to situate possible contributions of this study. In summary, works focusing on teacher attrition, i.e. why teachers

leave or left; and works focusing on retention, i.e. why they persist, have been considered here as mutually supporting and informative.

At the broadest level, substantial quantitative (Goldring et al. 2014; Ingersoll, 2001; 2003; Keigher, 2010;) and qualitative (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Kersaint et al., 2007) work has clearly established job dissatisfaction as a significant source of teacher attrition. This mutable source has also been shown to be of increased significance for teachers identified as ethnic minorities (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Although this study focuses on sources of (dis)satisfaction for teachers who have maintained their classroom tenures, as opposed to leaving them, knowledge of the importance of job dissatisfaction in teachers' career trajectories provides justification and direction for investigating possible sources of career dissatisfaction, how the participants may perceive these sources, and how they have mitigated them in maintenance of their professional trajectories. Major categories of professional dissatisfaction for teachers throughout the literature included low salary (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2003), described lack of support from the school administration (Boyd et al., 2010; Brunetti, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2003; Kersaint et al.'s, 2007; Kokka, 2016; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014), problems with student discipline/behavior (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2003;), flat or plateauing career prospects (Cochran-Smith, 2004;), and the effects of increased standardization and accountability (Nieto, 2005; 2015b).

Of particular relevance to this project, works written and edited by Nieto offer numerous first-person accounts of teachers' sources of professional frustration and sustenance from a variety of specific sociocultural and economic contexts. The broadest and most in-depth of these texts, though ostensibly representative of teachers in urban contexts or from across the national landscape, however, drew upon teachers' experiences in specific geographic regions (Nieto,

1999; 2005) or predominantly featured teachers professionally recognized beyond their working communities (Nieto, 2015b). Nevertheless, their accounts provide rich, teacher-centered accounts of the realities faced by educators as they experienced the effects of dominant educational reform agendas since the turn of the millennium. They also provide starting points for comparing and contrasting sources of (dis)satisfaction for teachers of various backgrounds and working contexts (Nieto, 2015b), including responses from participants in this study. Additionally, less emic, more researcher-centered work drawing upon the content and tradition of these works has interrogated the intersections between “care” and effectiveness for early-career teachers, particularly with regard to teacher identity and mitigation of systematic sources of oppression (Nieto, 2008; 2009). In sum, reviewed works by Nieto offer justification for this study’s focus on educators’ perspectives not widely recognized beyond their immediate working and peer communities, working in another specific, yet, different geographic context, whose cultural identities and residential backgrounds remain firmly embedded within the same communities as their students.

Thus, the need for work research focusing on teachers, particularly African American teachers, finding success over decades of work with students in urban contexts has been opened through literature reviewed in this chapter. Beyond the generalized, yet geographically centric and widely acclaimed teachers featured in Nieto’s works (2000, 2005, 2015b), additional literature featuring the career trajectories and professional perspectives of teachers also contribute to this need. As noted, much work has focused on early-career teachers exiting decisions (Boyd et al., 2010; Gonzalez et al, 2008; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). While some work has been done to evidence and problematize higher rates of exit for teachers of color compared to white teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011), works specifically featuring the

perspectives of African American teachers regarding their career perspectives has largely remained missing from the extant literature. In particular, the lack of emic research specifically featuring career trajectories and perspectives of black educators with significant years of experience and expertise in the classroom, beyond the two relevant articles addressed in this review (Foster, 1993; Stanford, 2001), creates a particular empirical need emerges for this study. These works, despite their somewhat dated enactments, nevertheless explored specific themes, such as the importance of early educational and spiritual connections, experiences with personal and systematic acts of racism and oppression, and culturally congruent or situated pedagogical ethos, and provide investigational direction for this study. Additionally, methodological approaches, such as detailed description of school community contexts and use of open-ended as well as structured interview activities (Stanford, 2001), in these two studies offer further guidance for data collection in this study. Taken into account with local and national trends towards a workforce that is increasingly younger, less-experienced, and persistently white (Ingersoll et al., 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011), justification for this work takes on even greater salience given the dearth of community-situated perspectives of African American teachers in the literature.

Finally, reviewed works focusing on career persistence, sources of support, and resilience for teachers working in urban contexts further establish need for this study and lend additional investigational direction. Need for this study emerges through problematization of works featuring over-generalized, normative expressions of “urban” (Kokka, 2016) or “inner-city” (Brunetti, 2006) schools, and deficit-oriented perspectives the students’ communities and lives as they are situated in so-described contexts (Brunetti, 2006; Patterson et al., 2004). Such works lend to an *outsider’s* perspective of successful teaching careers in urban contexts, thus, creating a

need for more contextualized and worthy accounting of specific conditions, challenges, lived experiences, and strengths of teachers, their students, and the communities in which they work and live. Additionally, though problematic in ways, findings in these works (Brunetti, 2006; Kokka, 2016; Patterson et al., 2004) generally comported with previously addressed literature in terms of sources of job (dis)satisfaction in teachers' maintenance of their career trajectories. Finally, addressing "resilience" as an innate (Brunetti, 2006) or retainable and developable (Patterson et al., 2006) trait for educators in urban contexts provides further direction for theoretical exploration and development of this concept. Through the theoretical conceptualizations in these studies, as well as the methodological, empirical, and critical gaps established through all of the works reviewed in this chapter, particular needs and challenges emerge for research seeking into the perspectives of African American female teachers working successfully for decades in a specific impoverished urban context. Through investigation and presentation of the perspectives, stories, and professional wisdom of this study's participants, who are described in the following chapter, meeting these needs and challenges will be attempted with the intention of making meaningful contributions to the greater body of extant literature regarding teacher career perspectives and longevity.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods, Context, Ethical and Critical Considerations

Methodology

As described, this study operates from a constructivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mills et al., 2006) perspective towards knowledge and experience. With this in mind, it also operates from a critical (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) standpoint towards the positions of its various participants, myself included, their relationships to each other, and their relationships with other conditions and agents. Within this more general framework, as Carey (2013) recommended, specific methods were utilized to elicit findings and develop the theoretical perspectives offered in this study. As said, these included formal, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with participants. Interviews included set protocols of questions, survey-type questions, but also left space for participant-led discussion and sharing of researcher stories and perspectives. Classroom observations rounded out the data collection component of this study, and these served as a source of supporting evidence for the selection of several of the participants and provided additional information for the pedagogical approaches and beliefs shared by participants. Background, theoretical, and ethical considerations for, as well as descriptive narratives of, the various phases of the data collection process for this project are provided in the following sections.

Data Collection

Though greater detail will be provided throughout this chapter, for purposes of clarity and orientation the following description of how the data for this work were obtained is offered. As stated, this study involved four participants. I selected two of the participants based on my knowledge of their work and careers gathered during my time as a teaching colleague with them.

The final two participants were selected based upon the knowledge of their work and careers shared by the initial two participants. For all participants, initial verbal and written consent to participate was obtained at the start of the 2015-16 school year. Verbal and written consent from these teachers' building principal and district's office of research to conduct research on school grounds were also obtained at the start of this school year.

Each of these teachers participated in audio-recorded semi-structured interviews utilizing a uniform semi-structured protocol during the summer or fall of 2015. Items on this first-round protocol (See Appendix A) included open-ended narrative questions as well as "brainstorming" items regarding their perceptions of teaching. After personally transcribing and conducting an initial analysis of these interviews vis-à-vis an ongoing review of the literature, emerging and relevant themes were utilized to construct more personalized interview protocols (See Appendixes B) for each participant. Despite individual differences between these protocols, however, they remained coherent within a broader theoretical framework. The purpose of this design was to further probe ideas and perspectives presented by certain participants and also further develop emerging themes and intersections between first-round responses and the literature. Common features of second-round interview questions and prompts included a set of scaled response job-satisfaction items adapted from Brunetti's (2006) Experienced Teacher Survey, a best vs. worst school "anchoring-scaling" activity developed from a tool described by Stanford (2001, p. 82), as well as certain open-ended interview questions and prompts. These protocols were used to guide a second round of audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with all of the participants in December of that year. Personal transcription of these interviews commenced early in 2016 and was completed in April of that year. Visits to all participants' classrooms to observe their interactions with students were conducted throughout the 2015-16

school year as a means for better describing response data, triangulating (Merriam, 2009) my previous observations of the initial participants' work as teachers, and describing secondary participants' practices as teachers. Visits were not formally scheduled beforehand. Instead, informal discussions throughout the year with participants regarding scheduled academic blocks, upcoming events or periods of standardized testing provided windows of opportune time for me to show up largely unannounced and conduct participant observations (Merriam, 2009), in which I acted as both observer and occasional participant in classroom proceedings. During all visits to these teachers' classrooms, I felt welcome and unobtrusive. At the end of these visits, conversations with participants served as follow-up points for questions generated during transcription and initial analysis of interview responses. Annotated field notes taken during visits and transcribed later each day provided means for documentation of observations and interactions in participants' classrooms.

Researcher Position(s)

Previous to my position as a doctoral student, graduate teaching assistant, instructor, and student teacher supervisor at an R-1, state-sponsored university, I was a teacher in the Butterfield School District (pseudonym), or BSD. Before proceeding, I should note that all names and identifying information, characteristics, and sources have been modified or excluded throughout this chapter. In cases where specific and possibly identifiable data are referenced, rounded values are utilized to preserve quantitative significance while maintaining anonymity. The BSD is situated in the central neighborhoods of a major, midwestern city. The majority of this district's schools are located in diverse or predominantly minority neighborhoods where median household incomes are considerably lower, in some cases eight times lower, than nearby, predominantly white neighborhoods. I was an elementary and middle-school classroom teacher

for 13 years in this district, and, like many of my teaching colleagues during this time, had few experiences in any of these neighborhoods prior to teaching in them. I was raised as a white, cis-male, identities I retain to this day, and attended schools in one of the upper-middle class suburbs of Butterfield. During these years, I clearly recall the sharing of essentialized perspectives and “othering” (Fine, 1994; Schwalbe et al., 2000) of minoritized, lower-income neighborhoods by myself, peers, and caretakers. For us, the “inner city” was generally a place characterized by want, danger, lack of morality, troubled schools, and countless other assignments of inferiority. Racial-economic divisions in Butterfield’s metropolitan area were, and remain, sharply demarcated by a clear geographic feature, and traveling beyond this boundary for middle-to-wealthy class whites was, and still is, often considered to be an undesirable or dangerous journey. I still encounter stigmatizing perceptions of these neighborhoods and schools frequently in conversations with university students, colleagues, old acquaintances, and family members. Beyond these personal interactions, one may also readily witness the essentialization of various parts of Butterfield through the contrasts in discourse presented in local, mainstream news and social media coverage. Descriptions of crime and other troubling events are often presented as surprising, shocking or unexpected because they occurred in ostensibly “upscale”, “nice” or “quiet”, i.e. predominantly white and higher-income, neighborhoods.

Immediately following the completion of my undergraduate work with a degree in history and an additional concentration in pre-medicine, without any formal teacher education courses, I took a position as a fourth-grade classroom teacher in this district through an exercise of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Originally starting out in the BSD’s department for research and assessment in the summer of 2000, and awaiting pending applications to medical schools, I learned that the district needed to quickly fill elementary classroom teaching positions for the

upcoming school year, and if wanted one all I had to do was apply. With few significant commitments beyond myself at that time, other than the year-long wait to hear about medical school, I applied and was hired. I was placed in August at a school with a then relatively newer building, a rarity at that time and unheard of currently in the BSD, in what may be described as a predominantly poor-to-working class, ethnically-diverse neighborhood. After a district-wide re-organization of staff members in October, I was re-assigned to a fourth-grade classroom at McClellan Elementary, a bunker-like, windowless and dilapidated school building located in what may be described as a nearly 100% African American, central section of the city. In some ways characterized by severe and concentrated poverty, and plagued by what Tatum (2005) described as “turmoil”, the homicide rate of this community’s zip code at that time was the highest in the state. Today, its median household income remains around \$20,000 per year. At best, an unfamiliar, and at worst, a potentially hostile neighborhood in my mind at that time, I clearly remember my hyper-vigilance when stopping in traffic on my way to this school for the first time.

My experiences during this school year, as well as the following 12 years as a classroom teacher in the Butterfield School District, were fundamentally transformative for me. I experienced many reflections, reckonings and re-evaluations as my mind frames and worldviews shifted in my attempts to survive my first year of teaching. I discovered that success and good teaching in my classroom required more than just content delivery or behavior control, that it required critical evaluation of various identities and roles positioned in my classroom, the school, greater community, and society. Eventually, during these formative years of my career in teaching, I increasingly became a member and resident of the community in which I worked. Along this path, I witnessed and participated in situations that initially engendered a strong

determination to explore critical theory and pedagogy with the intention of promoting social justice. As these years have progressed, experiences and other situations have shifted my habitus in ways to increase my alliance and sense of community membership within the marginalized spheres of city and society, where improving conditions educationally, socially, and economically is no longer simply a matter of caring about or trying to fix “other people’s problems.” It has become a matter of survival and prosperity for my immediate and extended family. Returning to my first year at McClellan Elementary, I experienced things that shocked, angered, and humiliated me, things that pushed me to the breaking point of quitting on numerous occasions. I also experienced things, some of them the same ones that challenged me so fundamentally, so powerful, moving, and engaging that I quickly came to realize that my professional life lay in education. My experiences during this year alone could probably fill a volume of teaching memoirs, but for now, I will say that the situations I participated in caused me to re-evaluate my plans for medical school. Situations in which I felt I played some part in changing students’ and families’ lives for the better taught me that the work of a teacher could prevent the need for, and futility of, the work of many doctors.

As my career in the Butterfield School District progressed through various other schools and neighborhoods, personal revelations and discoveries of the “psychic rewards” (Lortie, 1975) of teaching in urban communities became confirmations of my emergent perceptions and criticality. In time, these also became sources of conflict, tension, and further motivation. After several shifts in location and assignment over the course of the following summer and early fall, in November of 2001 I settled into a fifth-grade teaching position at Lowell Elementary. At that time, similar in age and state of repair to McClellan Elementary, which has since been shuttered, Lowell’s building, however, had many windows. It was, and remains, situated in a racially and

ethnically diverse and impoverished section of Butterfield. I would go on to spend nine of my years as a public school teacher at this school. It was in this school that I met two of the participants for this study, and here that all four of the participants worked during the time of this study's collection of data. Lowell was also the place where I met my wife, beautiful and outgoing, which was good because I tend towards introversion, a black woman working her way through college as a custodian. She had spent much of her early childhood in this neighborhood and even attended Lowell during her primary years of schooling. After we married, we bought a house next door to my wife's great-aunt, in one of the neighborhoods served by Lowell. We currently reside in this house with our three children.

During my years of employment in the Butterfield District, I was mentored by and worked closely with many excellent teachers. I doubt many of these educators' stories will ever be shared beyond their shrinking networks of colleagues or the numerous children and families they worked with in neighborhoods where violence, illness, substance abuse and incarceration have taken away friends and relatives with tragic frequency. I hold these teachers in the highest regard, and given my current position as a doctoral candidate, if in any way I can relate a few of their expressions and experiences for the betterment of my community, other communities on the margins, and ultimately our greater society, then I certainly feel my efforts here to be infinitely worthwhile. In this way, I feel this study moves from a primarily descriptive purpose to include an emancipatory one (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), in that I through this work I might be able to share the struggles, accomplishments, views, and wisdom of a group of exemplary and long-standing teachers in a silenced and marginalized urban community.

Many of my former colleagues, like me, left the Butterfield School District to continue on as educators in different capacities and/or locations. For those I knew best, though complicated,

their reasons consistently involved a sense of burdening constraint and intensification (Apple, 1986, 2001) experienced over the years in BSD schools. I empathize with those reasons encountered in the literature regarding teachers' experiences with top-down, organizational prescription (Fullan, 2003), particularly in heavily-scrutinized school systems: constant changes in leadership, selection of leaders of questionable motivations and abilities, frequent changes in policy and programmatic initiatives, increasingly constraining curriculum, and burdensome additional duties at the building level. These factors, though constant throughout my career, became acutely intolerable in the final years of my public school career. My frustrations may have also grown as I gained in experience and knowledge through my graduate work. As I learned about various historical and current educational trends, curricular traditions, and critical sociological and pedagogical schools of thought, I found it increasingly difficult to follow what I considered to be unfounded and oppressive directives. Those things often required of us through such top-down measures did not better the educational lives of our students, and I came to see myself less as an educator and more as an agent of the power of schools to reproduce class structures and inequities (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1981). This came into direct conflict with my fundamental reasons for becoming and remaining a teacher despite more classroom-centered challenges.

The problems brought on by failed leadership reached their apex for me during a controversial, district-wide "turnaround plan" in my tenth year of teaching. I was forced to relocate from the educational community at Lowell Elementary, a place, as will be seen, filled with contention, but nevertheless a place I loved and was firmly invested in, to a nearby elementary school. This new school community, although similar in neighborhood characteristics to Lowell's and enjoying the benefits of a newer building, was a place I often found to be hostile

in a variety of ways because of its organizational culture. Fundamentally, compared to Lowell, there was a striking lack of diversity among its “hand-picked” teaching staff, and, perhaps not surprisingly, administrative policies marginalized and targeted both students and teachers of color. In this place, I also experienced an abrupt change in demeanor from a white administrator after she met my African American wife and contention while advocating for several of my African American students with “troubling reputations.” During one notable situation, I was repeatedly questioned, with insinuations of misconduct by either me or my student, because a student, an African American girl who had routinely been in trouble throughout her earlier years at the school, began to show significant growth on her district-level standardized test scores. Given these circumstances, coupled with the challenge of supporting a family of five on atrociously-low and stagnant pay through the period of shrinking state budgets after the Great Recession, I felt that pursuing a career in higher education presented a path for both personal and economic relief.

Although I remained a public school classroom teacher for the first two years of my doctoral program, the above-described challenges coupled with the demands of doctoral-level coursework resulted in a largely untenable professional trajectory. At the end of the 2012-13 school year, I resigned my position as a classroom teacher in the Butterfield School District and took a different path as an educator in the field of teacher education. During these transitory years, as I developed ideas for a dissertation, my thoughts returned to the community at Lowell Elementary. While encountering various conceptions of teachers and teaching, curriculum, school contexts, the influence of social and historical forces on education, and critical perspectives, I became focused on the need for the recruitment, development and retention of highly effective teachers in urban schools operating under the most scrutinized and difficult of

circumstances. As I began working with teacher candidates and their supervising classroom teachers in schools in rural and suburban schools, I wrestled with the ideas and issues surrounding various notions of quality in teaching, whom these constructions may advantage or disadvantage, and how such perceptions may shift or remain constant across various social, cultural and economic contexts. Delving deeper into critical evaluations of social construction and indeterminate realities, I became acutely aware of expressions of deficit-oriented viewpoints towards students, groups, and communities. Interrogation of oppressive representations and relationships became particularly important to my work as a researcher and educator, not only because of mounting *critical incidents* (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and encounters with exclusive and essentialized views towards particular groups or content, but also through self-reflection regarding my own participatory actions with such viewpoints. I came to realize the importance of pedagogical approaches described as *culturally relevant* (Ladson-Billings, 1994) or *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2012), and began to think of past and present colleagues' pedagogical practices that might be described as such. These experiences and ponderings led me back to those teachers at Lowell whose practices and interactions with students I knew exemplified highly-effective instruction in an urban context fraught with turmoil. After visiting Lowell in the late spring of 2014 to reconnect with two of them, Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham, and determine their willingness to participate in this work, I began the processes and refinements necessary for this work, thus shifting my identities from those of a former teacher in this school to include those of a visiting researcher.

Thus, I write this work from various temporal, spatial, personal, and social vantage points of the communities within and surrounding Lowell Elementary. In some ways, the various roles and windows of time I have spent in this school necessitate a bifurcation, between teacher and

researcher, in my description of it. In other ways, given the temporal and social continuity of my experiences in this place, a seamless description is also possible. Therefore, in the following section, I attempt both. As a teacher for nearly a decade at Lowell, I bring particular insight into the past and continuous culture within this school and its surrounding community. As researcher, I have added to these past memories and experiences, situating them into theoretical and empirical considerations, while also witnessing recent changes and shifts in the school's community from more of an "outsider's" perspective. As a long-time resident of the surrounding community throughout my time as teacher and researcher at Lowell, I have shared conditions and experiences with the former and current students and families of Lowell, many of whom I still see and interact with during our daily lives outside of schools. Finally, despite perspectives and connections that have evolved over the course of half a lifetime away from my upbringing in a privileged segment of a persistently racist and socially-stratified metropolitan area, and greater society for that matter, my identities, perspectives, and expressions nevertheless remain shaped by formative hegemonic and essentialized views of other people and places.

Research Setting

During the 2015-16 schoolyear, the four teachers selected for this study were classroom teachers at Lowell Elementary. Two of them, Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham, shared concomitant careers with me as a teacher at this school. The remaining participants, Ms. Ford and Ms. Mack, were assigned to Lowell during the Butterfield School District's superintendent's efforts to "stir the pot" between the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. During my return to Lowell as researcher, beginning in 2014, I developed personal, researcher-participant, and professional relationships with Ms. Mack and Ford while also re-affirming my relationships with the Ms. Oldham and Eastman. The participants in this study have taught for either the vast

majority or entirety of their careers in the BSD schools. While other similar and nearby school districts and their teachers could certainly be worthy of consideration in other investigations, the stories and experiences of this district make it unique even among those generalized as “urban” or even “characteristically urban” (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012, p. 434). As a reminder, please note that in describing this district, I shall attempt to give enough information here to fairly represent this place while also preserving anonymity. More details will also emerge outside of this section, as they already have, through descriptions of the researcher’s and participants’ experiences.

To begin, by standard measures of student achievement, the Butterfield School District has and remains one of the lowest performing districts in the state. On statewide standardized testing, elementary grades in the BSD consistently scored, at times drastically, well below statewide elementary scores in math and language arts. For example, during the 2015-16 school year, percentages of BSD students scoring at the lowest score descriptor level in math and language arts for grades three through six were consistently twice or more as those at the statewide level. At the highest score descriptor level, statewide percentages were three to four times as great as those for BSD students for the same content areas and grade levels, with insufficient numbers of students for several grade levels scoring at this advanced level to even warrant an accurate listing of their percentages. Such differences in standardized achievement scores fall well within status quo for score ranges for the last decade. For seventh and eighth grades, these inequalities grow even more severe, and at the secondary school level, although not assessed statewide by grade levels, quantified discrepancies continue. ACT test score averages consistently fell about 25% lower than statewide averages, and graduation rates ranged from 18 to 30% lower than state rates over the last five years.

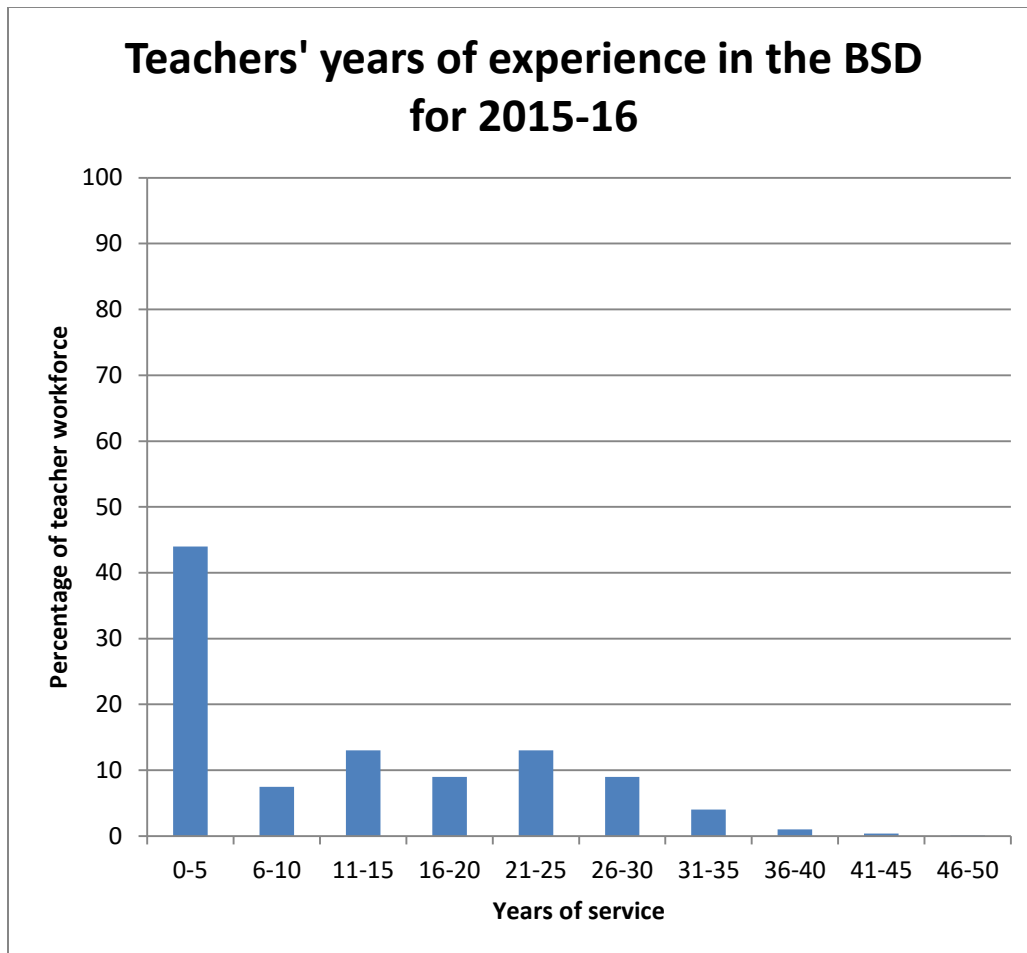
Low achievement outcomes, however, are but one contributing factor in the overall negative reputation this district has in the dominant “public eye” of its surrounding geographic region. Much of this reputation also stems from its location in the high-minority, high-poverty neighborhoods of a city long-suffering from racial and class segregation. Teachers and administrators of the Butterfield School District, particularly those who also lived within its boundaries, commonly expressed the belief that local media unfairly sensationalized and focused on the negative aspects of, and events taking place in, our schools as a means to boost their ratings while ignoring similar events taking place in nearby suburban, predominantly white schools and districts. During my 13 years as a teacher in the BSD, employees were repeatedly warned that discussing anything district-related with members of the media or on social media could be grounds for immediate job termination. In my interactions with individuals not intimately familiar with the Butterfield District or the communities it serves, I have been asked for insight into the district’s negative reputation. At times, these conversations began quite coarsely, with questions like, “Are they ever going to get their acts together?” and at times, my responses are more than or different than what the asker apparently expected.

Over the last two decades, the Butterfield District has lost state full accreditation, gained provisional accreditation, lost its provisional status, and regained provisional status yet again. During this time, the district has had eight superintendents. Despite the frequency and severity of the changes accompanying shifts in leadership, policies, and structures, administrative rhetoric regarding things such as data-driven accountability, performance goals, tracked instruction, curricular fidelity, and “customer service” has remained remarkably constant. For example, during my final years at Lowell Elementary, the recently hired superintendent of our district, a man trained by a major, corporately funded foundation to run public educational systems through

corporate modelling, one Kumashiro (2012) described as a proponent of “venture philanthropy,” implemented the aforementioned and unprecedented “turnaround plan” that, among other severe constraints, included the closing of nearly half of the district’s schools, laying-off and redistribution of staff, and “buyout packages” of \$20,000 being offered to teachers who had reached, and in some cases nearly reached, retirement age. All of the participants in this study would have been eligible to receive these retirement bonuses but did not partake.

During this time in the Butterfield School District, with less than two weeks before the opening of schools one August, nearly 200 certified classroom teachers were abruptly laid off. Many of those fired had been placed on “Professional Improvement Plans” for low test scores and less-than-stellar administrative teacher evaluations, while others reported strong evaluations but lacked organizational seniority. As replacements, over 150 Teach For American teachers were hired and given classroom positions in our district. While collaborating and mentoring several of these TFA teachers during this year, they recounted to me how in an exclusive meeting with the superintendent, he had called them his “soldiers” in the fight against the problems plaguing the district, and these included a union-protected, ineffective, and recalcitrant traditional teaching force. In an individual meeting between the superintendent, a department head and me around that same time, he confirmed these views in an attempt to draw me into participating in a pilot pay-for-performance scheme for classroom teachers.

Not surprisingly, teacher attrition within the Butterfield School District, whether viewed as such or not by those at the top, has remained problematic. According to their department of human resources, the district employed around 1,200 teachers as of May 2016. The following graph breaks down percentages of these teachers by their years of experience within this district:



As is readily apparent, a significant percentage of the teachers' are relatively new to the BSD. Even more striking, however, is the amount of turnover within the ranks of their most recently hired teachers. During the 2014-15 school year, 24% of their 238 new hires exited the district after one year; and during the 2015-16 school year, 40% of 180 new hires did the same. Although the district's department of human resources was unable to share comprehensive data for years of experience in the profession for their teachers, the above-described turnover rates certainly indicate a variety of negative conditions created by and/or resulting from these rates.

Situated within the various changes and upheavals brought on by greater national, metropolitan and district level trends described above, the educational community within Lowell

Elementary has endured for generations. Relying upon my experiences in this place as teacher and researcher, I offer this description as a means for situating the professional lives and challenges faced by the participants during their work as teachers at Lowell. Barely escaping closure in 2010, the school has remained a place of hope, pride, and challenges. Located in an older, central section of the Butterfield, Lowell is indeed what may be considered a “neighborhood school.” Surrounded on all sides by houses and three-story apartment buildings, it remains unseen unless one drives down an adjacent street. During my time at Lowell as teacher and researcher, the majority of students walked to and from school because of their homes’ close proximity to the school. During dismissal time, it was common to see groups of siblings, cousins, neighbors, and other relations, containing both current and former students, heading out in various directions from the school into the surrounding community.

Appearances and conditions of poverty pervade this community. Abandoned buildings, crumbling infrastructure, gang-related graffiti, and signs of violence appear in multiple forms, from bullet shattered windows on businesses to spontaneously, yet carefully, created memorials on street corners where loved-ones have died by gunfire. Situated just south of a heavily industrialized section of Butterfield, on days when the winds blow from the North, a foul, industrial odor pervades the air. On the bad days, it causes throat irritation and triggers asthma in susceptible individuals, which now includes all five members of my family. In spite of these outward signs of detriment, those of vibrancy and life also abound. Stores featuring bright coats of paint and messages in a variety of languages and alphabets line various neighborhood districts. Traffic bustles along the main thoroughfares, while many others get around on foot or by bicycle. Throughout the neighborhoods, the sounds of renewal can be heard through the hammering down of new roofs and the play of children. This is a place where people often fix

and maintain their own belongings and property, where tools, expertise and abilities are freely shared among neighbors if a wheel bearing needs to be replaced on the family vehicle or a dangerous tree cut down. On Sunday afternoons, bells from a local church belt out familiar melodies, and various block parties and community festivals are aplenty during months of fair weather. Pickup soccer games, football practices, and celebratory barbeques are regular sights in the many parks. During fair weather, it is not uncommon to run into a familiar or unfamiliar face and strike up a lighthearted but meaningful conversation while working in the yard. Some residents' families have lived in the neighborhoods surrounding Lowell for generations, while others represent the first generation from afar to call this place home. Many have immigrated here under refugee-status or simply in hopes of seeking better situations and lives for their families. In my time as teacher at Lowell, I had students' whose families had recently moved to the community from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Vietnam, and Cambodia. One of my practicum students doing her fieldwork at a middle school fed by Lowell recently reported that within her class alone there were ten different student home languages, and at least 15 schoolwide.

As a school site, Lowell Elementary was originally built in the late 19th century and largely torn down and rebuilt in 1960. Despite being remodeled in the 1990's, during my time at this school, from 2001 to 2010, the building lacked many of the "amenities" I would have expected from a recently updated building. After revisiting the school during my work for this project, I found that many of these facility constraints remained, and appeared to me in starker contrast compared to the regional suburban and rural schools I routinely visited in my recent work as a teacher educator. During my time as teacher at Lowell, our building managers and other veteran staff members often lamented about how poorly the recent remodeling had been

conducted despite a large amount of money being devoted towards the project. In the following anecdotes, the degree and effect of inadequate building-level facilities at Lowell Elementary will be described. As a note, although presented in the past tense, unless otherwise noted, the conditions described therein were current as of the end of the 2015-16 school year.

Until my departure from the school in 2010, air conditioning was limited to only the library, computer lab, and central office. During the beginning and end of every school year, we did our best to get our best instruction done in the morning hours, before the afternoon heat of the city blowing through our windows, heat from brick and mortar walls, blasts of industrial-sized fans, rustling of blowing papers, turned our rooms into 90+ degree ovens. Since my departure from Lowell as teacher, window AC units had been installed in most classrooms; but as I learned as a researcher at Lowell, these performed at various degrees of effectiveness. In winter months, heat in the building often remained insufficient to the point that students wore coats in certain classrooms. In others, the heat blasted to the point that windows were opened to make the rooms bearable. Structurally, Lowell's roof and plumbing leaked onto ceiling tiles, causing them to become moldy and crumble in places. And perhaps worst of all, the building's sewage system at times backed up to the point that the student and staff restrooms were rendered either inoperable or worse. On one occasion, during a particularly bad period of plumbing issues, raw sewage and water overflowed from last operable restrooms into the immediate hallway. Several classes of students and teachers, including my own, were trapped in it while trying to take a final restroom break. I recall looking over at the other fifth-grade teacher as we stood like statues in the half inch pool of wastewater. I shot him a look that asked, "You know what we're standing in?" His verbal response was quick and to the point, "When I go home I'm taking two showers." During these building-level, health-threatening events, school was never closed.

Beyond these intermittent and very apparent failures of infrastructure, more constant and subtle health threats existed. Pests, such as insects and rodents, were frequent sources of discomfort and distraction. On occasion, a cockroach crawling across the floor, desk, or shoulder would send students jumping and screaming. During warm weather, with the windows open, wasps and other flying insects often entered our classrooms to buzz in the faces of students as they listened and worked. To ensure an environment that was conducive to learning, I became quite adept at quickly and subtly removing an offending insect or pest. On numerous occasions, even during my time as researcher at Lowell, I was called to another teacher's classroom to swat a marauding wasp or remove a mouse found in a sticky trap. Even more subtle forms of infestation, those of the single-celled variety, posed potential threats to the health of individuals Lowell Elementary's. There has been a long-standing and common belief among veteran teachers of the Butterfield School District that many of its buildings are sources of endemic sickness via unclean and aging ventilations systems, moldy ceiling tiles, littered crawlspaces, etc. During my year at McClellan Elementary, respiratory illnesses were very common among students and staff. The schools windowless and poorly-lit corridors and rooms, leaking roof, moldy ceiling, and other past and present conditions made it a quite-obvious candidate for a condition recognized by the EPA (1991) as "sick-building syndrome." I experienced a resurgence in my childhood asthma and was plagued by regular respiratory infections throughout the year. Much worse, our school's secretary unexpectedly and tragically passed away from pneumonia within 48 hours of leaving work because she did not feel well.

At Lowell Elementary, which unlike McClellan, had windows that could be opened to allow in fresh air, occurrences of respiratory illnesses nevertheless remained readily recognizable. Perhaps, the benefits of windows may have been negated in part to our proximity

to the industrial districts of Butterfield, the resulting levels of sulfur dioxide pollution in the air, and its inflammatory effects on our respiratory systems. During my first years at this school, I was hospitalized briefly for walking pneumonia and went through numerous rounds of antibiotics for frequent respiratory infections. Over the years, students and colleagues also went through enough bouts of similar illnesses and hospitalizations that, in retrospect, these seemed routine. In the course of my recent visits to Lowell in December of 2015, I once again became quite sick with walking pneumonia. This was something I had not experienced since my time working at the school. After my recovery and return to Lowell in late January of 2016, I learned that two teachers at the school had also recently been hospitalized with walking pneumonia, and could clearly see and hear that several of the participating teachers and many of their students were suffering from respiratory ailments. Although stories of illnesses in these Butterfield schools do not provide sufficient evidenced for the presence of endemic pathogens or conditions conducive to respiratory illnesses, I hope that reporting these observations and personal experiences at least provides additional insight into the possible daily challenges faced by those living out their educational and professional lives within the walls of Lowell Elementary.

Descriptions of conditions and life inside of Lowell Elementary would be incomplete without some description of the more tangible effects of outside conditions, beyond air quality, on the students, educators, staff, administrators, and families who attend this school. As described, visible street-level crime has been a constant reality in the neighborhoods surrounding the school. During my time as teacher, multiple break-ins occurred during the school year or over our summer vacation. In some years, our school was burglarized with regularity, while in others this may have occurred once or not at all. Although few items were taken, perhaps because we had learned to secure and hide valuable items, the purpose of breaking into the

building may often have been mere vandalism, with graffiti or ransacked rooms being the most common result. I recall entering my classroom near the end of one summer vacation to find my outdated, but serviceable, student computers tossed to the floor with their outer shells cracked or shattered into pieces. To my relief, they all powered back up once the mess was cleaned up.

Vandalism and acts of graffiti also occurred with frequency on the school grounds. In various iterations, the shifting territories and arrival of new gangs into the neighborhood was presaged on the large, whitewashed retaining walls surrounding the school. During one particularly active year, our principal purchased several gallons of white paint and paintbrushes to combat the problem. She left them at the bottom of the stairwell leading out to the large play area bordered by a wall that presented a particularly desirable target for showcasing the names of gang members and their rivals. With ruthless persistence, after several gallons of paint and many washing of brushes, my students and I made it clear that any message on the wall would not survive 24 hours after its appearance. Our efforts, coupled with the fact that several of the likely participants were also former students, whom I was able to speak with when they came to the school to pick up younger siblings, brought an end to these occurrences.

The presence of dried spray paint on walls, however, paled in comparison to the less frequent, but more serious danger presented by gang activity to the lives of Lowell's children, families, and staff members. Even beyond gang-related activities, verbal and physical confrontations were a relatively constant factor in the lives of the school's community members. If not directly participated in or suffered by, acts of aggression have at least been witnessed by individuals on and around Lowell's grounds with traumatic frequency. Playground and classroom fights occurred in spaces where staff presence failed or was limited, and fights on the way home from school or over the weekend in neighborhoods were reported to staff members or,

worse, rekindled in spaces such as hallways or the cafeteria. With the availability of social media access for many students, current teachers of Lowell also described how conflicts originating in cyberspace have carried into their classrooms. Beyond the possibility for student-on-student conflict and violence, there has also remained a potential threat of aggression against Lowell's students by youth who did not attend the school. On several occasions, I had to physically prevent older children and individuals who had come to the school with the expressed intent of confronting or assaulting one of my fifth- or sixth-grade students because of a conflict she or he had with a family member.

On other occasions, particularly during the years that Lowell was set up as a school housing grades K-8, which is a whole other story in itself, our upper-elementary and middle-school aged students with growing gang affiliations were at times threatened and/or physically assaulted by rival gang members during our dismissal procedures. In one incident, our principal, Ms. Jeffrey, was barely able to thwart a group of young men as they tried to force their way onto a bus containing several seventh and eighth-grade students affiliated with a contending set. Fortunately, she was able to keep them off the bus despite efforts that included climbing on top of the bus and attempting to pull open its roof emergency hatches. Visibly shaken, she recounted the incident to our "security team," which was basically all of the male staff members at the school, in the school's office. I recall that not one of us had been there to assist her because we had been on the other side of the school at the time, trying to prevent a repeat of an even worse incident that had occurred the day before. Two vehicles carrying students and their older relatives affiliated with rival groups had exchanged gunfire just feet away from the large crowd gathered outside the school doors during our dismissal time. When this occurred, children and adults scattered in all directions or pushed their way back into the school in a mad rush to find

safety. Miraculously, no one was hit by any of the bullets. Within seconds, the entire area, normally bustling with life and activity, was completely empty and silent. I remember flagging down a passing squad car and pointing to the spent shells littering the street that the officers in order to get them to stop and enter the school after they drove by several times.

Beyond dangers to life and happiness for its members while on school grounds, there also remained the very real effects of concentrated poverty and lack of opportunities within the greater community surrounding Lowell Elementary. Over the years, students and families have shared countless stories of and bore the signs of various the traumas with me and other teachers working at Lowell. As a teacher at Lowell, student experiences with robberies, house break-ins, street fights, drive-by shootings, dog attacks, domestic abuse, neglect, exposure to poisonous substances, substance abuse, brutality at the hands of law enforcement, inadequate medical attention, sexual abuse and assault, and other tragedies, are all clearly etched in my mind. As a researcher, I was reminded of the continuing dangers and traumas faced by students at Lowell from stories shared during conversations with participants. As a resident of this community, I am reminded of these conditions through daily experience and wariness for my family's safety.

For our family, experiences with turmoil in our neighborhood at times feel un-relatable to people from other communities or those without similar experiences. Differences in experiences and communities, however, are not objectifiable and in the act of sharing or not sharing, agents' identities, histories, and perspectives of the world and each other determine the course of our interactions. Therefore, more than simple differences of experiences have stifled our interactions with others. We know with some people, based upon previous interactions, that our experiences with turmoil will likely reinscribe essentialized notions of our lives and community. Sharing a story of a recent traumatic event is hard when the first thing you expect to hear is, "Well, why

don't you just move?" Still, while distancing us from some, our experiences have brought us closer to others. Sharing my family's stories and experiences with former students and co-workers became points for mutual understanding, support, and social critique. Internally, they lead to increased recognition of the possible contentions presented by dissimilar life experiences, backgrounds, and outlooks between students and teachers, teachers and other teachers, and teachers and administrators. These differences were highlighted by the fact that the teachers who visited our home to check on us after the above-described attempted break-in were only those who also lived in similar neighborhoods of our city, as well as countless other occasions. Evidence of the barriers of comfort and experience that existed between some members of Lowell's educational community and the wider community in which they worked abounded. From differences in reactions by staff members to the same behaviors by students of differing racial groups, to the normatively expressed view by teachers living in the predominantly white suburbs of Butterfield's metropolitan to leave "before it gets dark", to the recounted distress of traveling through "an unfamiliar neighborhood" for a professional development meeting, to calling a sixth-grade black male student "a real thug," discrete to painfully obvious expressions of racism and classism continuously reinforced boundaries between *self* and *other* (Fine, 1994) at Lowell. Although I often, perhaps because of my privilege to do so, found myself seeking to navigate these differences and constructively engage individual expressions, for others with lifelong experiences as residents, students, and teachers in the historically minoritized communities of Butterfield, such expressions were met with open contention. As several of the participants used to say, teachers who came to the community but acted like they did not want to be there were nothing more than "thieves in the temple."

These descriptions of life in and around Lowell Elementary, however, are not intended to paint a picture of despair or essentialize this community as constantly suffering or its residents as perpetual victims. I remain particularly aware of this danger given my identity and expressions as a white male, as well as normative perceptions among this work's potential audience. Given my positions, as a member of this community in various ways for a good portion of my life, teacher educator, and scholar, however, I also feel compelled to share these experiences. As one of the participants, Ms. Oldham, said to me when I raised issues of representation vis-à-vis my positionality in this time, place and work:

You've been, you've been down these roads, this is not anything new to you, you've been exposed to this, so why wouldn't you? ...I mean, this is not *some thing*, you're not just walking in here and have not been exposed to this. You live this!

Moreover, I feel I would remain grossly negligent if I did not recount the effects of historical, racial, and social on and within the community my family and I have called home for over a decade. As Lubienski (2003) argued, obscuring these well-documented and very real conditions not only makes rectification or mitigation more difficult but also turns away from the lived experiences of persons and groups that critical educational scholarship "seeks to serve" (p. 30). Nevertheless, as a member of this community, and a proud one at that, I would also be critically negligent if I did not provide a counter-narrative to the stories presented thus far of this place and time. As said, the community in and around Lowell has persisted despite these challenges, and so, to move beyond my, perhaps, ego-centric assertions here, something should be said of the strength, resilience, and character of this community and its members.

For example, although many disturbing incidents over the years took place during dismissal procedures on school grounds, such events and turmoil represented punctuations in a much greater timeline of positive events and personal interactions at this time of day at Lowell. As said, the vast majority of Lowell's students lived in close proximity to the school, and so, on any given school-day afternoon, the doorways on the side of the building designated for "Parent pick-ups and walkers" would be flooded with a multitude of people, perhaps several hundred, gathering and slowly dispersing into the neighborhood in daily convocation. Even in harsh weather, it was a place for greater community members to gather, say goodbye, meet with former teachers and students, and pass along vital information, such as academic progress or an upcoming absence for a particular student. It was a time of celebration after a long day, of camaraderie and recognition of efforts, a time to reflect upon accomplishments or mistakes, and a time to share continued caring and support with visiting alumni. Recent observations of this time and place at Lowell in my researcher role confirm this daily occurrence and event remains largely unchanged.

Well beyond this occurrence, a vibrant and solid educational community has persisted at Lowell despite the described constraints. During my time as teacher at Lowell, the communal bonds between students, staff members, and educators, though strained or openly contentious at times, were nevertheless forged and strengthened in the face of these challenges. Often the positive aspects of these professional and personal relationships extended well beyond the imposed structures of bricks or school calendars. As gradual and sudden shifts in students and staff have occurred over the years, new relationships have formed and others have persisted. Although recountments of the positive aspects of life at Lowell could proceed in significantly

more detail, I believe a few specific examples will serve to round-out this work's description of the lives of individuals at Lowell Elementary.

In my years of experience as a teacher, student researcher, and teacher educator, it has been a rare sight to visit a school community with as much cultural and ethnic/racial diversity as the student population at Lowell Elementary. Despite a nearly, if not completely, exclusive set of poor- and working-class (Lareau, 2002) income levels among attending families, geographical ranges for the origins of the school's families ranged from those having lived in the neighborhood for generations to families that moved from places such as Somalia or Burma within a matter of days. Ethnic diversity among staff members at Lowell, although majority European American, was and has, nevertheless, remained higher than a vast majority of the schools encountered in my educational travels. Although, as has been described and will be addressed again, incidents of othering and other oppressive behaviors were visited upon certain staff and students by other staff members in particular moments at Lowell, our diversity and multicultural backgrounds were frequently recognized and celebrated.

Many of these celebrations came about through the work of Lowell Elementary's long-time music educator, Ms. Yvonne. A long-time teacher at the school, with a tenure that began before my start in 2001 and continues to this day, Ms. Yvonne is an African American woman with a background in opera and a talent for orchestrating memorable schoolwide performances as well as more intimate celebrations. I have spoken with her and heard about her continued work on several occasions during my recent visits to Lowell as researcher, but because I have not observed her most recent work at the school with the level of closeness I once enjoyed, my account here will focus on past experiences with Ms. Yvonne and observations of her interactions within the community from my time as teacher at Lowell. I recall that during her

regular music classes, she continuously developed students' musical and language awareness through direct instruction, intense practice, and emphasis on performance. Much of what Ms. Yvonne accomplished with students, however, extended well beyond the confines of her classroom auditorium and scheduled class times. Culminations of classroom efforts occurred throughout each school year in the form of magnificent programs, recognitions of accomplishments and talents, and celebrations of diversity in Lowell's large auditorium. Examples of these affirmations included yearly winter holiday programs, administrator appreciation ceremonies, Black History Month programs, and end-of-the-year promotions for our school's exiting classes of students, and a spring talent show. Leading up to every one of these events, Ms. Yvonne recruited numbers of classes and students from all grade levels to fulfill various roles as performers, choral singers, soloists, dancers, masters of ceremonies, speakers, ushers, stage hands, production managers, decorators, etc. As regular classroom teachers, we knew to keep our classroom schedules flexible as students would likely be pulled out in intervals to rehearse or operate logistics during final preparations for big productions. These activities often provided some of our striving students' outlets for their energies, recognition for their abilities and efforts, and structure in their work habits. I particularly appreciated these preparations as times to engage in cooperative creation of decorations for the auditorium.

Members of Lowell Elementary's immediate and extended community gathered together during these events. Always a grand production, winter holiday programs were particularly so because they brought out the largest turnout of our students' families, as well as school board members, district administrators, and our representative in the state legislature. These programs featured a broad array of various holiday activities, skits performed in different languages, and moving performances that at times included what seemed to be impromptu participation from

Ms. Yvonne, whose beautiful voice belied her operatic background, as well as our principal, Ms. Jeffrey, herself an accomplished singer within her church and our district. Ms. Yvonne and Ms. Jeffrey also collaborated in performances to ensure our schools' end-of-year celebration of promotion was no less of an important and moving affair. The "fifth," "sixth," or "eighth" grade, depending on our school's configuration at the time, "promotion" ceremony was Lowell's version of a secondary or tertiary level graduation. Everyone dressed up for the occasion, which featured the wearing of caps and gowns, provided by the school, awarding of certificates, recognition of particular student accomplishments, farewell speeches by teachers, administrators and local leaders as well as law enforcement officers, and a reception afterward where we gathered to give thanks and say our farewells. As a teacher of the oldest grades for most of my time at Lowell, I recall several particularly emotional moments while delivering a farewell speech in an oppressively hot auditorium packed with students, family members, and staff members or while receiving expressions of gratitude from proud parents taking final pictures of their children and their teachers.

While I witnessed and participated in a number of Ms. Yvonne's schoolwide celebrations at Lowell, I also experienced communal inclusiveness fostered through her more personal collaborations and celebrations. In addition to her talents for instruction, organizing, and performing, Ms. Yvonne also brought members of Lowell's community together through her culinary talents. In many ways, the care we felt from her and for each other, despite our differences, found root in her culinary expressions. Staff development days, teacher work days, teacher appreciation days, visits from our state's department of education, and more personal, events such as staff birthdays or soon-to-arrive new family members were marked by Ms. Yvonne's efforts to bring people to together. Most salient in my mind, however, and something

that I have told her we will remain indebted to her for, were the various celebratory showers she hosted for my wife and me at Lowell during the early years of our union. As a couple, we had deep roots at Lowell, with my wife having attended the school as a student years before, one of her former teachers still worked there, her then recent work there as a custodian, and my years of teaching there. We were often regarded with fondness by staff members who knew both of us personally and professionally through warm regards, compliments, jokes, and recollections of our initial encounters at the school. Depending on the teller, we still fondly hear how one of us “swept” the other “off [his/her] feet” when visiting with former co-workers. Moreover, being an inter-racial union of a black woman and a white man, in a school where contention among staff members often centered around racial divisions, our relationship also seemed to carry a certain significance by serving as a focal point around which members of various factions could come together outside of their professional obligations. Ms. Yvonne, with the support of Ms. Jeffrey and the assistance of our school’s librarian, brought about and hosted these gatherings in Lowell’s library in the form of our wedding shower, and all three of our children’s baby showers. These celebrations were significant sources of emotional and material support for our growing family when members from both of our extended families, and particularly my own, remained unsupportive or openly hostile towards our relationship.

In writing these accounts of life at Lowell Elementary, I further express my position in this work while also attempting to present the reader with a “thicker” description (Geertz, 1973) of the educational context in which the participants have continued their significant careers. Recounting my experiences with these conditions and situations has been an emotionally charged and reflective exercise, one in which certain memories have triggered forgotten occurrences or shelved feelings, that I have attempted to piece into a succinct and coherent account. I owe much

of who I was, am, and will be as an educator and person to the individuals and situations I encountered at Lowell Elementary. The struggles we faced and overcame as individuals and as a community will ever serve to be a source of inspiration for as long as I have a voice in this world. The challenges that proved too much or beyond our control, will likewise serve as a personal and shared source of bitterness towards the blind application of business-model approaches towards educational communities striving within American society and public education. The “turnaround” reorganization that upended the community at Lowell in 2010 sent many members of the educational at Lowell directly into retirement. Others, such as myself and several close colleagues, resigned within the next three years after being sent to other reorganized schools, where lack of shared experiences and diminished senses of belonging among staff member provided little support in the face continued top-down pressures. Still, significant numbers of staff members, including Ms. Yvonne, and two of the participants, Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham remained in their positions at Lowell, while two others, Ms. Ford and Ms. Mack, found themselves joining the community at Lowell when their school, located less than five minutes away from Lowell by car and within sight of my house, was shuttered during the reorganization. Describing life within and around Lowell Elementary in terms of a community with particular characteristics, as with any attempt to assert an identity, remains elusive, constantly evolving and ultimately contained within my interpretation. Nevertheless, though dependent on presentation and perception, and changed and presently changing through various policies and shifts in memberships, characteristics, and challenges, it is my hope here that certain characteristics and conditions at the school may be interpreted with some continuity.

Some of these characteristics may be additionally detailed through an accounting of more statistically-oriented realities at Lowell Elementary. Although exact figures will not be employed

for the continued purpose of anonymity, rounded figures based on exact figures obtained from Lowell's home state's department of education website may provide useful quantitative descriptions of the educational community within the school. Lowell's student population during the 2015-16 school year was over 500 students, and this represents the pinnacle in a steady population growth from about 300 students during my first years as teacher there. Currently, the school serves grades kindergarten through sixth, but it has also included preschool as well as middle-school grades over the past decade. About 40% of the students' families during the 2015-16 school year identified their child as Hispanic, around 40% as Black, and the remaining families split fairly evenly between White and Asian-American identifications. Group representations within the student population has steadily changed over the last ten years, with numbers of Hispanic and white students slowly decreasing, down from about 60% and 20% respectively in 2006; and numbers of black and Asian students have slowly increased, up from less than 20% and 5% respectively in 2006. These shifts in group identities have occurred amidst changes in school attendance boundaries, shifting neighborhood demographics within the greater metropolitan area, and influxes of new immigrant groups from various parts of the world. When I started at Lowell, about 85% of its families qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch. Over the last decade, this figure has steadily risen to its current level of 100% of families qualifying.

In 2015, over 50% of students at Lowell qualified for ELL/LEP services. Just under 10% qualified for SPED services. The percentage of students in tested grades at Lowell scoring at the highest standardized levels, i.e. those considered "proficient or above," was half of statewide percentages for the 2014-2015 and 2015-16 school years in language arts, and significantly less than half for mathematics. The reverse was essentially true at the lowest achievement descriptor, with percentages of Lowell students scoring at the "below basic" level being twice those of

statewide percentage for both of language arts and math in the same years and grade levels. These building-level percentages generally comport with district averages in matching categories and years. When disaggregated by grade levels, however, one grade level did stand out at Lowell for the 2015-16 school year with achievement level percentages that closely approached or matched statewide percentages. This was a grade level and subject exclusively by one of the participants described in the following selection.

Participant Selection

As said, given the purpose and underlying epistemological and methodological assumptions of this study, participant selection was conducted purposefully. Selection criteria included temporal, spatial, and qualitative considerations. In a holistic treatment of these considerations, I describe and justify actual selection criteria for participants. In justifying these selection criteria, both practical and empirical limitations are examined. In many ways, these justifications of selection intersect with justifications for this study, and, therefore, certain conditions and realities examined in the first chapter are revisited.

To begin, in terms of time, to qualify for consideration, candidates had to be current classroom teachers in the Butterfield School District with at least two continuous decades of classroom experience in this district. During their tenures, they were not to have taken any other positions, such as that of administrators, full-time instructional coaches, central-office staff, or any other positions requiring them to resign from their roles as full-time classroom teachers. They might, however, have taken on additional roles as teacher mentors, instructional leaders, etc., as long as these did not remove them from their classroom positions. Thus, the careers of teachers selected for this study may be described, in the aforementioned term, as *stayers*

(Cochran-Smith (2004), or those who remain in the same school and classroom roles from one school year to the next. Although these career classifications may be problematic for a variety of reasons, such as differing racial and generational opportunities (Johnson, 2007), and although the selected participants for this study did move between schools for reasons largely beyond their control, for the purpose of participant selection the term *stayers* will refer to teachers who maintained decades-long classroom careers in BSD schools serving the city's most marginalized neighborhoods. Although it initially seemed reasonable to extend participation in this study to *leavers* and *movers* from BSD with decades of classroom experience, I felt that engaging exclusively with *stayers* provided insights into the unique perspectives of teachers maintained, and at the time currently sustained, classroom careers in this place and through time.

Restricting participation in this way, however, presented practical limitations for recruiting larger numbers of participants in this study. In my experiences as a teacher and researcher in the Butterfield Schools District, stories of *movers* and *leavers* abounded. During my early years of teaching in this district, long-standing veteran teachers, many with careers beginning in the late 1960 and early 70's were not difficult to find. Most of my early mentoring experiences and many of my first professional associations were with these experienced educators. Generally speaking, these individuals were black and white female teachers whose pedagogical prowess and calm demeanors in the face of various adversities I could do nothing less than admire. Although obtaining reliable data regarding years of teaching experience for this district's workforce during these years would be very difficult, if not impossible given extensive turnover, relocation, and reconfiguration of staff and leadership as well as difficulties encountered in seeking current teacher experience data, former colleagues and participants consistently concurred that the teaching workforce in the BSD was once significantly more

experienced than it is today. During preparations for this work, I learned from former colleagues and family members through various interactions in the community or via social media that the vast majority of the veteran teachers I worked with over the years had left the district. Many reached retirement age and simply retired from the profession. Others reached the district's retirement age, retired from it, and then moved on to become educators in suburban districts around the Butterfield metropolitan area. Through these various avenues of attrition, the ranks of *movers* and *leavers* from the BSD have swelled while the number of *stayers* has dwindled. For many years, broad communities of veteran teachers with decades-long associations and shared histories that transcended school closings, reassignments, transfers, and other tumults used to turn district-wide trainings and convocations into impromptu reunions, but now, as Ms. Oldham put it "There's not too many of us left nowadays." In this way, the pool of potential candidates for participation in this study was significantly limited. Knowledge of the communal ties between veteran teachers of the BSD, however, provided potential avenues for seeking out teachers with significant years of experience in this place.

Beyond current employment status, the qualifying career length of two decades was selected as this seemed to coincide with a variety of considerations found in the literature. Although years of experience has been called into question as an indicator of teacher quality (Huang & Moon, 2009), it, nevertheless, remains important for several reasons. First of all, there is considerable evidence to suggest that years of experience correlates positively with teacher effectiveness (Nye et al., 2004; WSIPP, 2012), with some researchers contending that it is a "consistently strong predictor" (Darling-Hammonds et al., 2005, p. 4) and others finding that it may be so only during the early years of experience (Rivkin et al., 2005, Kane et al. 2006). In one widely-held view, teachers generally do not come into the prime of their pedagogical

practice until around seven years into their careers (Carroll & Foster, 2010), and, according to Ericsson (1996), ten years is a rough timetable for developing expertise in many professions. Pushing the timetable for maximizing effectiveness even further, Huang and Moon (2009), found that the most effective teachers of reading in low-performing, high-poverty schools had 19-24 years of experience. A strong body of research also demonstrates that more effective teachers are less likely to leave (Ronfeldt et al., 2013), and, therefore, staying in the profession for a significant portion of one's life increases the likelihood that a teacher has been successful at what she/he does as well as indicates that certain other factors, such as passion, dedication, and other internal motivators remain inextricably linked to educator longevity and effectiveness. Finally, utilizing first and second-hand research, Day and Gu (2014), described teacher careers in terms of stages. Beyond 15 years of experience, teachers' careers were less defined by existential tensions, such as self-efficacy and professional identity, and more characterized by individuals seeking stability amidst external tensions, such as the need to balance workload with personal factors, cope with change, and maintain motivation and commitment amidst various challenges in their professional environments. Therefore, from a selection standpoint, a minimum career length of twenty-five years seemed sufficient and advantageous for obtaining rich and in-depth perspectives of capable teachers maintaining career trajectories in our current educational landscape.

In terms of space and place, selection of participants was restricted to teachers from the Butterfield School District for several reasons. Given national and local needs to recruit and retain teachers in "hard to staff" districts and schools (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003), I felt the BSD provided an appropriate environment for selecting teachers who have defied current and national trends. Relying upon my own years of experience with the pervasively immediate

challenges of creating classroom environments conducive to student learning in this underfunded, urban public district, as well as my experiences in numerous other schools and districts throughout Butterfield's geographical region, I contended that successfully remaining a teacher in BSD schools is a particularly difficult trajectory to maintain. I recalled how many new or less-seasoned teachers resigned their positions in the BSD within a year or two, and some even did so mid-year, because they were unable to effectively establish classroom environments that were conducive to growth. Through my experiences, I can also fairly assert that a lack of solid classroom management was not only easily identifiable in the BSD schools, but created dangers and liabilities for teachers and administrators that required direct attention and redirection if one's employment status was to be maintained. This is not to say, however, that less-than-effective teachers remained in classroom positions for multiple years. I recall several notable examples of this, as well as situations where entire schools were generally places of frequent disruption, thus, making reasonably effective and meaningful evaluation of individual teachers unlikely for a number of reasons. Nevertheless, I think it may fairly be argued that pressure from various sources, whether internal through the daily stress of a poorly managed classroom, situated through the effects of working in a generally antagonistic and chaotic school environment, or top-down through disciplinary actions of building administrators under increasing pressure from above, forced many teacher out of the BDS and required a certain degree of effectiveness and expertise for others to maintain their positions as classroom teachers over an extended period of time. In this way, coupled with the previously described contextual challenges within this study's research setting, limiting selection of participants to BDS schools became a justifiable place for selecting participants who work and have worked in particularly challenging professional contexts.

This brings us to the final initial selection criteria for this work, namely, that selected teachers also had to be good at what they do. As Gu and Day (2007) contended, effectiveness and resilience intertwine. From an interpretive standpoint, I would contend that interpretations of teachers' professional resilience, at least for the purpose of seeking "resilient" teachers to participate in a work such as this, justifiably requires perceived effectiveness of these individual's pedagogical approaches. Justification for this component presents a number of facets for consideration, and this is accomplished here in three parts. First, I discuss why effective teaching is important to this study. Second, I describe how good teaching is defined in this work despite competing interpretations and measurements of teacher effectiveness. Finally, relying upon this definition, I present evidence to show how the participants were determined to have met this qualifier.

Importance of teacher quality. To begin, including a component of teacher quality in this work's selection methodology may simply come down to my thoughts about what makes stories worth experiencing or appealing in the first place. After all, there would have little point in watching *To Sir, with Love* (1967) had "Sir's" pedagogy not positively impacted his students' lives in meaningful ways. However, beyond the appeal of the "teacher as savior" (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 93) story, necessary pragmatic and ethical considerations also exist given the purposes of this work. It is an unfortunate reality that ineffective teachers sometimes remain in their positions for decades, and evidence exists to show that less effective educators, at least by standardized measurements of effectiveness and quality, are more often staffed in traditionally disadvantaged schools and districts (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). Thus, in a work that emphasizes teacher retention, I also felt compelled to acknowledge Ingersoll's (2014) assertion that turnover may benefit an organization by removing "low-caliber performers" (p. 26) and

reducing stagnation of ideas. Although the latter of these benefits is not synonymous with effective instruction, I would argue that effective instruction remains either intertwined with innovation or conceptually precludes it. Thus, I feel providing sufficient rationale for why these teachers' pedagogical practices and careers are significant in terms of longevity of experience as well as their positive effects on student lives becomes essential beyond simply telling a good story. Moreover, in heavily-scrutinized districts and schools, where the most extreme "intensification" (Apple, 1986, 2001; Valli & Buese, 2007), or *intensifications*, of professional lives have likely been experienced by educators, should we not strive are hardest to keep and retain only the most effective and resourceful teachers? Given the needs of the students, families, and communities, such as daily challenges presented to those living in Butterfield's central neighborhoods, I felt ethically obligated both as a teacher, researcher, school parent, and community member to select teachers who have made significant differences in their students' lives over the greatest periods of time.

Definition of 'good' teaching. By accepting that quality does matter in terms of retention, and particularly so in contexts similar to those in which this study was conducted, we must then consider what constitutes "good" teaching, how this might be conceptualized, and how this notion might be usefully constructed for this work. To begin, perhaps an examination of predominant definitions of high-quality instruction is warranted. If we look to recent definitions at the policy-level one of NCLB's precepts, and legacies at this point, has been to ensure there is "A Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom" (USDE, 2005); and according to the Act, to be deemed as such, a teacher "must have: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach" (USDE, 2004). While these may serve as useful guidelines for the credentialing of current and prospective teachers, they certainly

leave much wanting in terms of how the assessment of teacher quality plays out in school. Moreover, considering the rapid rise in numbers of teachers entering the profession in “hard to staff” districts and schools through fast-track licensure programs, in some ways the conversation has shifted away from retention to recruitment, with quality being based upon one’s field or school of undergraduate study. Obviously, this is a highly contentious viewpoint and, as has been argued thoroughly throughout this work, experience and retention of effective teachers is a worthy pursuit for a variety of reasons at all organizational levels.

Without engaging in further discussion of the effectiveness of fast-track teacher training and certification programs, it can be fairly asserted that no matter the way in which one enters the teaching profession, all paths and programs are assessed and held accountable by a common measurement scheme. There can be little doubt among students, families, academics, and teachers that the use of mandated standardized test scores in remains, and increasingly so over the course of the last two decades, the most salient of method for measuring student progress, teacher effectiveness, and systemic success. As my own experiences and the words of the participants indicate, the progression and effects of these policies and their underlying epistemologies in the Butterfield School District have been nothing less than profound. Yet, despite the prevalence, and mainstream popularity, of standardized assessments they remain contentious among parents, teachers, administrators, certain policymakers, and academics (Taylor & Rich, 2015; McNeil, 2000). Often, with well-supported reasoning, critics of standardized assessments as measures of teacher quality contend that they fail to capture the effectiveness teachers’ abilities to elicit students’ acquisition of formal curricular content across a variety of individuals, groups, and contents. If we look only at standardized tests as measures of ability to teach academic knowledge, we immediately confront the idea that these cannot be

equitably applied across various contexts, particularly in a society with significant economic, racial, ability, and gendered inequalities. Even the most current “value-added” measures, which employ algorithmic variables and constants as a means to account for the variety of student characteristics found in any particular school or classroom, present problems in terms of their inability to separate directly observable ineffective teachers from effective teachers (Hill et al., 2010), measurement errors (Kane & Staiger, 2002; Linn, 2001), lack of coherence and consistency between curricular materials and assessments (Bock & Wolfe, 1996; Martineau, 2006), failure to adequately capture individual student characteristics (Hu, 2000), and failure to capture within-school factors such as selective assignment of students to particular teachers’ classrooms (Rothstein, 2010; McCaffrey et al., 2009). In my own experiences, as the head of Lowell’s Data Team and for the entirety of my tenure and Professional Development Committee chair for two school years, I was continuously witness to the limitations and frustrations associated with our reliance, or perhaps overreliance, on standardized test scores and a proponent of improving their usefulness for educators at our school.

Should testing technology ever reach a point of development and sophistication as to equitably measure and reliably “capture” individual teacher’s effectiveness to deliver standardized content, such schemes, despite current trends and perceptions, nevertheless fall short of capturing adequate pictures of good teaching. Whether desired or not, schools remain places of various forms of acquisition beyond academic content. Moreover, if we move beyond the acquisition model of learning (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003) to one more aligned with Vygotskian model of learning as socially situated and constructed, there can be little doubt that students develop a variety of crucial skills, beliefs, abilities/inabilities, and behaviors as a result of their experiences in public schools. Things such as the ability to get along in groups and

organizations, solve real-life dilemmas, participate as democratic members of society, or advocate for oneself and others are all things of significant importance to the lives of individuals and social progress. As Noguera (2009) said, when referring back to an educator of fundamental influence in his life, schools are best described as places where we prepare children to become responsible adults. Despite the current paradigm of assessing teachers' effectiveness exclusively through behavioristic measures of student performances, teachers nevertheless continue to exist at the forefront of ensuring their students learn crucial life skills. Or, as Dewey (1902) timelessly contended, even beyond his assertion regarding the absurdity of measuring the mind, the effective teacher takes curricular material and makes it relevant to the various needs of their learners, that is, they *psychologize* the curriculum. When teachers fail to do this, schools further become places of inequitable reproduction, marginalization of youth from underserved populations (Kirkland, 2011), and perpetuate other forms of detrimental, hidden curricula (Jackson, 1992).

With these considerations in mind, for the purposes of selecting highly effective teachers to participate in this study, the inadequacies of student scores on yearly standardized tests of language arts and math became readily apparent. When considered vis-à-vis the contexts and lives of students in places such as Lowell Elementary and the Butterfield School District, their shortcomings perhaps became even more severe. Therefore, given the array of potential and realized issues of reliability and validity, as well as failures to describe more qualitative and essential purposes of schooling, standardized testing was deemed inappropriate, even before considerations of access were considered, as a qualifier for participation in this study.

Another common measure of teacher performance, formal teacher evaluations and administrator recommendations, might also have been employed in the selection process of this

study. After all, such measures typically rely upon direct observation and often provide more holistic and situated descriptions of teachers' performance. Despite the possible advantages these evaluation measures may have presented, I decided they also presented sufficient situational and epistemological limitations to deem them as insufficient for the purposes of selection for this study. Beyond frequent reminders to self that the purpose of this study did not entail finding out what the "best" teachers have to say about things, i.e. I was not attempting to separate longevity and effectiveness, I needed only to consider the turnover of leaders and administrators, movement of staff, and abrupt changes in programmatic initiatives within the Butterfield School District to recognize such limitations. Turnover among administrators and movement of teachers made obtaining and utilizing teacher evaluations both unlikely and undesirable for reasons of reliability and inconsistencies. As evidence of turnover among possible evaluators, during my 13 years of teaching in Butterfield, I worked under seven different principals and even more vice-principals. As described, the participants selected for this study came to Lowell from various schools, and as will be later described, experienced similar changes in the number of schools and administrators encountered. Even beyond movement of people and individuals, remaining in one place was no guarantee of a consistent evaluation system. In my relatively, compared to the participants', tenure, I have records of at least three different evaluation forms and systems used by one principal during my time at Lowell. Changes in Lowell's administration since her and my departure in 2010 further complicated issues with obtaining and utilizing consistent evaluation data and recommendations for possible participants.

Final selections: Justifications and process. Thus, given the limitations of prevalent measures of teacher effectiveness employed in this district, along with a remaining need to select teachers with careers that may be described as significant in terms of time and effects on the

educational experiences of students, I contended that descriptions of my own observations and interactions would reasonably serve as a final justification for selection of participants. Although individual accounts and stories may be relegated to the sometimes diminished category of “anecdotal” evidence, in a selection process that operated on a case-by-case basis with a small sample size, I contend observations and interpretations, by the reader and myself, provide the best evidence for credibly describing good teaching. I hope that as I attempt to do so, the roles and positions I have occupied throughout my time as an educator, resident, and academic have sufficiently developed my observational, analytical, and representational skills to do this.

To begin my description of this work’s actual the selection process, I selected Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham based upon my experiences and knowledge I had gained of their career lengths and pedagogical practices during our years of collaboration at Lowell Elementary. As will be seen, these teachers also selected me as someone they could rely upon, trust, collaborate with and share their professional and personal insights, frustrations, and triumphs through what could well be termed a *community of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) at Lowell. As will be seen, although our collaborative relationships were initially encouraged at the urging of our principal, the formation of our group in a place like Lowell, as will also be seen, was accomplished amidst a greater professional community at the school and within the Butterfield School district marked at times by racial intolerance and exclusivity. Beyond its strengths and challenges in the face of social, historical, and systemic turmoil within the wider community in and around the school, Lowell was also a place where longstanding divisions between African American and European American staff members had reportedly existed well before my arrival in 2001. It was a place where I learned how black, female teachers, such as Ms. Oldham and Eastman, experienced overt and micro-aggressive racism from white colleagues and

administrators. Thus, the formation of our community of practice, between two black women and a white man, was something that came about in the middle of an environment that might have otherwise worked against our fellowship. As will be further detailed in my accounts of these teachers' presence and work at Lowell, my white co-workers at times attempted to steer me away from Ms. Eastman and Oldham through acts that I now would consider as *white racial bonding* (Sleeter, 1994). Additionally, teachers at Lowell who engaged in such practices were generally regarded as ineffective and unresponsive towards the needs of students by Ms. Oldham and Eastman. Thus, our community of practice at Lowell was more than just an acknowledgment of each other's professional prowess and mutual support, it was also situated within mutual recognition and resistance towards oppressive stances and behaviors taking place in the school. In this way, even beyond my experiences as a successful classroom teacher, academic researcher, and teacher educator, I feel my acceptance by Ms. Oldham and Eastman into this community, despite the circular nature of my reasoning here, in some part justifies my worthiness as a credible source to witness their work at Lowell as exemplifying a confluence of longevity and pedagogical quality in this setting.

It is also through their expertise, wisdom, and professional commitments that I came to know and select the final two participants, Ms. Ford and Ms. Mack, also African American, female teachers. After my departure and their simultaneous arrivals at Lowell, these teachers, who had known Ms. Eastman and each other in binary professional relationships for many years from previous school placements, by their accounts and my later observations, formed a newer and closely supportive professional working community at Lowell. During my initial visits to the school in the spring of 2014, to "catch-up" with Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham and inquire into their willingness to participate in this project. After enthusiastic agreement and discussion of the

selection criteria, they recommended Ms. Mack and Ms. Ford as possible additional participants based upon their close association with and knowledge of these teachers' career trajectories and pedagogical practices through their community of practice at Lowell. In this way, the purposeful selection of participants took on a two-step process of recruitment, with the secondary round resulting from a process describable as *snowball sampling* (Merriam, 2009). During this time, I was introduced to Ms. Mack and re-acquainted with Ms. Ford, whom I had met years before through Ms. Eastman at a highly-contentious and memorable district-wide staff development. As possible participants, I informed Ms. Mack and Ms. Ford, that I would like to spend a year visiting their classrooms and observing in order to familiarize myself with their pedagogical practices and justify their participation in this study. They both agreed to this and seemed excited to participate as well as be part of an endeavor in which one of their own was attempting to move into wider sphere of academic influence. As Ms. Ford put it during a meeting with all of us in Ms. Eastman's room, "You go, boy! I know it's about time we had someone with some sense move on up!"

During this time, my intention remained to continue the process of snowball recruitment and possibly expand the setting of this study beyond the professional community at Lowell. However, various factors of timing and place confounded these attempts because none of the participants knew of any long-term colleagues they held in high regard to still be teaching in the Butterfield School District. After giving some thought to seeking additional participants through the district's central offices, I later decided against this idea because it seemed too much of a "break" with the more holistic recruitment approach employed up to this point. Obtaining access into the communal, personal, and professional lives of educators in the BSD has historically presented certain difficulties. I recall that during several investigations by the state's department

of education, our schools were criticized for being unwelcoming places where visiting officials and interviewers reported being met with suspicion, rebuff, and disregard. Beyond any critiques and justifications I might offer for these portrayals, I felt that attempting to contact the few remaining elementary teachers with comportsing tenures through unsolicited inquiries into their careers, messages through the central offices or by me as an unknown researcher, along with the necessary visits to their classrooms for observations seemed too out of place given the knowledge, trust, and access I enjoyed with the participants at Lowell. In this way, this study became contained within the setting and community at Lowell Elementary, and as this parameter emerged, its advantages became apparent in terms of my intimate knowledge of this place. Additionally, through this process, another, what might be considered *de facto*, criteria emerged in the social reality that all of the selected participants were African American women. Although initially not a selection criteria, this descriptor later seemed appropriate for broader as well as more local considerations. As discussed, representational inequities in our teacher workforce for African Americans as well as the negative effects these present our nation's students and progress as a society I felt justified a focus on the experiences of teachers identifying as such. Locally, as will be further detailed, members of this community of practice of African American classroom teachers at Lowell have dealt with various situations involving racist and exclusionary behaviors from other members of the wider professional community at the school. As previously described, I witnessed many such incidents and situations while teaching at Lowell. As a researcher, I learned that sadly this was a reality that the participants continued to contend with at Lowell, as well as throughout their careers, for themselves and their students.

In the following section of this rather extensive justification and description of participant selection, I will offer stories of my experiences in the presence of the participants as teacher and

researcher. Through these descriptions I hope to show the significance of their work with students and offer justification for participation that moves beyond the limitations presented by dominant forms of teacher evaluations of quality, provide thick description of their work to situate vis-à-vis featured interview responses, and detail my formal and informal interactions with them for the purposes of data collection as a final component of this chapter. As a last note to this section, I should also state that the participants in this study were not promised and did not receive any formal or monetary compensation for their participation. I did, however, assist the participants on various occasions with certain tasks, such as moving furniture or setting up electronic hardware, work one-on-one with some students during visits, and my wife baked each of them one of her uncommonly delicious pound cakes before the holiday break for the 2015-16 school year.

Participant Portrayals

Ms. Eastman. At the time of this writing, Ms. Eastman was in her 31st year of classroom teaching in the Butterfield School District. She has been a lifelong resident of Butterfield, grew up attending and graduated from BSD schools, and still resides in a centrally-located and predominantly African American neighborhood of the city. She has her bachelor's and master's in education studies respectively from a local university and an outreach program from a university outside of the region. Prior to her tenure in the BSD, she taught for eight years as a regular classroom teacher at a parochial school in a central neighborhood, or as she put it, "You know, as they say, it was in the *hood*," of Butterfield. After several tumultuous and story-filled experiences in two other BSD schools, she came to Lowell Elementary after her second school was upsettingly shuttered in 1997. Several other teachers I have known throughout my time in the BSD also worked at this school and described similar feelings of frustration and loss about

this school's closing. Thus, when I began my tenure at Lowell in the fall of 2001, Ms. Eastman was starting her fifth year at this school. According to her responses in during out interviews, she has been eligible for full-retirement benefits from the BDS for the last "three, or four, or five years." This statement, from one our interviews, somewhat surprised me, however, because she has been reminding me at the end of beginning of each school year for at least the last decade that "this year, if the good Lord is willing, and the creek don't rise" will be her last, leading me to believe that she is not overly concerned with "setting her sights" on retirement. After contacting Ms. Eastman in the manner described previously, our relationship as researcher and participant tentatively began in the spring of 2015 and has remained ongoing unto the time of this writing. Informally, before this study's proposal was approved by my committee, I met with Ms. Eastman at Lowell in April of 2015 to give her the opportunity to conduct a "member check" regarding my representation of her work and words in my proposal draft based upon our interactions as fellow teachers at Lowell. She verified and approved of my recountments. After acceptance of this study's proposal and IRB approval, our formal relationship as participant and researcher commenced when we conducted a nearly two-hour semi-structured interview following this work's initial interview protocol (see Appendix A) on July 24 in her home's living room. After transcription of this interview, and initial analysis vis-à-vis the responses of the other participants and relevant theoretical work, a secondary interview protocol (see Appendix B) was developed specifically for a second interview. This interview took place on December 6th of 2015 in her home's living room and lasted slightly more than two hours. During this interview, my audio recorder stopped recording a little more than an hour into the interview for approximately 25 minutes. When I noticed this, I started a new recording on my smartphone for the remainder of the interview, and we took time at the end to review Ms. Eastman's responses

during the time that was not recorded. I created field notes for this time and immediately transcribed these after I got back home. I also visited Ms. Eastman's classroom five times during the 2015-16 school year for observations. Although classroom observations were not initially proposed for her participation because of my extensive experiences with her pedagogy, she expressed a desire for me to observe her work, and so, feeling both an obligation while also recognizing possible benefits in terms of credibility presented by such visits, I conducted these observations on September 18th, November 18th, December 3rd, January 13th, and February, 19th. Observations lasted between 20 to 40 minutes, during which time I observed from a seat in the room, spoke informally with Ms. Eastman, and took handwritten, annotated field notes. These field notes were transcribed later in the day after each visit to an electronic format. Later, in June of 2016, I spoke with Ms. Eastman over the phone about her decision to remain in the district for another year. Notes from this interaction were also recorded as electronic, annotated field notes immediately after our conversation.

As previously described, I met Ms. Eastman during my first year at Lowell Elementary. During this year and others to follow, I experienced frequent attempts by white co-workers to enter into racially contentious and factional relations against certain teachers, such as Ms. Eastman, and our school's principal, Ms. Jeffrey, both black women. I clearly recall how openly these white teachers described Ms. Eastman as "standoffish" and "rude" when, for example, they passed each other in the hallway without either party acknowledging the other. Very obviously, the expectation was that Ms. Eastman was supposed to greet and speak to them before they were going to do the same. These kinds of interactions and double-standards began to bother me, but as a young teacher in a new school, and as a white person growing in my awareness and exposure to overt acts of racism against people I had come to know and care about, I kept silent.

As the year progressed, within this climate of hostility, I was encouraged by our principal to collaborate with Ms. Eastman. I believe Ms. Jeffrey did this not only because, as she described, that Ms. Eastman was one of the best teachers in the building, but also, and this is personal conjecture, that a bond between us would help to mitigate some the tensions and isolation of Ms. Eastman among the predominantly white staff. Through observations and conversations, I recall how Ms. Jeffrey likewise dealt with similar animosity from many of the same white teachers. As mentioned earlier about Ms. Eastman, Ms. Jeffrey also described many of these teachers' attitudes and behaviors to be detrimental to our students' educational outcomes and ways to "cover" for their underperformance as educators. In effect, their exclusionary and essentializing expressions influenced and were influenced by pedagogical struggles and failures. As a young teacher who showed some promise, after successfully taking over a class of 32 fifth graders that had reportedly "run off" two previous teachers by November, she warned me about staying away from teachers she described as "boosters," and directed me to work more closely with teachers such as Ms. Eastman.

For the remainder of my first year at Lowell, through various experiences with many of these teachers, I began to see the wisdom in her advice. In one incident, a white male teacher brought a black male student into the hallway as I was passing by and began yelling in his ear, "You are a stupid boy! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!" As I attempted to intervene by asking this teacher what was wrong, Ms. Eastman emerged from her classroom door and quietly told the student to come into her room, which he quickly did. The following summer, in 2002, I returned to the neighborhood of McClellan Elementary, to a school less than a mile away, as a summer school teacher. One of the educators I worked closely with was also Lowell's instructional coach, Ms. Whiting (pseudonym), during the regular school, an African-American woman with

many years of experience teaching and leading in the Butterfield School District, as well as several teachers who had worked with Ms. Eastman prior to their school's closing in 1997. Ms. Whiting and these teachers were professionally close with Ms. Eastman at Lowell. When I returned to Lowell for our before-school in-services at the end of the summer, Ms. Eastman approached me, "Hey man, a few of my friends that worked with you this summer said you did a great job over there. They said you were really down with the town!" That moment was the start of a professional friendship that has lasted until today.

During my time as teacher at Lowell, Ms. Eastman and I teamed up in a wide range of educational activities. We planned and co-taught numerous integrated science and language arts lessons between her third grade and my fifth-grade classes. We were grade-level partners for several years, members of various building-level committees, and represented our school at various district-level meetings, seminars, and development events. Although Ms. Eastman and I were peers in many endeavors, I am also profoundly indebted to her for the professional and personal guidance she provided me through the years. She taught me the importance of resisting gossip, the importance of sitting back and observing, and never "letting your right hand know what the left is doing." She consistently emphasized the importance of humility in both words and actions, preferring to give individuals "enough rope to hang themselves" instead of engaging in detrimental or escalating behaviors. After my departure from Lowell, we continued our professional and personal relationship by calling each other every few months to share stories of our work as teachers and perspectives of the world in which our students were growing and learning.

Over these years, as both teacher and researcher, I have witnessed Ms. Eastman impact the lives of children in ways that I believe are not adequately captured by standardized metrics of

teacher effectiveness. I should note here that this is my contention as researcher. Ms. Eastman, on the other hand, has celebrated and shared with me the positive gains her students have made on district and state standardized tests on numerous occasions. From these results, one could probably argue for the quality of her instruction based upon such measures if one were so inclined. Ms. Eastman has taught a variety of grade levels and subjects, ranging from a regular third-grade class in a traditional elementary model to eighth-grade math and science at Lowell. During my time at Lowell as researcher, she taught fifth-grade reading and language arts in a compartmentalized class arrangement. In all of my collaboration and observation of her work, Ms. Eastman has remained flexible and able to effectively engage with any subject, student or class in a manner that exemplifies what I would consider to be teaching that is high in support and high in structure. To some, however, Ms. Eastman's teaching and management style was considered as to be overly-strict. Indeed, on many occasions, fellow staff members, all of whom were white, attempted to judge and portray her teaching as harsh or mean-spirited, how she managed her class through "intimidation" or how she had "raked a student over the coals" for engaging in an inappropriate behavior. Knowing Ms. Eastman's effectiveness to engage all of her students, as well as the respect they and their families had for her, such portrayals struck me as undue, inaccurate, and tinged with racism. The same teachers who characterized Ms. Eastman in this way, also struggled to effectively engaged students at school, often attributing students' misbehaviors within students' personalities, upbringings, "culture," or families. For Ms. Eastman, misbehavior was not an option for any student, not only because she did not "play," but also because she worked against deficient-orientated views of her students and their families. I believe several recollections from my work with Ms. Eastman illustrate how her work exemplified a balance of structure, support, and high expectations for students.

I recall how one student, a young man in need of a very capable teacher, came to our school during a time in which our K-5 elementary schools were being transitioned into K-8 schools. As described earlier in the chapter, this was a difficult time for a variety of reasons. During this time, our principal, Ms. Jeffrey, asked Ms. Eastman and I if we would “loop” with our current fifth graders as they made the transition into sixth grade. As was our typical response when asked to take on a challenge, and considering a number of the students we had at that time in our classes at that time it was just that, we readily agreed. Towards the end of our fifth-grade year, our principal called Ms. Eastman and I to her office and told us about a new student who would be transitioning to our grade level at Lowell. Apparently, he “a track record a mile long” and had been removed from several other Butterfield schools because of behavior problems. As Ms. Jeffrey told it, she had “bragged too much” about her teachers being able to teach the most difficult students, and so we were chosen to be this particular student’s last chance before facing expulsion from the district. We knew he must have been in a lot of trouble considering that this level of disciplinary action was rarely resorted to in our district, save for the most chronic and dangerous of behaviors. Ms. Eastman agreed to take this student if I would take a student who had required a lot of her attention throughout the previous year into my class for the following year. I agreed.

When this student, whom I will call “Ray,” arrived at our school the following school year, it was initially clear he meant to live up to his reputation. He routinely attempted to leave the classroom at his leisure, picked fights with other students, cursed without shame when spoken to by adults, and seemed genuinely surprised when any authority figure attempted to redirect him for the even the most egregious misbehaviors. During one memorable incident, Ms. Eastman’s class photo had to be re-taken because it was discovered that Ray had flipped off the

camera right as the photo was snapped because he did not like how the cameraman had addressed him while directing students where to stand. While this level of misbehavior was not something unheard of during my experiences in Butterfield, for Ms. Eastman these kinds of things were not going to “fly” for very long. I remember clearly how on one occasion, as we were walking and talking in the hallway, Ms. Eastman ducked in and surprised Ray just as he was in the middle of creating a scene in the cafeteria by cursing at one of the supervising paraprofessionals, an older man with a very calm demeanor, after he told Ray to return to his seat. Calling him by his name in a serious, yet calm tone, Ms. Eastman removed Ray from the area and directed him to her classroom. I followed for support but did not say a word. In the classroom, she asked him why he thought it was acceptable to talk this way with adults. Although it has been a number of years since this incident, Ms. Eastman and I believe the following dialogue adequately captures this moment:

“Because he was disrespecting me!”

“Son, I’ve known Mr. Jones (pseudonym) for many years, and not once have I ever seen him disrespect anyone. Now you’re telling me that he’s disrespecting you? Of all the people he has dealt with, he just decided to disrespect you?”

“Well, he needs to learn that to get respect he needs give respect. He better watch how he talks to me!”

“Huh?! Now I know you didn’t just tell me about getting respect, son! ‘Cause if I didn’t know any better, I’d say that sounds like a threat! You call threatening adults respect?! Seems to me like you’re the one who needs to start giving a little respect. Because the

way you're headed, you ain't got nothing good coming! God don't like ugly son, and all I saw in there was whole bunch of ugly! Coming from you! Do you understand me?!"

"Yeah."

"What was that?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Son, nobody here wants to see you in more trouble, and man you've gotten yourself into trouble just about every place you've been. When's it going to stop, Ray? Mr. Jones was only looking out for you. He's busy in that cafeteria and he could use more leaders than followers in there. So, you've got to ask yourself, which one are you going to be?"

"A leader."

"Okay, then what is it that you need to do."

"Apologize."

During this interaction, Ms. Eastman's tone firm, and possibly describable in places as angry. With this emotion and intensity, as I observed her do on many occasions, came compassion and caring. For this reason, I would describe her approach to management as being high in structure, because she had high expectations and passion for her students success in school, while also being high in support because she was willing and able ensure her students had the support and commitment from her to live by those expectations. As Noddings (2012a) has said, an expression of care must be received, i.e. it must be relational between the carer and cared-for, lest it remain an exercise in merit or virtuosity for the supposed carer. For students,

like Ray and many others, Ms. Eastman's actions and demeanors were successful in bringing them to positively participate in their school environment. In effect, according to an *ethic of care* (Noddings, 2012b) viewpoint, one could argue that expressions of care from those teachers who criticized Ms. Eastman's as well as another participant's management styles as being "mean" or as one teacher related to me, "You talk to the kids and explain things, but it seems to me that those ladies rule their classrooms only through intimidation," while often failing to successfully redirect students most-challenging behaviors themselves were essentially hollow and even harmful. Such expressions particularly struck me as odd, because I always considered my management style to be similar to and heavily influenced by teachers such as Ms. Eastman. Later, during my doctoral work, I drew connections between these recollections and the stereotyped, misinterpreted and racist portrayals of black teachers described by Ladson-Billings (1994, 2007), as well as her critical interrogation of what constitutes good teaching. Redirecting students at schools such as Lowell outward firmness and confidence, and at times demanded that one know how to effectively "bring things down a notch" with a student in order to de-escalate a tense situation. Interactions such as this were often when strong connections with students were made. These were times where essential life-skills were passed along. We knew too well the worlds our students stepped out into every day and the dangers they faced if their primary coping mechanism for conflict was escalation.

Looking back on these kinds of interactions, I was further reminded of the way Ladson-Billings (1994) described the simultaneous exhibition of firmness and compassion, as well as the "fluid and 'humanely equitable'" (p. 61) relationships, displayed by successful teachers of African American students. In the above-described encounter, Ms. Eastman turned Ray's desire to be recognized as a leader into a means for him to better manage himself in tumultuous

environments. This also harkens to Delpit's seminal work (1995) in which she described how some children will not listen to a teacher simply because she/he carries the title of "teacher." The expectation holds that first an individual must act as like a teacher to be seen as one. Ray was not going to be cajoled or redirected because someone told him to stop or because of an implied disciplinary consequence. He listened, though, to Ms. Eastman because she understood something about him that others had failed to do, and knew how to convey this in the way she talked to him about himself and his place in the world.

I do not, however, wish to portray Ms. Eastman's pedagogical skills as primarily situated in the realm of behavior management and social development. Although educators generally recognize the requirement of solid classroom management for effective instruction to take place, as a teacher educator, I often stress to my preservice candidates that this link must also be considered in reverse, i.e. effective instruction also drives solid classroom management. In a context such as Lowell Elementary, one can hardly deny the holistic nature and importance of these sometimes separated facets of teaching. Thus, while I feel obligated to also clearly describe and assert Ms. Eastman's skills as an instructor, I think it best to do so in a way that also features her responsiveness towards her students' behaviors and backgrounds. Through my personal observations and interactions with her as a colleague, she consistently displayed exceptional pedagogical skills. I contain this description within her commitment to ensuring her students' engagement with rigorous content and activities as well as her own development as an educator. Walking into Ms. Eastman's room, I never once saw her disengaged from her students. Even if she took time to speak with a visitor, the conversation remained interspersed with continuous interactions with students, and something she often voiced frustration about was unannounced and unresponsive interruption of her instruction by adult visitors to her class. She often described

such behavior as disrespectful of and in complete disregard for her and her students' valued time together. This was true during my time as a teacher at Lowell as well as the times I visited her classroom as a researcher during the 2015-16 school year.

Upon entering Ms. Eastman's classroom, one would typically see her seated with an individual student or group of students conferring and offering feedback about their work. Other times, before even entering her room, you could hear her walking around the room, conducting a mini-lesson in her distinctly clear and, at times, intense voice. If she was seated, students would usually be working independently or in small groups on projects. At any one time, you might see various students each engaged in four, five, or six different projects or instructional activities, quietly getting up to go over to her for feedback from time to time. Students might be engaged in science experiments or social studies projects that integrated exploration, literacy, and hands-on activities. Current instructional technology was a very apparent component of her pedagogical approach, with high expectations being placed on students for the work they created on this technology as well as their responsibilities for caring for components such as their assigned laptop computers. Regarding her own development as a teacher, Ms. Eastman was one of the first teachers in our school and district to participate in the *Integrators* program, a voluntary and intensive initiative that provided regular on and off-site training, various pieces of technology not offered to most teachers, and curricular planning over the course of a three-year commitment.

I believe the following description from one of my observational visits well represents Ms. Eastman's instructional responsiveness and effectiveness with her students:

As I enter the room, Ms. Eastman's fifth-grade students are seated at large tables pushed together to form squares. Eight students fit around each square. She sits behind a large

“kidney table” near the front of the room facing them. I recall this is often her arrangement and proximity during guided-practice activities. The class seems highly engaged as students work and talk quietly in their groups. I see they are creating detailed maps of the United States to illustrate the various routes taken by Cherokee Indian groups during the Trail of Tears. Some have out opened laptops, others look through trade books, some have colored pencils, and virtually all have a large sheet of paper with a general map template showing the borders of the states on it. I sit down at the side of her table, and she shares with me the book they recently completed and explains how this activity integrates social studies with communication arts. A boy brings his map up to her for evaluation, and apparently, it does not meet the standards they have set. She tells him, ‘You see how raggedy this is?’

The student nods his head and says, “Yes.”

“You do? But you did it anyway?” She then provides the student with specific directions for what he needs to do in order to improve his work, such as providing labels, names of places, a compass rose, dates, etc., and reminds him to bring his best work next time.

Ms. Eastman stands and addresses the class, inquiring into their progress on their maps. A boy raises his hand and she calls upon him. He informs her that he’s lost his map. She responds, “Well, you’ve got two options. You can take an ‘F’ or you can come and get a new one and get to work. So, what’s it going to be?”

The student informs her that he would like to get a new map template and start over.

She responds, “I’m glad you chose that one, baby. But I’ll tell you what, you’re gonna’ have to look through all this stuff and find you one, because I’m not about to do that.” She points down to a pile of various papers and folders on the corner of her table. The boy, who is joined by a girl, hurries up to the table and starts to carefully look through the papers. They quickly pull out two blank maps and return to their seats.

Ms. Eastman starts walking among the students, looking at each person’s work and making comments. She comes to one boy, who doesn’t appear to be working. He stares up at her. She looks at him for several long seconds and then says, “Boo! What ‘chu doin’?”

The boy responds assertively, “Nuthin’.”

She responds, “*Nuthin*’! Next time I ask you, you better not tell me *nuthin*’.’ Tell me, *smiling, scratching my leg, or something*, but you better not tell me *nuthin*’!” Before continuing her slow and deliberate walk around the room, she instructs him to return to his work and explains he is running out of time to complete the project. The addressed student looks ahead pensively for a moment and then begins to color his map with a colored pencil. She then looks up at me, “Mr. Richards, are you still going to help us set up our bulletin board outside so we can show of this work?”

I respond in the affirmative.

Ms. Oldham. Another long-standing teacher of the Butterfield District, Ms. Oldham, is an educator whose career and work are not adequately described by standardized measures of teacher effectiveness. Like Ms. Eastman, Ms. Oldham was reported to me by our principal at

Lowell to be “one of the best.” Unlike Ms. Eastman, however, I only had the pleasure of working directly with Ms. Oldham as a teacher for two years before my reassignment. Despite my departure, we managed to continue our relationship through district meetings after my reassignment, informal visits with my family to Lowell Elementary after my resignation, and of course, through our interactions as participant and researcher. I met Ms. Oldham when she transferred to Lowell school during the short-lived attempt by the Butterfield School District to convert its elementary schools into K-8 schools. After her previous school was shuttered, a building also located in the same section of Butterfield as Lowell and one that would soon burn down after a transient occupant lit a fire in it on a cold night, she was assigned to Lowell as a sixth- and seventh-grade teacher of language arts. Since the re-opening of Butterfield School District’s middle schools as 7-12 hybrid junior high/high schools, Ms. Oldham has remained at Lowell and currently teaches fifth- and sixth-grade language arts.

Ms. Oldham was raised in Macon, Georgia, during the Jim Crow era. She attended college in Atlanta, where she became certified as a music educator. After moving with her then-husband to Butterfield and starting a family, she became certified as a general education teacher. She lived for years in a predominantly African American section of Butterfield with her family, where she still owns a home, but now resides in a second home she bought in a northern suburb of Butterfield. She has taught in multiple elementary and middle schools throughout her time as teacher in the BSD, and like me, taught during her first-year at McClellan Elementary. During the course of this study, I learned from her that this school was once a flagship school of the BSD, until it was gutted by a fire set by a group of older students in the early 1970’s. At the time of this writing, Ms. Oldham was in her 46th year of teaching, and according to her, she was the

longest-standing teacher in the BSD. If one closely revisits the graph shown earlier in this chapter, one can see her unique spot in the grander scheme of teacher longevity in this district.

During my experiences with Ms. Oldham as a researcher, like Ms. Eastman, I met with her to conduct a “member check” during the proposal phase of this work to verify the credibility of my representation of my recollections of our experiences together as teachers at Lowell. After formal approvals were obtained, I met with Ms. Oldham in her classroom on August 7th of 2015 to obtain her written permission to participate. We also conducted our first formal interview at this time, utilizing the first interview protocols in a semi-structured session that lasted just over two hours. During this time, Lowell’s long-time police officer liaison, Officer Cleary (pseudonym) dropped by her room and chatted with us for several minutes before we resumed our formal protocol. I worked for years with Officer Cleary for many years at both Lowell and my final school in the Butterfield School District. I consider her to be an exceptionally committed and responsive police officer in a community in need of such officers. Ms. Oldham informed her of our ongoing and interview, and let her know of Ms. Eastman’s participation as well. Officer Cleary is also a longtime friend and partner of both of these participants and she stressed to me that, besides myself, I was working with two of the best teachers she has ever worked with in the BDS. During this interview, Ms. Oldham shared a depth of information that was rich, emotional, and something I am deeply honored to have been witness to. At certain points, she recounted stories and events that brought tears to both our eyes, things personal enough that she told me, “I don’t want to hear this again, either. ‘Cause I never told this to anybody.” I met again with Ms. Oldham for our second interview on December 7th of the same year, and this interview lasted just shy of two hours. It was also very productive and during this time, Ms. Oldham shared her thoughts about *To Sir, with Love* (1967), and its relevance to this

work. Both interviews were completely audio recorded with written notes, and transcribed personally by me. I also, per her wishes as well, conducted six visits to her classroom to observe her pedagogical practices during the 2015-16 school year. These visits took place on September 18th, October 9th, November 18th, December 3rd, January 13th, and February 19th, lasted between 20 and 60 minutes and always include me visiting with Ms. Oldham for brief periods and then seated observations of classroom interactions. During these visits, I took handwritten field notes and transcribed these later the same day. Also during these visits, she often involved me in her students' learning activities and at times had them share their best work with me. I also visited Ms. Oldham's classroom on May 13th, and during this time she informed me of her decision to remain a classroom teacher in the BSD for another year.

Prior to Ms. Oldham's first year at Lowell Elementary, our principal met with Ms. Eastman and me, as we were teaching the highest grade level, to discuss new teachers arriving for our middle school grades as we moved from a K-6 school to a K-7 model. According to her, we were going to receive a "very experienced" and highly-regarded teacher, whom we would later meet as Ms. Oldham, as well as two beginning teachers from the Teach for America (TFA) program. Our principal asked that we form "middle-school team" with these teachers and divide up duties for teaching the individual courses typically found in more traditional middle school programs. She also asked that we put effort into making Ms. Oldham feel welcome and involving her expertise into our planning activities while also preparing our beginning teachers for the challenges they would likely face. Not long after the meeting, during the days before formal summer staff-development commenced, Ms. Eastman and I went to Ms. Oldham's room to introduce ourselves. When we arrived at her room, we found the door closed and the lights off. We knocked and Ms. Oldham opened the door. Despite the somewhat insulating outward

appearance of her room, she welcomed us warmly. She complimented me on my looks and asked me how old I was. When I responded proudly that I was thirty-one and had eight years of teaching experience in the district, her reply was to smile, shake her head and say, “Mmm. Just a baby.”

As we talked things over, I noticed the surprising amount of furniture and equipment present in her room. She even had a window-unit air-conditioner, something that no one at Lowell had at that time. When I commented on how much stuff Ms. Oldham had been able to get into her room in so little time she said, “Oh they moved all my things from [her previous school] last week.” This struck me as significant considering most teachers, including myself, often waiting for considerable amounts of time to get any kind of materials delivered by our district. Many times, we simply gave up in frustration and did things ourselves or simply went without certain materials. Apparently, Ms. Oldham commanded considerable respect in the district and knew how to get things done when she wanted them to be done.

As we discussed plans for the upcoming school year, Ms. Oldham asked about our group of incoming seventh graders. Ms. Eastman and I knew most of these students very well as we had taught them in both their fifth- and sixth-grade years and we described the needs of various students and how they interacted with each other and school staff. At one point, when I described several girls in the classes that tended to get into conflicts with each other or argued frequently with authority figures, Ms. Oldham simply said to me, “Honey, I’m the only diva in here.”

We also discussed the likely needs of our incoming TFA teachers. This was a new initiative in our district and we knew very little about the program. We knew, though, that these teachers were beginning teachers and we guessed that they likely did not come from

backgrounds similar to our students. We planned to meet with them and prepare them for the challenges they would face in a way that was clear but hopefully would not cause them distress. During the following weeks, we did this and also made particular efforts to provide our new teachers with ideas, materials, and availability for questions or concerns.

Unfortunately, the next two years for our TFA teachers, as well as our whole school in general, were particularly difficult. Much of the already described turmoil took place within and around our school during this time. Despite our efforts to prepare these beginning teachers for these realities, their classrooms rapidly became scenes of chaos, conflict, and general mis-education (Dewey, 1938). I remember one particular day in which our principal asked me to personally go to one of these teacher's classrooms shortly after the end of the school day because she was "having a meltdown." Apparently, my principal, Ms. Oldham, and Ms. Eastman had tried talking to her and she responded angrily. In my principal's words, "Someone who looks like you might be able to get through to her at this point." When I entered the room, saw desks overturned and covered with copious amounts of graffiti. When I looked out of the open windows, I saw the ground below littered below with precious textbooks and various other instructional items. The teacher stood behind her desk, and with tears streaming down her face, started telling me about how her digital camera had been stolen that day. I tried talking with her but this did not seem to help. She told me she had been given "lots of strategies" to deal with students behavior, but that these were not working because she was not being supported by the principal or her mentors, Ms. Eastman and our school's instructional coach, all African American women. She said she felt as if she was being targeted by the students because she was white and that she had "walked into someone's bad family re-union."

As I quickly figured out, our TFA-teachers, both of whom were white, had become acquainted with the staff divisions plaguing Lowell. Despite being partnered in grade-level to Ms. Oldham and Ms. Eastman, and mentored by our school's instructional coach, these teachers began to spend substantial collaborative time with a group of elementary-level teachers, all of whom were also white. As only one observer and participant in the social context of this place and time, I want to make clear that as I report these interactions here as honestly and accurately as I can. As someone who "fit in" with these various groups, I attempted to utilize my identities and positions for the improvement of staff relations. Even as I write this, I consider that someday former colleagues, whom I also carried on complex working relationships with, may read this and feel betrayed or express contention with my recollections. Should this be the case, I would hope they at least recognize my need for clarity and honesty in reporting these interactions and perhaps gain something through additional perspective and self-reflection. As described, I believe that particular white teachers at Lowell benefitted from these aggressions through racial bonding and by creating caricatures of certain black teachers as harsh, overbearing, unapproachable, unsupportive and/or incompetent. Through these behaviors, they found means by which to resist administrative directives, justify their own failures at times with particular students, and also support each other in the face of various adversities. It was through this form of bonding, in my opinion as well as viewpoints shared by Ms. Oldham and Ms. Eastman during our formal interviews, that certain teachers at Lowell lent sympathetic ears and provided acceptable reasoning to our young, white, struggling TFA teachers. While I do not intend to excuse these individuals failures to better engage their students or interrogate their privileged positions, I do also recognize that for individuals selected into a highly-competitive program and entering the profession with high hopes of "making a difference," the support offered by these

teachers certainly must have been an alluring and soothing explanation for why things were turning out so badly in their classrooms.

The effect of this situation seemed to only make matters worse for these beginning teachers. While being increasingly drawn into a faction of educators that had few dealings with our older students, they found themselves increasingly removed from the teachers with whom they were supposed to work closely with and may have learned the most from as their mentors. Ms. Oldham and I recollected how during a particular middle-school team meeting, our other TFA teacher, a white, male teacher attempted to vent his frustrations on Ms. Oldham. This beginning teacher had also struggled significantly to facilitate effective instruction and classroom management. For example, when I walked into his classroom one day to ask about borrowing some science materials, I witnessed the girls sitting around in groups talking while he facetiously coached the boys as they shot paper balls into a trash can. During this meeting, he became angry with Ms. Oldham and in a raised voice told her that he felt she and Ms. Eastman were not doing enough as a team to discipline the students. Ms. Oldham's response was swift, calm, and left us with no doubt she was not moved by his display:

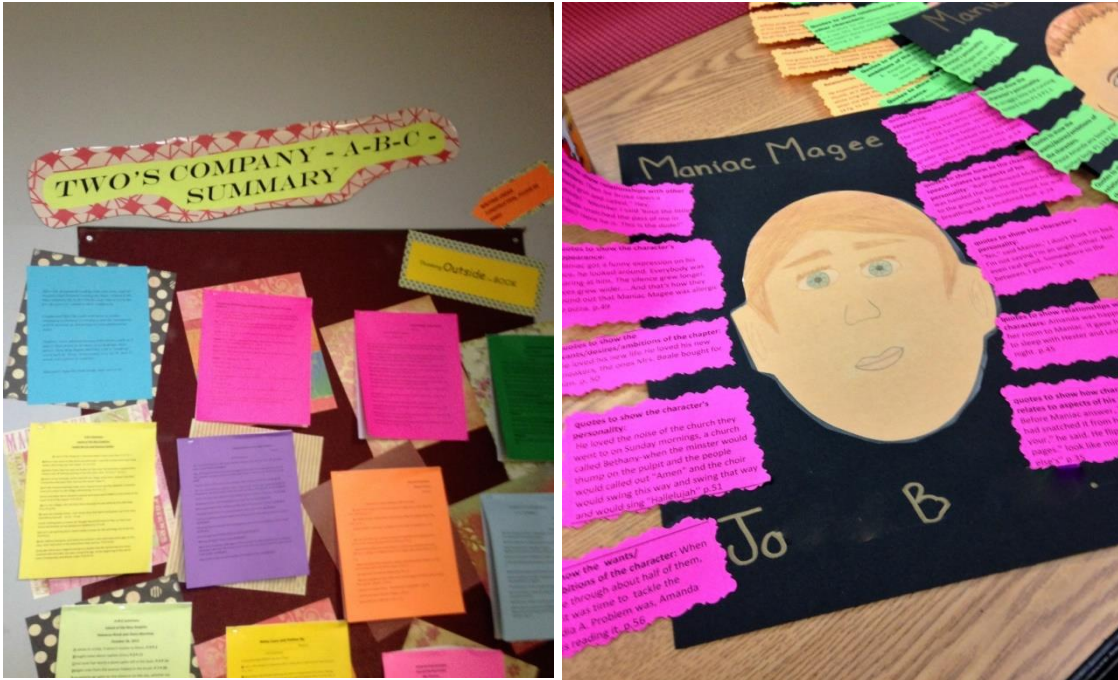
“Excuse me. Who do you think you're talking to? Let me tell you something. First of all, don't you ever talk to me like that again. I'm not the one. Second, I have been supporting you, but you need to start doing *your* job. You need to try different strategies. No one is going to sit in your room and manage your class. These kids are hard and so is this job. You've got to make believers out of them. I suggest you either start doing *your* job or get out, but don't you dare blame me because things are not going how you want them to in your class.”

For the rest of the meeting, he said nothing else along these lines.

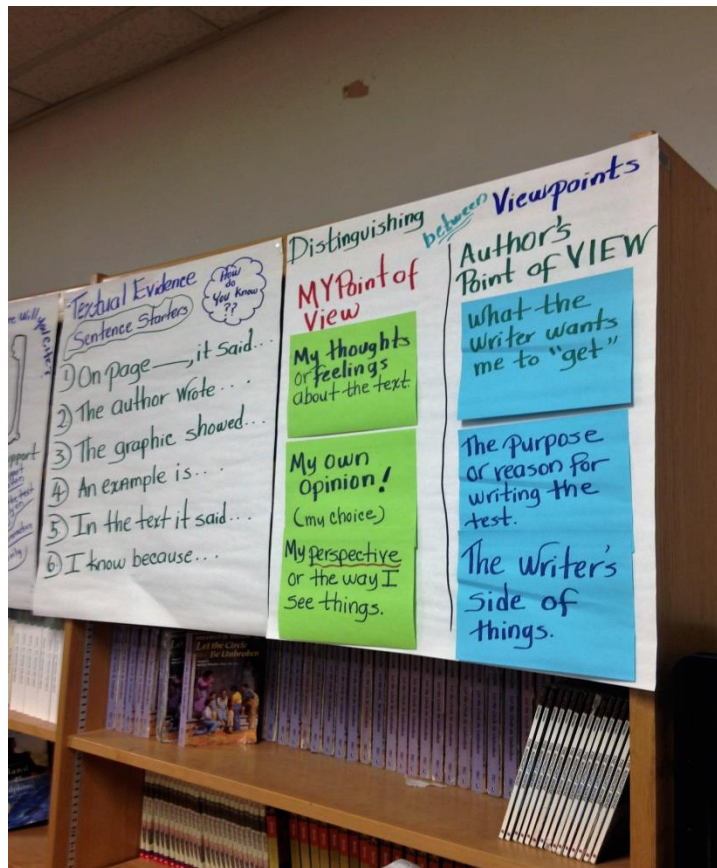
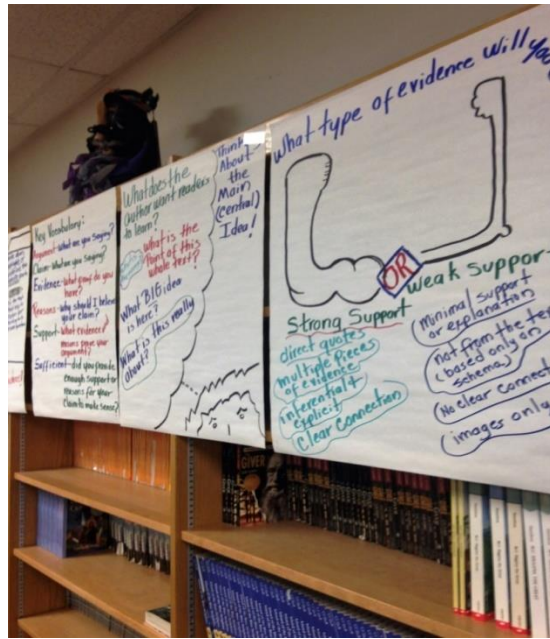
As Ms. Oldham would later report to me, such hostility and portrayals of her work would continue after my departure from Lowell as teacher. These, however, will remain to be explored in following chapters.

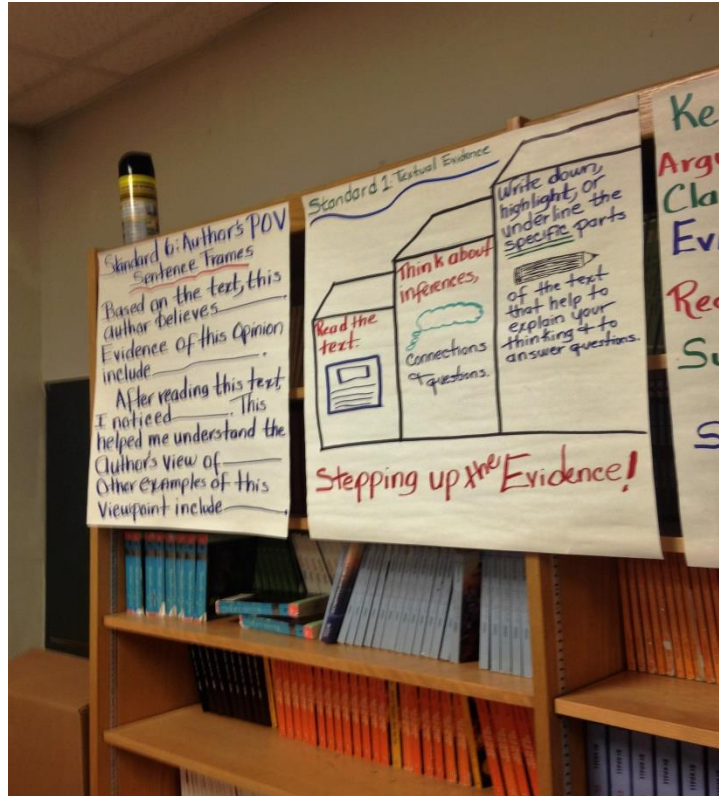
Beyond her perseverance with and ability to handle difficult situations with co-workers, I have also witnessed Ms. Oldham's excellence as an educator. Walking into her classroom as teacher and researcher, I regularly saw students working quietly at their desks or in small groups. Passing her class in the hallway, or watching as students passed between classrooms for "passing period," one could see the stark contrast between order and chaos, depending on whose classroom they were exiting. Once students from chaotic classrooms reached Ms. Oldham's door, their behaviors drastically calmed. Students' written work on display was always word-processed, well-written, and demonstrated rigorous thought. Ms. Oldham, like many of us who had been with the district around the turn of the millennium, had been trained in the *Balanced Literacy* approach to teaching reading and writing. Unlike many of us, however, she retained this more holistic instructional approach through years of various other mandated, highly-scripted literacy programs. Students from my previous classes frequently reported to me that although they thought Ms. Oldham was tough, she made them want to work hard and learned a lot because of her efforts.

During my observational visits to Ms. Oldham's classroom in the 2015-16 school year, I not only became reacquainted but gained an even more in-depth look into her expertise in teaching. Student work of exceptional quality was displayed inside and outside of her classroom from September onwards. Several examples of these are provided below:



Ms. Oldham often utilized mini-lessons to build her students' literacy skills while creating anchor charts to hang around the room for continuous reference. These charts are explicit and direct in their scaffolding of students' work and reflect responsiveness towards the needs of Lowell's student population. Some of the charts posted in December of that year in Ms. Oldham's room are featured below:





While observing in her room, I took copious notes of Ms. Oldham’s interactions with her students. These direct observations perhaps provide the best evidence for her pedagogical excellence, as well as an effective counter-story to previously described accounts of her approach with students by colleagues. I believe the following account from my notes of one full observation in her classroom well-represents my observations of her work with students:

As I enter the classroom, a class of Ms. Oldham’s sixth-grade students are seated in, what I’d consider at this point, their usual arrangement, working on laptops or with books. Ms. Oldham is seated at her computer podium. The room is quiet and she is talking to individual students about their work. I approach her and see she is looking at a particular student’s work on her laptop through her OneDrive. She smiles at me and reminds the

class of who I am. After we speak briefly for a few moments, she excuses this group of students to head to their next class.

After they leave, I can see another group of sixth-grade students in the hallway, hurriedly taking off jackets and hooded sweatshirts. She tells me, with audible disapproval in her voice, that they are allowed to wear jackets in their previous teachers' room and they know "to not let [her] catch them coming into [her] room with them on." The new group enters the room, quietly taking their seats, hanging up backpacks and jackets on chairs, and getting out their laptops, notebooks, and books. I see novels and reading cards with nonfiction passages and questions at their desks.

Ms. Oldham begins explaining to the class the variety of things they may be working on. In the middle of doing this, a male student yawns as he looks in her direction. Without disruption, she calmly says to him, "Close your mouth boy," and continues on with her directions.

She talks to me about why a quarter of her students are missing. This conversation comes to involve students in the class. She explains that the principal has taken only those students who scored Proficient or Advanced on last year's standardized state assessments to a nearby university for a field trip. The entire 6th grade has a field trip planned for later to a local community college. She says she does not like this arrangement because it leaves so many students out, limits their thinking in terms of what they expect of themselves, is based solely on a test score from last year, and uses up most of their grade-level's funds for field trips. I have heard other teachers, such as Ms. Eastman, also complain about this trip and arrangement. As the students give names of students

attending the field trip, some with audible sadness in their voices, a young man raises his hand and makes it known that he wasn't here last year to take the test because he'd been at a local KIPP school. She affirmed his response and then turned to me.

As she'd done in a previous visit, she told me about this student's academic strengths and behaviors. She then says loud enough for him to hear, "He's smart, but he had a little attitude with me yesterday. Didn't you? He and another young man were wrestling in the music room. Wrestling in the music room! You should be singing in the music room! Making love, not war!" The class giggles at these remarks. The young man gives her a slightly embarrassed smile and then attempts to resume his work.

Ms. Oldham presses this student about his "character chart" for the book, *Maniac Magee*, inquiring into his work progress. He says he's finished, and she pulls his work up through her OneDrive. She has him turn on the LCD projector to display his work and offer feedback. After looking over his responses and sharing them with me, she says things such as, "Go back and check! You know sentences start with capital letters. You're missing something. You're a detective now, you have to *pull it* right." This final statement referred to a citation he'd incorrectly quoted from the text as evidence for a character's traits.

I move towards the back of the room and have a seat. A student, whom I recall recently lost his aunt after her car was hit by a vehicle being driven by a suspect fleeing from the police in our neighborhood, stands up quickly and begins shaking his hand vigorously. He goes over to Ms. Oldham and begins showing her his fingers, apparently saying there's something wrong with them. She leans back and looks at him with surprise, "Why

are shaking? I ain't gonna' shoot you, yet!" He smiles and holds up two of his fingers and says something again to her. She replies, "All I see is two ugly fingers. You'll be okay, Daniel!" The student laughs. "You probably just sat on them too long. Do you think you're gonna' be okay?" The student laughs, nods and returns to his seat.

The student Ms. Oldham had spoken with previously, about his character trait diagram, approaches her. He attempts to walk around next to her and she reminds him to stay across from her. He returns to his seat and as he does so, a girl looks up from her work at him. Ms. Oldham puts her on the spot, "Oh sister, stop cutting your eyes at him and get to work." She opens her mouth to speak, and Ms. Oldham says, "Don't! I know what I'm talking about!" They both laugh and several other students giggle. Several minutes later, the boy approaches her again and she reminds him of the directions, she says to him, "You know I'm gonna' raise Hell if you don't follow my directions." Ms. Oldham then tells him to go ask the girl who was looking at him for assistance. He plays coy, but she insists, reminding him to ask her politely if she can help look over his work. Later, after the young lady has finished checking over his work, he gets up and tells her thank you. Ms. Oldham says to them, "I know he thanked you. He's such a polite young man!"

She addresses a girl seated in the middle of the room. This girl seems older than the other students by several years. I notice she is one of the students reading from a comprehension card. Ms. Oldham looks at her and says, "I'm trying to see what sister's doing here. You doing okay?"

The girl responds, "Yeah."

Ms. Oldham, responds, "Excuse me?"

The girl says, “Yes.”

Ms. Oldham continues, “Don’t ever let me catch you floating again, you hear? You almost had to lie.” As I learned, the girl had been wandering around the hallways when she was supposed to be in a support class earlier that day. When Ms. Oldham caught her, she apparently initially claimed she didn’t know where she was supposed to go, but then relented and said she did. Ms. Oldham then asked her where she was supposed to be tomorrow, “So, where do you have to go tomorrow? Where do you go tomorrow?” Some other students begin to answer for her, but Ms. Oldham cuts the off, “Uh-uh! Nobody help her out, now.”

The girl says, “Art.”

Ms. Oldham’s face lights up, “Oh so you do know! You do know! I knew it. She saw me this morning in the hallway and made an about-face...Saw [Ms. Oldham’s] beautiful face and, snapped back! See, I saved the day.”

Ms. Oldham calls upon another student, whom I recall her expressing particular concern for during a previous observation, and says, “Let me see it Drew (pseudonym). What are you doing?”

He responds with audible irritation, “I’m done.”

She replies, “You’re...?”

Several students whisper to him, “Finished!”

She says calmly, “Don’t help him. You’re gonna’ make me lose my religion.”

Drew corrects himself and responds calmly, “I’m finished.”

She responds with a positive tone, “You better be right, Drew!” and calls him over to her with his work. He takes his novel and notebook over to her. As he shows her his work, I hear her compliment him, reassure him, and critique his mistakes.

Ms. Oldham speaks with various students around the room, checking their progress and offering answers and feedback. In each interaction, students she reinforces expectations for conversation and their work, while also making light-hearted comments and compliments through signified, i.e. *signifying* (Mitchell-Kernan, 1971), *speech and* interactions. She pulls up a chair and begins to interact with both Daniel and the student who had been wandering the halls, saying, “Now you got me sitting down. I wasn’t trying to see y’all until tomorrow.”

The students begin to ask her questions and pointing things about what they’re reading. The young lady appears excited about something she’s read, and Ms. Oldham tells her to come share it with me. She brings her card over and points out a passage about leeches being used in emergency rooms. As she reads it to me, I notice that the expected reading level of the cards is somewhere around 3rd or 4th grade and that she struggles to decode several of the words. After the student returns to her group, Ms. Oldham looks at me and says, “So, you’ve got an idea where we are.”

Daniel says to her, “Ms. Oldham, I don’t get this paragraph.”

She replies to him, “You don’t get? Who you talking to?”

He corrects himself, “I don’t understand.”

She goes on and has Daniel read the paragraph to her and the other student. She requires him to recall and share possible word meanings. As I listen to these interactions, I'm reminded of how much I love teaching

Before I leave, we sit and talk at Ms. Oldham's desk. She proudly shows me her recent language arts scores on a nationally employed battery of standardized tests. The scores are from the second of three rounds of tests taken that year and are intended to show academic growth. Lower scores from the first round of tests were highlighted in red, no change in gray, and growth was shown in yellow. For the entire 6th grade, nearly 60 students, eight students' scores appeared in red, two in gray, five had no color because they had recently transferred to Lowell, and the remaining 45 or so were highlighted in yellow. Although I am not familiar with the scoring scale for this test, those students with red scores lost ten or fewer points compared to their first exam. Students with yellow scores showed growth in the range of single digits upwards to nearly 30 points.

Ms. Mack. I met Ms. Mack during the late spring of 2014 when I visited Lowell Elementary as a researcher to inquire about possible participants in a work investigating the careers of veteran teachers in an urban district. As said, she was recommended as a potential participant by Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham, based upon their experiences with her as a grade-level partner and respected colleague within their community of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991). I informed her of this study's participatory requirements and gained her initial verbal willingness to participate at this time. In September of 2015, I obtained her formal written consent and conducted my first formal observation of classroom environment and interactions on the 18th of this month. All in all, I visited Ms. Mack's fifth-grade classroom on seven occasions, with visits of between 15 and 60 minutes occurring on September 18th, 24th, 29th, October 9th,

November 18th, December 4th, and January 13th. Annotated field notes were taken during these visits from a seat in the room and typed up later the same day. During these visits, I typically spoke with Ms. Mack briefly before she resumed her work with her students.

After initial visits and observations confirmed the relevance and importance of Ms. Mack's participation in this study, we decided to proceed with formal interviews. On October 13th, per her request, we conducted our first interview "bright and early" in her classroom at Lowell shortly after the school was unlocked at 6:00 am. This interview lasted slightly more than 50 minutes, involved both audio recording and field notation, and followed the same first interview protocol in a semi-structured format. Thirty minutes into our interview, my recording device's battery died. Without a replacement, I continued on by taking detailed field notes and transcribing these shortly after leaving the school. Our discussion was detailed, and Ms. Mack seemed very willing to share her perspectives and experiences. During this interview and afterward during transcription, I paid particular attention to my interactions with her while questioning and probing. Through analysis and self-reflection, I notated places where I felt my interjections or probes seemed to change or stifle Ms. Mack's responses. I applied this reflexivity to my initial interviews with the other participants and also noticed points where I felt I should have remained a passive listener. I utilized my interpretation of these moments to be more diligent in second-round interviews with all participants, to let them have more direction and control over the content and length of their responses. From initial interview and literature analysis, as with other participants, I created a second-round protocol specific for Ms. Mack that fit into an overall framework. Our second interview took place on December 11th, at the same time and place. It lasted for just slightly over an hour in length and was productive. Our interactions seemed very positive throughout, and I believe our increasing familiarity with each

other, as well as my additional discretion regarding my participation, benefitted the proceedings of this interaction.

As said, Ms. Mack came to Lowell the year after my departure when her nearby elementary school was closed, a school she worked at for several decades. At Lowell, she taught sixth and fifth grades, and during the time of my work with her as researcher, she taught fifth-grade social studies. Of all the participants, she is the only one no longer teaching the Butterfield School District. Over the course of my time knowing of Ms. Mack's work, she, Ms. Eastman, and Ms. Oldham kept an informal agreement to not retire until all of them decided to do so. All of them reported this had been going for their time together at Lowell. During the 2015-16 school year, all three reported that this was to be their last year of regular classroom teaching. Over the winter holiday break, however, all three rescinded their decisions, and during subsequent visits with them, they each described their personal and shared reasoning for deciding to come back for another year. Unfortunately, however, Ms. Mack learned of a significant threat to her health in the late winter of that school year. This predicament became serious enough that she had to take a leave of absence for the remainder of the school year. According to her, despite her wishes to do so, her employment with the BSD for the 2016-17 school year was precluded by a district-level decision not to reinstate her position. Thus, her career of 41 continuous years in this district concluded.

Ms. Mack is a lifelong resident of a historically African American community in the Butterfield metropolitan area. She attended predominantly African American public schools and holds a master's degree from a local university in curriculum and instruction. She expressed enthusiasm for teaching all subjects and pride in her connections with students. My visits to her fifth-grade social studies classroom were also opportunities for me to make several personal

connections. As I sat in her classroom, which happened to also be my old classroom at Lowell, in my old chair, I not only recounted my own successes and struggles in this place, but also reflected on my own practice as a fifth-grade teacher and college-level instructor of social studies and social studies methods. I would describe Ms. Mack's approach to teaching social studies as primarily traditional. She often worked with her students from a textbook, with comprehension questions and short exams at the end of sections. She also incorporated various fiction and non-fiction trade books into instructional units. Through these, she integrated additional literacy skills, engaged students in visual arts, promoted student interest, and provided additional content and connections for her students. Typically, during my observations, she and her students shared responsibilities in the reading of various selections and participated in teacher-directed discussions of the material. At other times, Ms. Mack included project-based learning into the regular curricula of her classroom, with students engaging in research and production of such projects as "Native American Story Cloths" as a concluding event for their prescribed curricular unit about the first people of the Americas. Examples of these projects are featured here:



Ms. Mack and other participants reported her frustration in previous years because of administrators' tendencies in years past to place students considered to be the most challenging, for behavioral and/or academic reasons, in her homeroom or regular classroom because of years of experience and ability to connect with such students. During my observations of her interactions with students, she, like the previously described participants, maintained a clearly structured classroom environment for herself and her students. Also during my visits, as well as during formal interviews, Ms. Mack expressed deep concern and care for her students' lives and growth. She maintained a culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994) approach with her students through numerous moments of intersection between rigorous academic content and her students' background experiences and competencies, picking up on language cues and expressing things in ways that no doubt many outsiders would not fully comprehend or appreciate. I believe the

following segment from one of my observations well-exemplifies these interpretations. All student names have are pseudonyms:

As I enter the room, I see Ms. Mack sitting at a student desk in the middle of a room of fifth graders. She says to them in her usual, calm tone, “Okay, I need you on pg. 34, and put your thinking cap on.”

The students take out interactive-reader, “consumable” social studies textbooks. Before they begin reading, Ms. Mack previews and explains various text features found on the pages in front of them: an illustration of an old compass, a map of European explorer routes, the map key, etc. As she does this, she makes connections between the featured items, various concepts, and the students’ lives. For example, she compares the compass used by 16th-century sailors to a GPS navigation system found on smart phones. She explains these things primarily through questions and answers. She occasionally interjects humor. She asks the class how they might be able to find out how to get somewhere if they were on a trip. A girl responds, “You can ask somebody for directions.” She responds, “Girl you don’t want to ask nobody, people are crazy.” The class bursts into a brief round of laughter at this remark. When one student appears to be distracted during this section, she redirects him, “Omar, do you know where you are right now?”

Another student attempts to engage in sidebar conversation and Ms. Mack tells him, “Hush.” The student attempts to re-engage after a moment and she says to him, “I’m not gonna’ say hush to you one more time.” The student stops his attempts, smiles up at her and holds up his pencil. This is the same student she took the role-playing cards from

during a previous visit. During this redirection, as with all the redirections I have witnessed in her room, Ms. Mack's voice remains nearly indistinguishable in volume and tone from any of her other voiced interactions with students.

Ms. Mack exhales audibly and gets up. She walks over to the pencil sharpener, and several students also line up to have their pencils sharpened by her.

One boy in the line asks her for a pencil. She reproaches him for a repeated pattern of not coming prepared for class, "I'm not going to keep giving you pencils. When you go home this weekend, tell your folks to buy you pencils and paper, you hear? I've been giving you those every day."

After the students have retaken their seats, Ms. Mack begins a lesson about early European explorers. Following the text, she relates the travels of Lief Erikson. She goes beyond the text to discuss Eric the Red. She describes Viking behavior to the students, "How many of you have heard of the Vikings... Vikings were very manly, and always down for a good fight. They were takers. If they wanted it, they would take it." She read a short passage in the text about Vikings. All students appear to be reading along. She stops to ask a comprehension/vocabulary question, "Ms. Savannah, what does it mean if 'they raided a town'?" The called-upon student only mutters, "Uh..." Ms. Mack responds, "Well, we got 'uh' out of you. Mr. Washburn?" This student responds by saying, "They took care of it." I was initially unsure if this student gave an incorrect response or if he was expressing his answer figuratively. Ms. Mack, however, seemed to have no doubts about his expression and responded, "Yeah, they took care of it. They took everything they wanted, so they took care of it alright."

Ms. Mack focuses her discussion around the map and timeline displaying routes, settlements, and events important to the history of Viking exploration. She gives detailed descriptions of symbols and how to use the compass rose to determine cardinal and ordinal directions between locations.

During this discussion, she notes the location of Canada in the northern part of North America. She adds, “Let me spend this 30-second tidbit with you. For those of you who get a good job when you’re older, go to Canada. It’s beautiful. Every place I’ve been to in Canada was beautiful. So, if you get the chance, go.”

She gives specific redirections to students. Individuals are reminded to sit properly in their chairs, not to slouch, and not play with unnecessary objects. She says things such as, “Put that pencil down...Scoot your tail up...Touch that computer again and it’s gone.”

Ms. Mack calls upon a student to read, “Mr. Venn, can you read for us?” As the student reads, he mistakes the word ‘spices’ for ‘species’. She responds, “Uh, he said, ‘species’. Ladies, what is that word?” Girls around the room say in unison, “Spices!”

She asks the “gentlemen” in the class what ‘silk’ is. As she calls on various boys around the room, they repeatedly shrug their shoulders, sit quietly or verbally indicate they do not know the answer. After eight or nine attempts, Ms. Mack finds a boy who says, “It’s like a thread and cloth.” She responds, “Congratulations Mr. Volquez. You just saved the whole male race.”

Ms. Mack continues to make connections between textual concepts and the students’ likely life experiences. For example, she relates spices to “what your mom has in the

cabinet at home to cook with.” She then asks students to share various spices they use in their homes. She clarifies that “salt” and “peppers” are not spices, but that “chile powder”, “cinnamon”, and “dried red peppers” are.

She describes how early European explorers and traders sought new routes to avoid theft and attack, “You had thieves everywhere. Just like today...If you walk to school every day and there’s always two dogs waiting, and they will bite you, are you going to keep going that way?” The class responds in unison, “NO!” She continues, “That’s right, not if you’ve got a brain in your head. You will find an *alternative route*. So, what does alternative route mean?” A girl responds, “They were looking for a safer route.” Ms. Mack approves, “Oh my God. Ms. Girlfriend was listening. Thank you!” I recall the disturbing frequency in which my students and family have been menaced, or worse, by stray or aggressively-trained dogs in the neighborhoods surrounding Lowell.

She continues to talk about exploration and travel. She asks the class, “How many of you have been on a road trip with your parents? Don’t you expect to come to your home when it’s over? These people were the same way, except they were on water, nothing but water everywhere. So they had to use their brains. They had to figure out where they were. That’s where *navigation tools* came in. What’s navigation mean, Omar?”

Omar is seated at the table Ms. Mack has arranged for her ‘New American Program’ participants to work, rapidly reads a verbatim textbook definition, looks up, and smiles. Ms. Mack chuckles in approval and thanks him. Throughout all of these observations, the students appear overwhelmingly on-task.

Ms. Mack assigns a review activity that involves understanding as well as extension-level thinking. The activity asks them to put themselves ‘in the shoes’ of an explorer and describe how various tools would help them navigate. She tells the students to, “Put their thinking caps on,” as she explains their expectations for the activity. When she is done the students begin quietly working on the activity independently. After two to three minutes have passed, she says, “Everything you need is in the second and third paragraphs.” She calls a student seated by himself over to her again, takes his book, says something to him, and makes several marks in his book before handing it back to him.

After approximately five minutes have passed, she brings the class back together to share answers. She calls on students at random. After one boy gives a satisfactory answer, she responds with enthusiasm, “Thank you sir!” As she looks around the room for other students to call upon, she says, “Oh, why are you looking away from me Mr.

Washington, like you don’t want me to call on you. You know next time I’m going to...Ms. Mallot, let’s hear what you have to say.” She asks students to explain how maps might have been used. After hearing from several of the students who usually give outspoken answers, she says, “Can I get some new blood for the maps? Some new blood? Oh, God.”

After hearing several other responses, Ms. Mack gives a brief address regarding the students’ grades in her class, the upcoming end of the quarter, and parent-teacher conferences. She says, “Remember at the beginning of the year when I said I’m only giving out A’s, B’s, and a C’s? Some of you might be making a liar out of me. Don’t do that. Nobody should get a D or an F in Social Studies.”

She then prompts students to do well in their next class, especially considering they would be having a test in this class. She double checks with a student, “You got that Omar? Check your answers.” She then lines them up with her usual ‘numbered’ procedure. I count 30 students in the class.

Ms. Ford. As previously described, I met Ms. Ford some years before the commencement of this project during a contention-filled district-wide training for an abruptly implemented scripted reading program. Ms. Eastman and I were in attendance, and she introduced us. She and Ms. Ford had worked together years before until their school was problematically closed in 1997. Since that time, they and a group of former co-workers kept in touch through various personal and professional interactions. I recall feeling an immediate affinity with Ms. Ford, not only because Ms. Eastman held her abilities as a teacher in high regard, but also because of her critiques and sense of humor in the face of various situations our students, selves, and colleagues faced in our schools and city.

During my re-acquaintance with her as researcher, beginning with our preliminary meeting at Lowell in the late spring of 2014, I was reminded of Ms. Ford’s critical humor while also receiving her willingness to participate. During our preliminary discussions, I learned Ms. Ford entered the profession as a paraprofessional in the Butterfield School District in 1978 and gained her classroom certification through a district program that provided financial support for coursework and district mentorship that began in 1994. I was familiar with this program as it remained ongoing during my time as teacher in the BSD, with me participating in it for its final year as an in-district mentor for a new classroom teacher. As a paid paraprofessional, Ms. Ford also performed the role of classroom teacher in various places and times, a practice not uncommon during these years. I recall numerous arrangements in my early years of teaching in

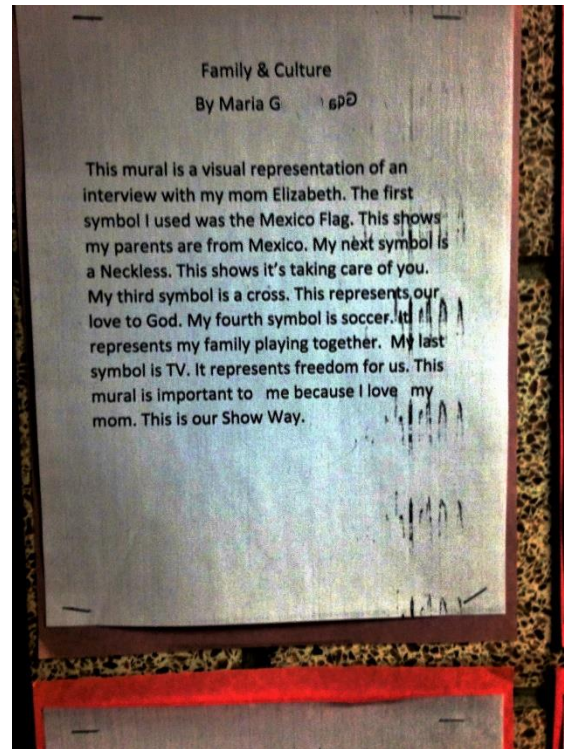
which individuals without classroom certificates nevertheless assumed full-time duties as classroom teachers for significant periods, sometimes entire years at a time. Thus, determining an exact count of Ms. Ford's years as a classroom teacher is somewhat difficult. After some discussion, however, we decided it best to use the district's accounting of her years of teaching experience given through the retirement system. According to this system, she is currently in her 28th year of classroom experience. She continues her education as a teacher, and during my interactions with Ms. Mack as researcher during the 2015-16 school year, she was working on her master's degree in curriculum and instruction, while also supervising student teachers from a local university. She is a mother and lifelong resident of the central, predominantly African American neighborhoods of Butterfield, where she attended BSD schools and also sent her children through the same school system.

During my work with Ms. Ford, I visited her classroom, a self-contained, regular third-grade class of 24 – 28 students, for observations on six occasions during the 2015-16 school year: September 15th, October 9th, November 18th, December 4th, January 13th, and May 13th. Observations lasted between 20 to 60 minutes and included such activities as me speaking briefly with Ms. Ford, my involvement in various classroom activities such as representing an audience or assisting individual students, and generally passive observational periods from a seated vantage point. Whenever I visited her room, Ms. Ford welcomed me aloud to the class and ensured they knew my name and purpose for being there. She introduced me as a guest and after several visits, students were visibly excited upon her announcement of my arrival into their classroom. Annotated field notes were taken during these visits with transcription completed later each day. First and second-round semi-structured interviews followed the same protocol development and delivery procedures as all other participants with complete audio recordings

and personal transcriptions for each. Our first interview, lasting almost exactly 90 minutes, took place in her classroom after school on September 22. Our interactions throughout were relaxed, very productive, and provided many opportunities for sharing common experiences and perspectives of Butterfield and our lives in its core neighborhoods. She spoke much of her family's experiences in their community and schools, and how these intersect with her work as a teacher. Our second interview, lasting a little more than an hour and a half, was likewise productive and a time for sharing and connections.

I found visits to Ms. Ford's classroom to be particularly beneficial, intriguing, and enjoyable as a researcher and teacher. Before entering her room, one immediately noticed the variety of visually appealing student work. Closer inspection revealed work that engaged students' life experiences while also encouraging academic rigor, artistic expression, and knowledge of place in the world. Displayed work changed throughout the period of observation from month to month. Below, featured work outside of Ms. Mack's doorway includes a collage of photos from recent science unit, artwork and descriptive paragraphs created by students for a family history project, and letters written to active members of the armed forces:





Unlike the more highly, or perhaps traditionally, structured classroom environments of the previously described participants, the environment inside Ms. Ford's classroom typically had a louder volume and a more open, energetic atmosphere, often with multiple people speaking in small groups or as a class in rapid succession or unison. This is not to say, however, that her class lacked in structure, for Ms. Ford still maintained excellent management of her students' behavior and ensured their engagement in learning activities. Class-wide discussions and presentations of projects were common, as were independent and guided practice periods in which Ms. Ford sat in the middle of her students, constantly giving attention and feedback, both sought and unsought, to all of them. As with all the other participants, Ms. Ford's pedagogy remained culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1994), with high expectations for work and behavior being coupled to receptions and expressions relevant to her and her student's shared experiences and perspectives. In particular, Ms. Ford employed a communal approach in which

students were expected to support each other. Humor was an integral part of her instruction, taking on multiple levels between adults and children present in the classroom, and a pervasive countenance of care was evident at all times. While leading discussions, I could not help but draw similarities between her interaction with the class and my own limited participation, through experiences with my wife's family, in African American churches and religious functions in Butterfield. During our interviews, Ms. Mack reported that she grew up in a church known locally as "the teachers' church" and that her experiences in this community and place were fundamental to her early development and entrance into the teaching profession. I believe the following vignette from one of my visits to her classroom provides a good example of my overall interpretations of interactions within Ms. Mack's classroom community:

As I enter the classroom, Ms. Ford says to me, "I suppose you want me to put on my dog and pony show?" I say whatever is going on is fine, and she responds, "Well good, 'cause you're not gonna' see any dogs or ponies this morning."

Ms. Ford has 26 third graders in the classroom, seated in two long groups of double desks, working in partners with Venn Diagrams and basal readers in front of them. They compare and contrast past and present ways for obtaining food based upon several feature articles they have recently read in their basal reader. The volume in the room strikes me as loud. The students are highly engaged and sporadically raise their hands to gain Ms. Ford's attention. Ms. Ford walks around the room, making enthusiastic comments such as, 'Yes!...I saw you!...I like it! Now tell me more.' Students smile at her recognitions. She puts her arm around several students and confers with them.

At one point, she visits the smaller group where I sit, checks one of the student's work, and then gives me a look that says, "Did you help her with this?" I say that I showed her how to summarize some of the information. She then discretely relates information about the student's strengths and challenges.

Ms. Ford announces that she is counting down from ten for students to get back to their seats and have their desks ready to leave for a restroom break. She counts by twos. The rooms' volume drops to only the sound of things moving and the shuffling of feet. By the time she reaches the end of her countdown, which includes a sympathetic "One", the students have returned to their seats and quietly look to her for direction.

She moves over to a tally chart on the board and begins giving out points to all the groups for doing so well during this transition. She says, "Now, come on, group Four can't keep winning every week! Didn't I move you guys around? What? Nobody's back there messing things up for you?" A girl in this group nods her head. "Really? Well it must be you since you just joined that group!" The girl smiles broadly and then hides her face in her hands. After this, she lines the class up in two lines, and they exit silently.

Outside the door, I hear a newer teacher berating her class as they attempt to walk up the stairs. She is white. It seems to be one of those painfully frequent "standoffs," in which a teacher attempts to get a class in order by making them wait, with any small transgression "ruining it for the group." The frustration by everyone can be heard in complaints from all-around. The teacher attempts to make appeals to her own efforts, "I've tried to do [this]...and I've tried to do [that], but you guys can't seem to get it together..." The class then quiets down suddenly.

At the same time, Ms. Ford's class appears so quietly at the door I didn't know they were approaching until I see several small faces looking around the corner at me. I assume the disruptive class quieted because of their approach. The class re-enters with students hurriedly whispering to each other, encouraging others to hurry up and follow procedures. Once settled, Ms. Ford addresses the class, "We've been talkin' a lot about how a sentence works. Who can tell me about the parts of a sentence?" She calls on a few students. A boy near the back quickly puts on a pair of sunglasses, looks around at his peers with his head ducked, and then jams them back into his desk. Ms. Ford moves around the room, leading a discussion of sentence types and engaging with the class in what appears to be a more general "call-and-response" form of discussion. As she does so, she nonchalantly passes by the boy with the sunglasses, bends down and takes them out of his desk, and says to him, "Don't worry, I'm gonna' put them right here." She sets them down in a box on top of a book shelf towards the back.

Many students appear excited and, initially at least, "antsy," to me, squirming about in chairs, turning quickly in one direction or the other. One student, an African American boy, stands up, falls to the floor, gets up, and sits back down several times. As he does this, he continues to respond to her questions with the class. Ms. Ford walks over to him, inaudibly redirects him, and he retakes his seat. He then continues to respond to her, but instead punches excitedly at the air. Ms. Ford's volume rises and falls frequently during this. She gets out a pack of number cards and drops them on a desk as individual students begin to give out individual examples of sentences. As she calls for responses, students answer quietly and piecemeal. She repeats her questions louder, calling for and causing the students to respond louder, "Imperative...Imperative!"

Ms. Ford moves up to a carpet area in front of a projection screen. She begins a mini-lesson in which definitions and examples of the different types of sentences are displayed on the screen. Students initially work from their seats, until she says, “You need to get closer? Well, go to the floor!” Students begin flooding excitedly from their seats to the floor. “No, I know all of you don’t need to come up here...Excuse me Joseph, you’re gonna’ have to pull your feet in. Thank you Joseph. Everyone needs some help sometimes, I think it’s you Ronald. I’ll put you right there. You sit right there, baby.” After quickly managing the students’ seating arrangement on the carpet with these words, she points out that some her directions are examples of imperative sentences.

She gives another example of a different type of sentence, interrogative, and explains how this word relates to “interrogate” by rasping her knuckles on a desk and pretending to be, “The police coming to your door to ask you a few questions...to interrogate you.” When a student from another class enters the room looking for a lost notebook, she uses this as an opportunity to give an example of a declarative sentence, “Jerome, I don’t know where your notebook is.”

The students hurriedly write notes (as I am at this moment, feeling part of the synergy of the room), with Ms. Ford’s dialogue moves fluidly between individual and whole-group audiences. She corrects individuals and small groups through these interactions, “You got it all Anton? Really? You were talkin’ so much I thought you were through...Come up here, Yasmine...Really? You stopped looking up so much I thought you couldn’t see.” As students work to summarize the notes from the board and their discussion, Ms. Ford announces, “Are we ready to move?” Which is answered by an overwhelming, “No!” She

responds, “Well, you might have to get it later! I want to practice some of these sentences!”

A student seated immediately in front of her is busily writing, and she encourages him to finish up shortly. He insists on having more time to complete his notes. She looks at me and says, “Sometimes I let them finish, sometimes I don’t. You can write that down. But I know this one’s father will be on him about his homework, so I’ll make sure he gets it or the study guide.” suggesting to me that these notes and examples would be a necessary part of the students’ homework.

After shifted into a guided practice session with the students at their desks, Ms. Ford begins moving around the room, pulling cards that I finally surmise provide means for randomly selecting students to respond. This routine , however, seems to incorporate a bit of Ms. Ford’s discretion as well. She says to the boy who had the sunglasses, “This time I really pulled yours. What’s an imperative sentence?” The student gives an incorrect definition. Ms. Ford says to the class, “What’s it?” and the group starts to give many different definitions. One student, the boy who had been punching the air, and still is, excitedly shouts out an acceptable definition louder than the rest. Ms. Ford looks back at the original student and says, “Okay. Now you’re ready.” The class quiets and this student then repeats the correct definition. “Now, I want you to give me an example. I want all of us to write an example while Anthony gets his ready!”

As the students get to work she gives directions and focuses on a paper, “Please write something appropriate. I don’t want to see something about killing somebody,” which is answered by a few audible, “Ooo’s!” reverberating around the room. “Please make it

appropriate! What kind of a sentence is that? Please...make...it...appropriate!” Ms. Ford begins to pull number cards to hear student examples for each type of sentence, ‘Number 25, isn’t that you Lakeedra? How you feeling today Lakeedra? You’ve been out sick. You feeling up to it?’ She gives enthusiastic recognition by reading aloud correct examples. The students respond with matching enthusiasm. She says, “I love the way you said that!” or, in a deep voice, “I command you to do that!” Another student offers two examples for imperative sentences, “Man, extra examples! I like that! Help me! That is a command. Help me, I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!”

A girl tries to give an answer without her number being selected. Ms. Ford responds, “Did I call your number? Okay, what’s your number Alejandra? Fifteen? Well, let’s see if you’re up next?” The class waits with anticipation...“Fifteen!” The class lets out a collective “Oooo!” and one student exclaims, “You cheated, Ms. Ford!” She responds, “I sure didn’t. Let’s hear it!” Alejandra gives her example for an imperative sentence: “Don’t go there.” Ms. Ford responds with excitement, “Ooo! I like that one! Don’t go there, girl!”

At this point, the line blur between Ms. Ford giving examples and talking to the class seems to blur. She repeats things that appear half-literal and half-exemplified, “Stop talking, please! Stop talking please! Do you hear the anger in my voice? That anger needs an explanation mark. I hope you have a Merry Christmas Cecil! Have a Merry Christmas Cecil! Happy Hanukah Brandon! Celebrate Kwanzaa Bao Minh!” Ms. Ford laughs out loud, “You see, sentences can combine sometimes.”

Ms. Ford then takes time to show students how to write exclamation points on the white board. The students remain excited about their successes. She quiets the class and asks the original student for his example, “Anthony, turn your mic. Come on and step up. What do you have? I can’t hear youuu...” The student gives an appropriate example.

Another student gives an example to Ms. Ford in a conference setting. ‘We’re not writing anything Jesse about “stupid.” You can’t go to your friend’s house because you’re stupid? That’s a terrible way to talk. Somebody talkin’ to you that way? If somebody ever talks to you that way, let me know and I’ll let them know it’s not okay to talk that way to you.’

At one point, Ms. Ford calls upon a student who appears to no longer be involved in the activity. She moves closer as she asks, “Did I lose Jasmine? Did I lose you? Still lost, still lost, still lost.” The girl reluctantly looks up at her, and Ms. Ford starts to back up from her, “I got ya. Do I got ya? I got ya!” She then gives an explanation of the independent work/homework to the student, and simultaneously to the rest of the class.

Ms. Ford has a clip chart that matches the places described in *Oh the Places You’ll Go*: “The Waiting Place,” “A Lurch,” “A Slump...” I recall the importance of this book to a principal we both worked for years ago.

As I leave the room, another young, white teacher is attempting to get her class in order in the hallway outside the door, “See, that’s where it starts, I give you a direction and you start with the attitude! You can’t be line leader and the monitor at the same time! So, you need to make up your mind. Count on being in a different line order tomorrow!” Her class continues to shift about and complain as they wait.

Chapter 4: Findings

Interpretation of Responses

Reflexivity and language. Before delineating and describing predominant themes from the responses of the participants, I feel a certain measure of reflexivity is warranted given the epistemological and methodological assumptions utilized in, and emergent situations encountered during, the collection and interpretation of these findings. As a qualitative piece, my role as an “instrument” or agent during this phase must not only be acknowledged but also reflexively examined. As a project in which critical intersections of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, researcher-participant roles, and other constructions are at least recognized as inseparable from these negotiations, an examination of my positionality and interactions with the participants and their responses during the collection, interpretation, and analysis phases of this chapter will serve as its introduction.

First, as a career-long teacher in the same district the participants also spent the overwhelming majority, if not entirety, of their careers, I was not only able to make particular and personal connections to the conditions, situations, relationships, trends, and events they described, but could also empathize in some ways with their stories and descriptions. As has and should continue to be noted, in other ways, however, profound ways intersecting with differences in race, gender, age, socioeconomic background, etc., I cannot empathize but instead have attempted to remain attentive to these differences and possible sites of repression as I have attempted to remain responsive and responsible in my attention to and interpretation of the participants’ words and perspectives. Additionally, as a teacher among teachers, a certain amount of solidarity reinforced my belief in the participating teachers’ intentions, strengths, competencies, and acts of resistance. Given my positions, professional orientations and intimate

knowledge of previous negative portrayals of, and aggressions against, the participants during their professional lives at Lowell and in Butterfield schools, my resolve to portray their responses positively and competently becomes a matter of ethical and necessity remaining true to myself. Thus, my focus and interpretive lens throughout the construction of this chapter remains one of presumed competence, expertise, candidness, and sincere respect towards the work and words of these four African American women.

Second, as a teacher in the Butterfield public school district, resident of the central and predominantly African-American neighborhoods of our city, and family member in a working class (Lareau, 2002) African American family, I have developed ability to code-switch (DeBose, 1992), or take on a more fluid language profile, between the middle class white dialect of my upbringing, my university-level academic student and instructor positions, and the African American Vernacular English, or African American Language (Kirkland, 2010) predominantly spoken by family, friends, students, administrators and professional peers. During our interactions, the teachers featured in this study also employed fluid and bidialectal (Chisholm & Godley, 2011) linguistic modes between the AAL of their home communities and the academic language often used in mainstream discussions of pedagogical practice. Our interactions, however, were more than exercises in code-switching and deciphering, and intersections with personal and professional relations, common experiences, and mutual respect between us facilitated shared understandings, fluid conversation, and nuanced communication. In this way, interviews, both formal and informal, progressed conversationally and were consistently sincere, clear, and reciprocal. For example, meanings and understandings were further shared through common conventions and structures, such as embedded dialogue. This often occurred without speech tags, and required particular familiarity and attention by the listener, as knowing or

correctly interpreting such dialogue, be it voiced in the first, second or third person, was crucial for credible interpretation during interviews and their transcription and analysis. I believe the following example, in which Ms. Ford and I discussed her experiences with professional relationships during a formal interview, provides an anchor through which these conversational and interpretational modes and understandings may be more clearly illustrated. It begins with me describing the formation of my professional relationship with Ms. Eastman and the negative comments made to me about her by several white teachers:

Me: No, I hadn't, but once we did meet and started talking I was like, I had already started thinking these people were wrong, because, "Maybe she doesn't want to say 'Hi' to you because you, you're not very nice either."

Ms. Ford: Yeah, but I'm like you. They came to me when I arrived, but I had already heard from Eastman. See, [she] had already told me, "I ain't gonna' say nuthin' about 'em, but...[trails off]" (laughs).

Me: Yeah, she wanted you to make your own.

Ms. Ford: Right! And I told her, "Please!" because she already know me, "Please! 'Cause I really like people different from you, and you know that! From in the waaaay' back, I like people different than you. I see different things in people." That's my girl, though, but she got a little something on her back too. "Girl, that happened back to you in the 70's and the 60's, 80's," and I ain't gonna' say if they all true, and you're right, they'd probably lynch me tomorrow, but in the meantime, I'm gonna' get my work done.

Relying on audio recording and general field notes to capture content, it was not possible to create the punctuation seen in this example during the conduct of the interviews. While my responses during interviews required me to recognize Ms. Ford's words in her final response, "“Girl, that happened back to you in the 70's, and 60's, 80's,”" as a piece of embedded dialogue, and to differentiate it from the following line, "...and I ain't gonna' say if they all true...", it was not until I began transcribing audio tapes of interviews that I could accurately place punctuation as a means for credibly representing explicit and implied meanings. Mutual understandings were also found in this excerpt in terms of the dialectical and interpersonal shifts that took place both during and after interviews. Beyond the more obvious meanings conveyed in Ms. Ford's use of conversational features common to AAL, certain lines required both knowledge of discourse codes as well as interpersonal communication between Ms. Ford and myself. For example, when Ms. Ford said, "“Please! ‘Cause I really like people different than you,”" I interpreted this as her expressing how she approaches relationships with colleagues differently than Ms. Eastman. That is, Ms. Ford was not saying that she *likes people who are different from* Ms. Eastman, but that she sees her way of "liking" and approaching relationships with others as different from Ms. Eastman's, that she *likes people differently than* Ms. Eastman does. When Ms. Ford described Ms. Eastman's words to her regarding her perspectives of other teachers at Lowell, reporting that Ms. Eastman told her, "“I ain't gonna say nuthin' about ‘em,’ but...[trailing off]," I interpreted this to mean that despite Ms. Eastman's ostensible attempt to remain neutral in her description of other staff members to Ms. Ford, the attachment of "...but..." at the end indicated also represented an admonishment. My interpretation of meaning in this passage was also furthered through awareness of metaphor in the words, "...she got a little something on her back too," as a description of perceived negative effects on Ms. Eastman's demeanor towards interactions with

particular colleagues after years of experience with racism from other educators in Butterfield schools.

Spirituality in interpretation. In addition to awareness of implied meaning and other conventions, through shared discourse, dialect, shared experiences, and background knowledge, the participants and I also shared understandings regarding particular religious references and meanings. As an example of this, consider the following excerpt, in which Ms. Eastman described a situation she encountered when a group of white teachers at Lowell Elementary attempted to hinder her from playing music in her room before the start of the school day:

Ms. Eastman: But that's what they were talking about. About the Gospel music that I would be playing, you know.

Me: It was unfamiliar to them.

Ms. Eastman: Uh-huh, right, so, 'cause I remember one teacher came and asked me, you know, uh, I can't remember what song it was, and it was a spiritual, gospel song. And I was just clapping and carrying on (laughs), and she stopped at the door and said, "Ooo! That has a, uh, upbeat tempo. I kinda' like that! What kinda' music is that?"

Me: This was a white teacher?

Ms. Eastman Uh-huh. I said, "It's keep the Devil away music!"

(both laugh)

Ms. Eastman: And she looked at me, she said, "Oh," and she went on, you know. Now, like I said, petty stuff. I'm playin' music. And after that, a couple other teachers start

playing their music, you know, so it seems like when I have an idea, some of the teachers catch on, and they start doing it...

From the standpoint of a long-time peer, I was aware of numerous marginalizing and aggressive actions by white co-workers against Ms. Eastman. While I appreciated the humor in her response, “It’s keep the Devil away music!” I also remained aware of Ms. Eastman’s frequent references to scriptural adages from our conversations over the years. She had often described deceptive or oppressive behavior by white teachers and administrators towards staff and students of color through phrases such as “You know what they say, the devil is a lie” or “There’s thieves in the temple.” As a researcher, I interpreted her inclusion of this statement and description of this moment as stressing the importance of awareness, diligence, and resistance towards intrusive, deceptive, and oppressive behavior. Through her reference to “the Devil,” a character reliant on deception, Ms. Eastman made clear her doubt and mistrust for the veiled and innocent lack of awareness or curiosity expressed in her account by the white teacher, while also expressing her wish to be left in peace and “keep” negativity “away” from her professional space.

In a separate example, from an interview with Ms. Mack and one that provided inspiration for the title of this dissertation, similar interpretive nuance along religious lines may also be illustrated. In the following example, she described the importance of remaining candidly mindful personal challenges faced by many of her students from turmoil in their daily lives as well as pressures exerted from standardization and intensification of curriculum and testing:

Ms. Mack: Mm-hm. And that’s something else, everybody’s got a phone. It’s just the values are different. And then, one other thing that really ticks me off is some kids come

to school not clean. How could you send your kid to school in dirty clothes and this body odor? I don't understand how you have a mother in the house, I don't understand that, but then, again, *sign of the times, just like weeds, except they don't grow up* [emphasis added]. I remember one young man I had, I would actually let him sit back and rest, 'cause he was up all night, parents on drugs and partying, and wouldn't get any rest. And after we talked, 'cause I used to, when I was at [previous school] we'd go outside and talk, and I found that out, I understood. So, sometimes, we have to understand. Instead of fussing at a kid, "Sit down. Don't do..." If you understand their problem, it'll help them kinda' deal with stuff.

As said, on the surface Ms. Mack described the importance of competently taking into account students' experiences with turmoil in her pedagogical approach. In my interpretation, however, the words, "...sign of the times, just like weeds, except they don't grow up," also alluded to deeper spiritual connection and attachment of meaning. I interpreted this line in terms of a connection drawn by Ms. Mack from the realities faced by herself and students to an eschatological outlook towards perceived social change and breakdown. The phrase, "sign of the times" has been featured in Christian tradition in reference to apocalyptic progress, as *signs* or indications of movement towards fulfillment of a divine reckoning. References to such *signs* are found throughout Biblical scripture, in books such as Matthew (24:3-36, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*) and Revelation. I further interpreted Ms. Ford's attachment of, "...just like weeds," along eschatological lines in connection with a selection from the book of Matthew (13: 24-30), in which "the Enemy" sows weed seeds among wheat seeds in a master's field. The weeds, or unrepentant, cannot be separated from the wheat, or faithful, until after harvest, or time of reckoning. In Ms. Ford's comparison, however, it is recognized that some students will never

reach this moment of reckoning, i.e. "...except they don't grow up." This highlighted the importance acknowledgment and responsiveness towards potential life outcomes for students as well as spiritual connection and interpretation. Although my elucidations here may seem as largely conjecture at this point, I hope that in the following chapters Ms. Mack's accounting of the significance and intimacy of religious community and practice throughout her life, and specifically in her pedagogical development, will lend credibility towards these interpretations.

As will be seen, spiritual references and the importance of spirituality featured prominently in all of the participants' descriptions of professional challenge and support, and their emphasis will be framed through several categorical themes. Inclusion of this interpretive component should not be interpreted as representative of personal religious views or beliefs on my part but as part of the greater scheme of interpretation in this chapter. As my life experiences prepared me to converse and credibly interpret with participants in various modes of dialogue, so to have my previous formal, educational experiences with Christian tradition and texts guided me in religiously-themed interpretation. During my childhood, I acquired familiarity with Biblical scripture through my family's regular participation in the Methodist church and confirmation classes. My knowledge of scriptural content later grew during my undergraduate studies and culminating with the writing and defense of an undergraduate thesis, under the direction of my medieval history professor and mentor, in which I connected apocalyptic allusions made in a late 12th-century chronicle to passages in the Bible. Through this work, I also learned to appreciate the value of interpretation and recognize the importance of looking beyond attempts to describe the deliberate intentions of speakers and authors through their choice of stories and words, and to instead seek shared understandings between the originator and audience and see their words in terms of the milieus in which they were produced. Even with this

background and interpretive stance, as the following example from an interview with Ms. Oldham attested, I nevertheless remained in need of additional “schooling” in terms of seeking more credible interpretations, and, thus, consider this work to be a continuation this learning process:

Me: And so, let’s see, okay, last thing here. Um, what are two or three, or however many pieces you would give to somebody entering into education today? So, we talked about the new generation coming in, what would say to them, somebody coming to a school like this?

Ms. Oldham: Be very sure. Be sure. Be dedicated. Love it.

Me: When you say “sure”?

Ms. Oldham: Be sure this is what you want to do. You know, be sure this is the journey you want to take. Don’t take it lightly. This is, and don’t make it secondary. This is your first choice. So, you know, handle it like that. Be dedicated, love kids, gotta’ love kids. And travel on your knees. (laughs)

Me: Travel on your knees?

Ms. Oldham: Travel on your knees, with this you do have to travel on your knees.

Me: Does that mean pray?

Ms. Oldham: Yes, I’m sorry.

Me: Okay, I haven’t heard that one before.

Ms. Oldham: That's southern. Travel this journey on your knees, and don't be ashamed to ask for help.

Thematic framework

As described in the previous chapter, after completing several rounds of initial analysis and open coding, I began a process of establishing axial codes, or anchor points, around which the data might be clustered. Initially, I sought two groups of categories for these clusters, the first being those things that answered my guiding question, "What do they describe as the most significant challenges in their career paths and pedagogical practices?" and the second being, "What do they describe as significant in their abilities to meet or navigate these challenges?" As I openly coded the data with these questions in mind, looking for sources of challenge and frustration as well as sources of support, strength, satisfaction, and redemption, the reflexive and recursive process of developing axial categories from and for my open codes seemed relatively straightforward. During this process, however, I soon realized the dichotomous nature of these guiding questions also lent itself to the dichotomous pairing between the categories. Thus, while things that increased descriptors or themes, such as *connection*, were expressed as sources of strength and satisfaction, things described as detrimental to *connection* readily became sources of challenge and frustration. In this way, categories for both positives and negatives coalesced into dichotomies around particular categorical themes, with positives increasing those themes and negatives working against them in the participants' responses.

In all, five major, succinct themes emerged through this process: *competence*, *commitment*, *candor and acknowledgment*, *agency*, and *connection*. After numerous rounds of delineation and revisiting coded data, various shifts, and frustrations with these shifts, I believe

these categories represent my interpretation of the data in a way that is credible and allows for comparisons and connections to be drawn within and across the participants' responses.

Furthermore, these five themes represent both what the participants "practiced," i.e. things I interpreted and gave meaning through the content of stories and reflections shared by the participants; as well as what they "preached," i.e. values, beliefs, advice, wisdom and other things more directly stated by the participants. Detailed description of the shifts and final "cast" for each of the themes as they stand in this study will follow as introductions to each theme's section.

In the following sections, individual participant's responses will be presented in support of the above categorical framework of *competence, commitment, candor and acknowledgment, agency, and connection*. After some consideration and consultation, participant responses for each theme will be presented in separate sections in order to clearly nuance and individually affirm their contributions to this project. As noted in the previous chapter, individual interviews provided material high in quality and quantity, with interview transcripts alone totaling about 260 single-spaced, 11-point pages. Given the depth of the data and evidential possibilities presented, support for categorical themes appears in the following section through exemplars selected, metaphorically speaking, for their precision and accuracy. Through a metaphor of precision, as something that hits close to the mark, exemplars were selected according to how well they illustrated interpretation of thematic categories in this study's framework. Through a metaphor of accuracy, exemplars were selected as representatives of groupings of similar and possible supporting examples from the data.

Additionally, the following findings represent things expressed by the participants and my interpretations of these expressions, not generalizations about the participants, their

intentions, desires, or personality traits. Instead, my assertions regarding the themes remained, to the best of my ability at least, rooted in what was said by the participants and the possibilities these contributions presented for interpretation. Thus, wording such as “For Ms. Eastman, *agency* is...” or “The importance of *candor* for Ms. Mack was seen in...” will be avoided in lieu of assertions worded along the lines of “In the following passage, the importance of *competence* manifested in terms of...”

In one of two final notes regarding nomenclature, all names, save my own, in the data have been substituted with pseudonyms or bracketed descriptors. On a final note, I also want to delineate a terminology scheme that emerged during the analysis and write-up processes of this chapter. While seeking a better way to describe relationships between the participants and other teachers, I developed and applied a concept describable as *peers versus colleagues*. On the surface, and certainly some denotations the terms indicate this, *peers* and *colleagues* appear synonymous. One could generally employ either when referring to another teacher one has interacted with or observed. A more connotative comparison of these terms, however, allowed for particular differences between them to be contrasted, and such contrasts were applied to the interpretation and presentation of the participants’ responses in this chapter. In this more nuanced presentation, *peers*, referred and will refer to educators recognized by the participants for both their positions as teachers and their positive attributes. They were considered “on the level” and described as worthy of trust and mutual understandings, values, and competencies. Other teachers, described as co-workers and perhaps deserving of respect for their positions as teachers, but lacking in describable commitment, care, effectiveness, expertise, connection, and other of the attributes valued in the participants’ responses were considered and termed as *colleagues*.

Presentation of themes

Competence. To begin, the importance of *competence* featured heavily throughout all participants' responses. As a theme in this study, *competence* was applied to both personal pedagogical practice for the participants as well as the educational effectiveness of others, such as administrators and other teachers. Although most readily associated with teaching or leadership effectiveness, this theme encompassed and extended beyond notions of educational effectiveness as measured through psychometric assessments of growth. As will be seen, in some responses, improvements on standardized test scores were described by participants as sources of professional satisfaction and indicators of competence; while in others, pedagogical competence was expressed through social, developmental, and/or cultural responsiveness towards students' identities, experiences, and community. These components of teacher competence included expressions of the importance of *care* towards others and the importance of fostering *growth* for individuals. The importance of *growth* and *care* included stories such as another teacher's actions viewed as limiting to students' educational experiences or a story about an administrator's leadership approach described as. Although the ideas of *care* and *growth* were at times in the analysis process considered able to stand as a separate category, or categories, the recurring expression of these ideas in the participants' responses as essential to one's pedagogical effectiveness, justifiably warrants their inclusion under its conceptual umbrella.

Ms. Eastman. As mentioned, I have known and worked with Ms. Eastman longer than any of the participants, and I consider her both an exceptionally effective educator and a dear friend. I believe our working and personal relationship would not have developed and been maintained over the years if she did not consider me to be a competent educator within the

socioeconomic and cultural milieu at Lowell. As will be seen in the following exemplars, many of the stories shared by Ms. Eastman, and other participants, drew intersections between cultural responsiveness and pedagogical competence and illustrated the detrimental effects on students when white teachers from backgrounds similar to my own failed in these competencies. This has been something we discussed many times over the years of our professional collaboration and it again emerged as a prominent theme during our interactions for this study.

Ms. Eastman's descriptions of the importance of *competence* as an educator centered around several facets of pedagogical practice. During observations, informal conversations, and formal interviews she related numerous stories and moments in which she took students from other classrooms into her own as a way to shelter and redirect them. She described these students as coming from classes where they were described as acting "belligerently," or where teachers unfairly targeted relatively minor infractions or misperceived behaviors. In each of these stories, Ms. Eastman explained how she redirected the students and prepared them to re-enter and succeed, or at least survive, in their regular classrooms. In the following excerpt from one of our interviews, she described how she intervened in the life of a student who had been sent to her room for ostensible discipline, but whom she discovered had been contemplating suicide. The passage begins with her recounting words she spoke to him:

"Oh come on, baby, why would you want to do that. It's not that bad. Things could be worse. You get to eat every night?" He said, "Yes." and I said, "You look clean. You have nice clothes on." He said, "My mom just bought this shirt for me." He smiled and I said, "You're nice looking too. I want you to promise me something. Promise me that you will love you, nothing else, just start loving you." And he said, "Okay Ms. Eastman." The other day, I had him in my class and we were making 'oblique' [spelled Oobleck].

He was just smiling away and I asked him, “You don’t still feel like killing yourself do you?” He said, “No.” So, what these kids are going through, it’s more than a notion, you have to be sensitive to them and build them up.

Although featured here and in other passages provided by Ms. Eastman in terms of willingness and ability to responsively care for students’ emotional and social needs, *competence* in her accounts also included descriptions of academic successes with students. In particular, her responses connected with the theme of *competence* through featuring of student scores on standardized assessments as evidence of her pedagogical effectiveness. For example, in one of our conversations during a visit to her classroom, and similar to the featured moment in Ms. Oldham’s class in Chapter 3, Ms. Eastman shared her students’ most recent district-administered language arts assessment results. She expressed satisfaction that as the language arts instructor for over 50 fifth graders, more than 80% of them showed growth from their previous exam. In another example, from a formal interview, Ms. Eastman described her work during the 2014-15 school year with a class of 31 sixth-grade students whom she reported were considered to be a difficult group to work with for both teachers and administrators. In the following account, she described how she was selected by her principle to work with this class during the crucial statewide testing period because of their homeroom teacher’s failure to effectively engage them. The passage below begins with Ms. Eastman depicting the homeroom teacher’s complaint to their principal, Mr. Acosta, about this group of students:

Ms. Eastman: “Mr. A., I just can’t tell with it, they’re driving me crazy!” So, I’m like, “Well, it’s time for you to go.” You know? But fifth grade, 5B, we were cool. And even Mr. A said, “They’d do anything for you, to please you.” But these other folk, you know, y’all, and I got up in a meeting one day, and I said, “You all are too quick to put these

kids down. I wonder if you're putting the kids down in your own classrooms, like you're doin' these kids?"

Me: Yeah, I've always had a problem with that.

Ms. Eastman: And then, "You lower grades [teachers]. You don't even know these kids. How can you put these kids down? You havin' no contact!" And I mean, I made my speech (laughs), like, "Do your class. Leave these kids alone." You know? So, uh, and during the test, he [Mr. Acosta] said, well before the test, he says, "Well, Ms. Eastman, 5B works better for you. Would you monitor 5B?" I'm like, "I don't have a problem with it." First two days of the test, we were in the library. In the library, you know, there's enough room that they can spread out. And, they, Mr. Richards, they rocked steady. I would walk around, but I didn't walk around too much to be overbearing and intimidate 'em.

In other examples, Ms. Eastman not only explicitly described *competence* in managing student behavior and task engagement, she also continued, as seen in the previous excerpt, to intertwine and contrast her perceived competence with particular colleague's lack of competence with students. In the following passage, she described a confrontation with a colleague from a group of white teachers whom she described in numerous stories as behaving both passively and actively aggressive towards her:

Ms. Eastman: "You know, if you'd concentrate more on your class and your students and what you're supposed to be doing than more so concentrating on me, your test scores would be higher too," I said, "But it seems you have a hard-on for me. Why? I don't know."

(both laugh)

Ms. Eastman: “And it seems as though your whole little group here, if anyone is outshining you guys, you wanna’ wreck ‘em,” and I said, “Look here, I got somebody on my side that you probably don’t even know about,” I said, “So, y’all keep on playing your little games. Do what you do. And I’m gonna’ keep on doing what I do. And that’s be here for these kids, and keep these test scores high.”

Thus, Ms. Eastman’s response here drew upon intersections of race and *competence*, with described attempts to oppress her being motivated by racism as well as her pedagogical effectiveness as measured by students’ superior standardized test scores. As additional background information to this situation, during this time at Lowell Elementary scores on state tests were disaggregated by grade levels and available to all staff members, thus making it apparent to administrators and teachers which groups of teachers had the highest and lowest test scores. This passage also offered intersections between *competence* and spiritual connection through the words “...I got somebody on my side that you probably don’t even know about...”

Through these exemplars, emphasis of *competence* in Ms. Eastman’s responses manifested through a variety of pedagogical competencies: socio-cultural relevance, emotional-developmental responsiveness, classroom management effectiveness, and pedagogical effectiveness as measured psychometrically. Lack of competence by teachers of differing ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic identities than their students at Lowell becomes an almost necessary binary for contrast in these areas. In this way, failures by teaching colleagues in these competencies represented a source of challenge in Ms. Eastman’s accounting of her career

experiences while also providing a source for further demonstration of teaching effectiveness and responsiveness.

Ms. Oldham: *Competence* played an essential role in Ms. Oldham's responses as well. In some ways, her emphasis on academic growth as measured by standardized assessments mirrored Ms. Eastman's descriptions of success with students. As may be recalled from Chapter 2, Ms. Oldham also shared with me during one of my observational visits significant numbers of her students who had shown growth on a district-administered assessment series. As the following excerpt illustrates, *competence* appeared in her responses through stories of success with students who had previously experienced academic turmoil:

Ms. Oldham: Yeah. They feel so... 'cause I have, um, Marco. Marco was a kid, were you here? No, you were not here. He's that kid, Ms. Eastman and Mr. Bushouse can tell you, that did some writing that, he's a kid that didn't like reading or anything, but write poetry and, until we bragged on him so much, the more we bragged on him, the better he became. "Ms. Oldham, I want you to read this now. Ms. Oldham what do you think about this?" "Oh! You gonna' make me cry!" You know, just, "What do you want to be Marco?" and the end of the year, "What do you want to be Marco?" "A teacher."

Me: Wow. That's good. Did he get into reading?

Ms. Oldham: Oh he did. Oh my goodness, yes! It takes Mr. Bushouse to tell you about him. 'Cause he went [at the beginning of the year], "Not that." You know, and then at the end of the year, he just, that second semester, he just, showed out.

Unlike Ms. Eastman's accounts of success with striving students, Ms. Oldham did not explicitly situate stories of individual students' academic and social turmoil vis-a-vis oppressive behaviors or lack of competence by other teachers. Additionally, instead of the predominance of social and emotional considerations expressed in Ms. Eastman's responses, Ms. Oldham's stories of success with students focused heavily on academic behaviors and outcomes. In more generalized accounts of student turmoil, however, she did describe situations in which a lack of sociocultural competence by particular white teachers led to failure with and harm towards students at Lowell:

Me: Do you feel that, kinda' that their, we'll start with the students, with the friction they had with the students, do you think that race played a part in that?

Ms. Oldham: Yes, I do, especially one of them. Um, when he came to the black boys, the science teacher, he didn't know how to deal with them, and uh, they would do little silly things. And when they, when he didn't know how to deal with them, he would try to bring them down, or talk about them, you know, and talk about the culture where they are, and where they're coming from. He just didn't know how to, um, how to handle. Yes, and I don't think they should have, I don't know how they can evaluate those teachers, but they were just not *right* for the classroom. And the other one was so frail, she was afraid of the black kids, but not only the black kids, but the Hispanic kids too, they frightened her. And I said to her, "Why did you go into this?" You know, it's like jumping off into the deep water knowing you can't swim, but you're gonna' try to make yourself swim, "I'm just gonna' do this, I'm gonna' try my best to do it, and if it doesn't work out at least I can say I tried." So, I just think that those teachers are not, and then I don't understand, did we have any black TFA, were there any black ones?

In addition to the ability to engage students academically, pedagogical *competence* for Ms. Oldham was heavily situated in moments and ways in which she incorporated new technologies into her teaching practice. In the following passage, she described how she was able to teach, monitor, assess, and confer with students through Microsoft 365 and OneNote accounts she had set up for her students:

They know I'm gonna' pull it up...Now, sometimes, I've got another computer that I'll sit back at my table and pull that one student's, 'Okay, let's look and see what she's got.' You know, and a lot of times they want me to go into and show it. Isn't that something? And then there will be a lot of negative, but I don't pull the negative out in front. I take notes, and then I later, point out, 'I love this! I love this!' And I say, 'Can I meet with you today?'

During formal interviews and informal observations and conversations, she demonstrated how this technology worked, sharing particular student work samples that she could access through this centralized service or having students bring their laptops over to show me how they accessed and utilized this system to complete a variety of assignments in her class. In addition to sharing her instructional competencies, Ms. Oldham further stressed the importance of personal competence through stories of external recognition by building and district administrators. In the following example, she described a time in which her classroom was visited by a district-level administrators to view her use of the newest instructional technologies with her students:

Ms. Oldham: This is what we're going to be working on. And we're going to have all of our kids, we can set up, count up all our kids. But in order to get to OneNote, they had to, and I was so proud of us up in that meeting, 'cause I was already in 365, sixth graders

are the only ones that use 365. We had people coming from downtown, to my room, we were around the room as the kids worked on their computers in 365, and they were on, “Ms. Oldham, pull mine up, what do you think?” Cause they have to write, when they have to write something, I say, “Let me know when you want me to look at it.”

Me: The people from downtown were lookin’?

Ms. Oldham: Oh my Gosh.

Me: They were probably blown away, huh?

Ms. Oldham: One guy came in and hugged me, from down[town]. You what he said? He said, “And I’m the oldest teacher in the District,” you know. And they went to meetings, and Mr. Bushouse said, you know, and none of those people couldn’t, didn’t get in it, “We’ve got the oldest teacher in the building, and she does technology better than I do.”

Ms. Oldham’s mention of building and district-level administration provides segue into a final consideration for the theme of *competence* in her overall contributions to this work. Throughout our formal interviews, she repeatedly emphasized and contrasted the importance of support and guidance from competent administrators with professional frustration experienced while working with administrators she observed to be lacking in leadership and/or academic skills. In the following exemplar, she provided contrasting accounts and attributions of administrative competence:

Ms. Oldham: Okay. I went to Arthur [Elementary], after he went downtown, he moved me to Arthur, under that principal, Ms., no it wasn't, yes it was, Ms. Hazel King. She's a white woman that I loved, I did. I didn't think I'd like a woman, but she was great, and after that, Thomas Malloy, Mr. Malloy. And he's the one, mmm, he was a good, oh he was good. I've had some great administrators. I've had some bad ones. My worst was year before last. Maybe, I shouldn't tell you that.

Me: Year before last?

Ms. Oldham: Mr. Spellman. I've never, I can't get accustomed to a principal that has no kind of academic skills, you know, when it comes to, I can't deal, it's hard.

Me: That excellence of mind and...

Ms. Oldham: Right. No idea. No background in the educational part, you know, just leading by sitting in your room and eating. And a lot of people liked him, but I didn't, I just couldn't get into, he felt intimidated with me, and I guess I am, I don't know why.

(both laugh)

Me: I've never found you intimidating.

(both laugh)

Ms. Oldham: Well, you know, a lot of times I would correct him. He would send memos out, like [another former administrator], and couldn't write or spell.

Ms. Mack. Although a theme of *competence* featured less prominently in Ms. Mack's contributions, it nevertheless remained apparent in several ways comparable with other participants' responses. Like Ms. Oldham, Ms. Mack also described working with competent and incompetent administrators. She said she had white and black administrators that were "good, they were good." She likewise reported problems with administrators stemming from ineffectiveness of leadership, such as those who kept the staff "on edge" or one being a "very flashy dresser, a wonderful person, but not a good administrator." She contributed to the theme of *competence*, by also including descriptions of unethical practices, such as "truth be told, stealing," as evidence of ineffective leadership. Thus, a lack of *competence* by school leaders, through a variety of considerations, presented a source of professional challenge during her career. In the following excerpt, she described specific behaviors of exemplary and ineffective administrators:

Ms. Mack: And as far as principals go, I've seen some that were, I don't know how they got the job, and I've seen some that were really good, you know. Um, I've had principals that were actually, over the course of time, they would actually take classes, you know. Like if you had kids who were super low, they would have extra reading classes with 'em, they were just, you know.

Me: The principal would teach...?

Ms. Mack: Yes! When I was at Jefferson, the principal we had there, she sure did. Those lowest kids, she would take, 'em... Yeah, um, and then I've had principals that were just there, you know? They didn't do anything. And I've had principals that didn't take any stuff off of kids and the teachers had to toe the line too... And then I've had principals

who wanted to be *the friend*, (laughs) and the building is just like, fights every day, and you know. So, I've seen 'em all.

In other examples relevant to her *competence* as a teacher, Ms. Mack emphasized the importance of recognizing students' home situations and experiences with turmoil. In the following excerpt, which also presented significant intersections to the later theme of *candor*, she ascribed a primary need to acknowledge students' life experiences to successfully teach in school contexts such as those she had worked in. She also referred to the challenges faced by teachers who failed to do this:

Me: What are some pieces of advice you would give to somebody coming to teach at a school like this, or the schools that you've worked in?

Ms. Mack: Don't come in here with rose-colored glasses, 'cause it's not what, you know, a lot of people come in here and think, "Oh, the kids, I want the kids to love me." And they think that you can just tell a child to do X, Y, Z and that's what they're gonna' do. (laughs) They just don't know, the challenge, it's a challenge. Um, they don't understand that some of the things they've experienced, these kids have gone past that, you know? And, um, what you think a child's life should be, it's not. You know, it's not for some of these kids, 'cause they've seen things, and heard things, and they have more things on their minds than school. Some of them have, "Are we gonna' have food tonight?" you know? And so, you're trying to teach them math, English, and all that, but that's the least of their problems, 'cause their mind is on what's gonna' happen next to 'em. Um, kids that don't have water in their house, and then you have this attitude 'cause this child smells, and you don't know the water's been turned off. So, they just have a lot of weight

on them, and if you just come out of school thinking, everything's gonna' be rosy, and they'll love you, it just doesn't work like that. So, the ideas that they have, mm-mm, 'cause even my husband, I remember when this district turned to uniforms, he made a statement, "Oh, I know nobody's having problems with discipline now because they're wearing uniforms!" (laughs) I said, "Please! They'll fight in these uniforms." You don't, but that's outside, that's what they think. And they think kids are still, "Yes ma'am, no ma'am." You know, they don't know that there's some schools where teachers get cursed out every day, and that's a rude awakening. You come out of college all happy, and this is your class, and you're gonna' do this, this, and this, and then you called a "white" whatever, or "black" (laughs), "Where'd that come from? You're supposed to love me!" So that's a big challenge, you know. This is the real world.

Though significant, this acknowledgment of the realities and potential turmoil faced by students and teachers in schools as a key component of *competence*, represented a smaller facet of this theme in Ms. Mack's responses compared to multiple stories shared of former students who returned to her to acknowledge and express gratitude for her work as their teacher. Through these stories, personal competence as an educator was both stressed and evidenced. In the following excerpt she describes an encounter with a former student who had returned to her elementary school as a doctor-in-training through a program that provided health screenings for students in our neighborhood:

Uh-huh, and blond hair, she was a cute girl. And she came over and got to talking, and she's a former student. And she mentioned something to me I didn't even remember, 'cause her cycle had started at school, and she was talking about me, and what I did for

her, and how I calmed her down and this and that. I didn't even have a clue, but she remembered it, you know? So, things like that mean a lot to me, that means a lot to me.

Ms. Ford. Of all the participants' contributions, Ms. Ford's responses contained the most clear and thorough engagement with the theme of *competence* as it has been constructed in this project. As with all other participants, she described the importance of competent administrators, and like Ms. Oldham and Ms. Eastman, she noted the mentoring role such administrators played in her pedagogical development. She also provided significant accounting and *acknowledgment* of competent mentor teachers, describing the importance and excellence of their work during her early, middle, and recent years of teaching. For example, in the following passage, she recounted the mentor roles played by a mentoring teacher and administrator towards her pedagogical development during her first year of formal classroom teaching:

And at Henry [Elementary] I did the kindergarten para for one year, then the next year was my student teacher interning, and I worked alongside a second grade teacher. She was excellent, Ms. Jensen. Her husband was a principal at Keller. They both together would talk and mentor me after school about strength and completeness, not that I always got it, but listening to both of them as a team, 'cause it reminded me of church teaching, those adults who believed in, "This is something you can do. Just put your strength into it, now use your intelligence to find all the, but your intelligence has to be smart enough to move with whatever the district or the norms are," you know, and things like that. 'Cause they had both been teaching over 30 years and they said things had changed, and this was, like, in the 90's. And they were talking about how things had changed since they joined in the 60's. And as I listened to them, they're right.

Through this example, we are also pushed to consider the idea of *competence* in teaching beyond conceptualizations of it as the ability to connect with and effectively teach students to consider that it may also require the know-how and ability to navigate ongoing and inevitable change. In other places, as may be viewed in following interview passage, Ms. Ford acknowledged and described personal and peer, in this case Ms. Oldham and Ms. Eastman, pedagogical strengths. A discussion of her career length and retirement status preceded this excerpt:

Ms. Ford: Don't write that. (laughs) Erase that part! (laughs) But something like that. I might not make it to Oldham's and Eastman's status, that 75 is deep. Ms. Oldham's deep, she's good. She's strong. I've worked with her before. Man, she's good. She's dynamic. But I realize, when I hear about both of them, I see some of their story, and I know this is not their story, I see why they're dynamics is there too. Wow! The creative lifestyles they had to live, you know? They put it in their teaching. I watch Eastman. Oldham I hear about.

Me: Yeah, I worked with Oldham for three years, I think. She was here before I left. And, um, I've seen her in the hallway, and there were times when we were departmentalized that we shared classes and things...but I knew she was good, just from the work she'd put up on the walls.

Ms. Ford: Yes! Yeah.

Me: And then I went, the other day when I came in and saw you real briefly. I went down and observed in her room, and just sat in for an hour. I was, like, wow, this is really [good].

Ms. Ford: She is. The little bit that I've got to watch her, when I go in to her room for a message or something, to ask for something, yeah, yes. She has a very, way of instructing that shows that she is instructing, but she's so busy letting those students bring out their own strengths. *That*, I wanna' do! I know she has a higher level of kids, who can think at sixth grade, but she does so well at that...She has that thing, and I see there's so much self-initiative with her students, that when they do something with higher level thinking, like you say, she can be over here, really quiet, and she still has that hardest group over there doing their highest-level thinking, too. And I'm like, dang, I'm hoping that I had something [to do] with that when I had that child back in third or fourth, when I look at who that student is, I go, "Maybe?" you know (laughs), but yeah. I helped out with Ms. Eastman too, because when she gets those high test scores, I'm like, "Did I have anything to do with that? Did they just come, did she just fix all of 'em, or did any of 'em come ready?"

Though heavily imbued with depictions and stories of *competence*, Ms. Ford's contributions differed from other participants' responses in that she explicitly expressed the importance of remaining focused on positive examples of teacher and administrative work over more negative portrayals. While she did in places described moments in which individuals she worked with during her career, Ms. Ford's accounts presented in less of a clearly dichotomous fashion regarding *competence* compared to other participants'. Even when asked to describe "a teacher that's not a good teacher," as a counter to her significant accounting of words she associated with being a "good teacher", she offered some hesitant description before explicitly ending this line of discussion:

Me: Okay. I think that's enough. (both laugh) Um, so, the counter to that, what about, you've worked with many teachers over the years, what about a teacher that's not a good teacher? What words would come to mind for that?

Ms. Ford: Selfish. I don't like to find so much negative, because everybody's got a positive. To me, to be here, that's a positivity. But rigid, not willing to be adaptable, not willing to find out how to differentiate, because I'm hard on that, but I'm learning more and more about how to find ways to teach. Like I said, the students who didn't come ready for me. Um, a bad, I don't know about *bad* teacher. Those who cannot collaborate and work with other teachers, that's become a new thing, that, "I need to do this by myself," that doesn't work. You have to be able to work this team. That's enough.

Avoidance of negative portrayals and stories incompetence became even more apparent through this example as Ms. Ford connected some of these negative descriptors back to herself through the statement, "I'm hard on that..." In this way, she also avoided the dichotomous descriptions observed in other participants' responses regarding differences in *competence* between self and others.

Acknowledgment of areas for personal improvement in Ms. Ford's communications, however, were also balanced with accounts of pedagogical self-efficacy. These included sketches of responding to cultural, social, and psychological needs, as well as more academically-centered accounts. As evidenced in the following passage, Ms. Ford's responses focused on students' educational growth as assessed primarily through her own teaching practice:

Right! 'Cause I've got a third grader who can't do his phonics, and, nevertheless, I still need him to do some comprehension. If I've got him to get through the phonics, I am

thrilled, 'cause now he can read all the words. Maybe he can't put 'em all together and write me, almost, he can put 'em all together and write me a sentence. Maybe he can't answer that in a critical way, so the 'why?', but at least he can give me the recall, he can give me back something which he couldn't do.

As with Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham, Ms. Ford's narrative included test scores as a facet of *competence*, albeit in a way, as this final excerpt illustrates, that focused on student growth over numbers of students reaching proficiency levels:

I'm working on that. We had a better day today, wish you could a' saw it. Some actually get to that higher-level. That was my goal this year. My strength has been that if I get a lot of my "Below Basic" kids out of "Below Basic" and maybe to the higher "Basic," even a few to "Proficient". But I've been very low on having a lot of "Advanced" or "Proficient" and "Advanced" in my room. This was our highest year of third grade. We left 18, and went to 22. That's not a whole lot, but, but if you look at our other parts, we left 65 "Below "Basic", and it's now at 40. I mean, there was the change there, because that's where I felt I had to go grab some of my kids to feel comfortable in engaging in this class. That was me.

Commitment. Closely related to the theme of *competence*, the idea of *commitment* also remained prominent throughout the participants' responses. Although the importance of this theme intersected heavily with *competence* through expressions of *care*, e.g. a story of care for a student's emotional needs could be viewed as evidence of one's pedagogical competence as well as one's commitment to her students, the importance of *commitment* extended beyond one's student, their families, or the community to include commitment towards one's profession,

values, beliefs, community, peers, and career goals. Through these considerations, the theme of *commitment* figured heavily in the participants' descriptions of successes, professional development, and perseverance in the face of internal and external challenges; as well as accounts of situations when and where a lack of commitment by a colleague or an administrator was viewed as a source of negativity in one's career experiences.

Ms. Eastman. A theme of *commitment* ran heavily through Ms. Eastman's interview responses, connecting through considerations of commitment towards students' educations, vexation towards misguided and lacking senses of commitment by others, commitment as resistance to professional challenges, and commitment as derived from a source extending beyond oneself. To begin, as mentioned under the theme of *competence*, Ms. Eastman shared multiple stories throughout our interactions in which she took on additional duties with students. Through these expressions, she also emphasized a clear and deeply-connected sense of commitment towards students' well-beings and educational growth. When referring to the previously described class of sixth graders whom she was assigned to test, she illustrated this commitment in a personal, yet more generalized sense:

And if you don't have faith and confidence, in not just kids, in anybody, then they're not going to, you know, they're not going to perform well. So, all these people walking around the building talking about 5B. (laughs) I'm like, "Yeah, right." You know, 'cause I've always been for the underdog anyway. You know? (laughs).

In another example of looking out for students dealing with educational challenges, she described a student from a younger grade level who had been sent to her room multiple times during the school year because of his frequent disruptions and his regular teacher's failures to

successfully engage him in the classroom. She reported that the school's instructional coach came up with a plan to have this student placed in her room permanently for the last three weeks of the school year, as she had been successful with this student and he would enter her grade level the following school year. Though apparently not pleased with this plan, saying she told the coach, "Hey man, I don't need to anybody to pick any trees for me, and your favor list with me is growing," she nevertheless agreed to take this student into her classroom for this time. In the following passage, she detailed a personal talk with this student regarding her expectations for him during his time in her class and the positive outcome for this student:

So I said to him, "Look young sir, from here out, it's just me and you, me and you, so what you gonna' do? Well, I can tell you, it's gonna be more me than you. You understand?" He looked at me and said, "Yeah." And I said to him, "What's that?" [He replied,] "Yes, Ms. Eastman." Richards, I tell you, for the next three weeks that boy did his work, got along with everyone, and even did well in all of his support classes. I even had support teachers telling me that he was doing a lot better in their classes, "We aren't having the same problems with him that we usually do."

In a final example reflecting commitment towards students through taking on additional roles and duties, Ms. Eastman described her work as an after-school tutor, a role I knew her to continuously be involved in, whether paid or not, throughout my time at Lowell. In this excerpt, she underlined her willingness to go beyond formal expectations for the good of all students when gathering students for tutoring after school:

Then I had kids who, that weren't even in my class, like some fourth and third graders.

"Well, Ms. Eastman, can I come to?" I said, "Well, we're not going to play! We're going

to work!” [They replied,] “Ok. Ok!” And I said, “You got homework? Or something to do?” [The replied,] “Yeah!” [I said,] “Get your stuff, let’s go!” And sometimes, you know, I would be in there with 15 kids.

Ms. Eastman’s accounting of personal commitment with students also included reported recognition by administrator of her work with students. In the following excerpt, she detailed an attempt by a group of white colleagues to put an end to a classroom “store” she hosted in her room at the end of the school day. Ms. Eastman described conceiving of this activity as a way to build her students’ economics and number sense. She said it proved a success, students from other rooms began participating, and it became a source of funds for classroom supplies. I recalled her hosting this activity, which she called “Eastman’s Store” during my initial years at Lowell. Before my time at the school, however, a group of teachers had gone to the principal and complained to him about the “store”. Here, Ms. Eastman described a conversation between her and the principal after she had explained the purposes of the classroom store activity:

...he said, “Thank you Ms. Eastman.” I said, “Is that it?” And I’m like to myself, “Okay, ‘the clique’ has gotten to him,” you know ‘cause I didn’t know that they had been to him and talked to him about what I was doing. So, uh, I guess a few days after that, he and I were leaving at the end of the day at the same time, and he said, “Ms. Eastman, I think what you’re doing is good. And if these kids want to come and do this, and you are willing to do this,” you know, he says, “Because to me this is basically beyond the call of duty,” and he said, “And some people are not willing to go that far.” He said, you know, “You won’t have any problems with me. You keep on doing what you’re doing.”

Through this account, *commitment* also took on a quality of resistance towards challenges faced by Ms. Eastman in her professional life in Butterfield public schools. When discussing the idea of *resilience* as “as a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching despite challenging conditions and recurring setbacks” (Brunetti, 2006, p. 813), she furthered the connection between commitment and resistance. When asked about various challenges as possible threats to her maintenance of commitment to teaching, she described their effects on her commitments in the following terms:

No! They made ‘em stronger. You know, uh, because sometimes, somethings that are done to people, they block that themselves, they let that interfere with their thinking process, or their ability. That just made me go on stronger.

When I questioned her about specific challenges presented through students’ experiences with turmoil, and the effects these presented for her as a teacher, such as having students who might not be prepared for school regularly or who might misbehave because of neglect or other conditions at home, she responded with the following:

If anything, they strengthen my commitment to teach. I’m not looking for an award, but it’s small things that let me know I’ve done my job to the best of my abilities. When kids come back to thank you, that let’s me know I’ve done the right thing. When it’s all said and done, I know I can look back and know I did my best, that I may not have been perfect, and like the perfect school, there’s not perfect teacher, but when I’m finished I won’t have any regrets. So, no, these kinds of things have made me a stronger teacher if anything.

And finally, as we further probed the specific effects of aggressive and marginalizing behavior enacted towards her by colleagues on her commitment, she concluded with the following:

It's like they say, "The Devil is a lie. At the end of the day, I don't eat, drink, or breath you, so what are you and what you're doing to me?" I can't be diminished by the actions of a few haters.

Thus, *commitment* and overcoming challenges presented in a recursive relationship, where Ms. Eastman's commitments served as a source of support for successfully dealing with various professional and personal trials while also being further strengthened by them.

As with issues of *competence* in teaching, Ms. Eastman also featured a dichotomous perspective of *commitment*, in which certain colleagues and administrators either possessed or lacked in this regard. Moreover, an educator's orientation towards her or his students' communities and sociocultural identities remained similarly connected to one's *competence* with, as well as *commitment* towards, students. In the following excerpt, Ms. Eastman simultaneously questioned the competence and commitment of some educators and leaders observed over the course of her career in the Butterfield School District:

Make sure this is what you want to do. That's the biggest thing. If this is not in your heart, then get into another profession. I mean, there are so many teachers that I think just stayed on because they couldn't find anything else to do, you know? Even teachers like, that have possibly been with the District ten, maybe fifteen years. You know, jobs are hard to get now, so, uh, even if you tried to go to another district, you know, it's hard. So, that would be my first thing. Make sure this is what *you* [emphasis in original] want to do. We've got enough teachers already who are not teaching and kids are suffering, so if

this is not going to be a passion for you, then, “Exit stage left. Go do something else.”

And it’s just like they had that run on people coming from the business world, and they started sticking them into the classrooms. You cannot run a classroom like a business!

Some colleague’s commitments to students and their communities were further interrogated in Ms. Eastman’s responses. In particular, the theme of teacher commitment involving notions of *giving back* as presented in the literature (Kokka, 2016) were presented as problematic. In the following conversation, we discussed her experiences with and perspectives of teachers whose primary commitments operated under such presumptions:

Me: For some they say they go into working in an urban school because they want to go where the need is the greatest.

Ms. Eastman: Mm-hm.

Me: Or they want to pay back society.

Ms. Eastman: Mm-hm.

Me: For, like maybe they had certain privileges when they were growing up and they wanna’ go help where the need is most.

Ms. Eastman: Mm-hm. (laughs)

Me: Um, how have you seen that play out in your career? Or, have you observed that in your career?

Ms. Eastman: Yes I have! When you go into teaching with that type of reasoning, I don’t think, that’s not gonna’ work. You have to have a passion for what you’re doing. That’s

with any profession, you know, and especially dealing with kids and young minds. Now, when I retire, I hope I don't have too many regrets, you know? I try to do what I *can* do. I'm not saying I've done everything. You know, I'm not a, uh, what is the word now that they use? (laughs) An expert. You know, I don't think nobody would ever be an expert at teaching, because it's always revolving, you know? There's always something new to learn. There's always something new to get used to. Especially with the state coming up with different crap every year, you know? So, I don't think that wanting to give back to society, "So I'm gonna' be a teacher!" (laughs) works for me. (laughs again) I don't, you know, 'cause at first, as I said to you before, teaching was far from me, that's not what I started in college to be, you know, but, uh, God has a way of telling you and you have to listen as to what your fate is and what he's got for you. And I feel in my heart, my mind, and my soul this is what God had in place for me, you know. And, uh, I think I'm a pretty good teacher, but everybody can't be a teacher. So, these reasons, "I want to give back," and "I want to help the down and trodden," and all of this stuff, you know, now maybe somebody else may see it in a different, you know, way, but just to say, "I wanna' be a teacher so I can give back," you know.

Me: What's been the, when you've seen people come in with that kind of perspective, what's the result?

Ms. Eastman: Well, it's not too good of a result because you're concentrating on this, this thing, instead of concentrating on the child, which you're supposed to be concentrating on.

In this interchange, we also see indications of a final feature of the theme of *commitment* in Ms. Eastman's accounting of her career challenges and sources of sustainment: a deep-seated spiritual sense of personal and professional commitment. Although Ms. Eastman, as all the other participants similarly reported, described positive and significant influence from early teacher role models, in her case, several aunts during her childhood, she also described her primary source of commitment to teach in clearly spiritual terms. In multiple points, she attributed her entrance, continued work, perseverance, and eventual future exit from the profession to divine guidance, to a source beyond her personal intentions. Although she addressed this idea in multiple places throughout our interactions, I believe the following passage, in which she responded to an inquiry into words of advice she would offer for entrants into the teaching profession, serves well as an illustration of this:

And like I said, when I went to college, my focus was not on teaching, but things started happening in my sophomore year, and I just couldn't. Like the classes I wanted to take, well I couldn't take 'em 'cause they weren't offered that semester. I'd have to wait for the next semester, or the semester after that, or, uh, just different little stuff was happening. You know what I'm saying? And then, in my junior year, that finally kinda' *hit upon* [emphasis in original] me, I'm like, "Sumpin's not right," you know? And a friend of mine, we were sitting down talkin' one time, and I was telling this friend about all these different obstacles I was havin' to go through, and this-and-that, and she said, "Maybe that's not what you are supposed to be doing?" And I said, "*Maybe*, you need to tell me what you' talkin' about." So that's when she got to saying, "Well, you know, what God has for us, nobody can take it away. This is not what God has for you, what you're trying to do. See, you're trying to go against the grain. This is not what it's

supposed to be, that you are supposed to be doing.” And I’m like, “Yeah, okay, alright.” So, like I said, you got to be smart enough to stop and think and reflect on certain things that are happening to you in your life. And when I stopped, and started thinking about how and the way the things were going, well, it convinced me, yeah, well, maybe she’s right. But when I started taking classes that I needed to take for education, seemed like stuff just fell right in place. You know, it was just, just that simple. And I was like, “Well, okay.” And I know people like to blame everything on God (laughs), you know, but this one I’m blaming on Him. And I think this is what he, the way he wanted me to go, this is what He has for me. And, thirty years, after thirty-one years, I mean, you know. And like I said, I do a lot of reflecting and sit back and think about different things, you know, that I’ve done, that I could’ve done better, or that I can do in the future to make this better and da-da da-da da-da da-da, you know. So, uh, I keep that in my mind, and that might be a lot of my success, too, trying your best to do the right thing, by these kids. So, like I said, when I retire, I won’t have too many regrets. You know, I can say what I did, what I thought I could do, not saying that did *everything*, ‘cause you can’t really do *everything*. But I think I did a sufficient amount to make a difference, you know, and I can go on and retire and be cool with that. So, there we are.

Just as she reported the role of divine guidance in her initial commitment to teaching, Ms.

Eastman also described continued spiritual direction in her decisions to remain in the profession despite multiple moments of conviction in which she felt otherwise. During one of my final research visits with her in the early summer of 2016, she described how she had come to reverse her previously expressed desire to retire. She said she woke up late in December, did not feel like going to work, and tried to come up with a reason to call in. She said that after she got out of the

shower, however, she had a certain feeling come over her and she knew she would have to hold off on retiring. She described it as a difficult feeling to describe, similar to the feeling she experienced several days after her mother's death following a decade of bad health. She said there was a build-up of emotion beforehand, and she prayed repeatedly for strength to go on. Then, without warning, a feeling of calm and clarity, an "epiphany" as she called it, emerged. She said that she went to work without reservation that day, and went to Ms. Oldham to tell her she had reconsidered their "pact" to retire that year. She said Oldham said to her, "You mean to say that we're going to reconsider this whole thing because of your whim, you're epiphany?" She said she told Oldham she'd prayed on it and that the feeling was undeniable, and when Oldham heard this, she agreed to stay in for another year as well.

Ms. Oldham. A theme of *commitment* ran strongly through Ms. Oldham's accounting of her personal and professional life as a teacher. As already seen in an excerpt from the "Interpretation of responses" section of this chapter, the importance of concepts relevant to this theme, such as dedication, love, and purpose to one's work as a teacher, clearly manifested in her responses. Her expressions of *commitment* continued well beyond this passage and may be compared to Ms. Eastman's through their deep-seated and fundamental expressions of commitment towards students, commitment to teaching as a profession, dismay regarding unresponsive or misguided senses of commitment by colleagues, and commitment derived from sources beyond oneself. They may be contrasted, however, in the manner in which each of these considerations manifested in her responses. Also, although she did not position *commitment* in a way that connected it with resistance to colleague and administrative behaviors in the way that Ms. Eastman did, Ms. Oldham did include describe her professional commitment as being both increased by and supportive in her personal survival in the face of a traumatic life experiences.

As will be seen in this interpretation of expressions of the importance of *commitment*, Ms. Oldham shared personal experiences and stories that she said she had rarely-to-never shared with anyone before, things that at times became emotional stirring between us, things that she described as difficult to share but nevertheless essential to her story and purposes as an educator. As she noted, “I look back, and, I love the classroom, but that’s um, this is really my life. I look at this now, it’s hard.”

To begin, Ms. Oldham’s commitment to students and her position as a classroom teacher manifested itself most notably in her recollections of career choices and endpoints. At several points, she described a brief foray into an administrative track, with considerable amounts of classwork completed towards this end, however, during her practicum experiences as an administrative candidate she said the following:

I knew then, that it wasn’t for me. It’s something about being in the classroom. And all of us, you know, we’re not at the same, we’re not in the same, you [the interviewer] don’t like, I mean, you like the classroom, but you also want something better, something more, not better, but just more. But as, for some of us, like me and Ms. Eastman, we like the classroom, you know, we’ve had other options. I don’t regret not going to be a principal or vice principal. I don’t regret that. I think this is where I was supposed to be.

In other examples, she expressed in interviews commitment towards students through additional students she admitted, albeit reluctantly, throughout each school year because of parent complaints about a grade-level colleague, reporting that she would wind up “at the end of the year with forty kids,” or through additional interventions with students during classroom interactions regarding their attendance and behavior in classrooms other than her own. In a final

example, she encapsulated her career regrets as not stemming from diminished commitment, but through inevitable constraints of aging while also re-affirming the importance of commitment over innovation:

Me: What, do you have anything that you regret about your career?

Ms. Oldham: (Pauses and laughs) You mean about my career or about my personal life?

Me: Your career (both laugh). We'll just do career for now.

Ms. Oldham: (laughs) No, I regret not being able to stay into it for longer. I do regret that, because I still think I could still make a difference. But I know it's time for me to move on, you know, I regret that. And I regret giving up this, because it's been a journey of love, it's truly been a journey of love. And I look at my co-workers and I know they're ready to come out of it, but a part of me is not ready to give it up, but I've got to. But health-wise, my body tells me I need to. If I had the energy and the get around that I had then, I would stay. But I don't, you know. And then with things changing so, I think it's time for the young people to take over, and bring some new ideas in, you know, but yet not forget some of the other stuff too, cause it's gonna' take more than new ideas to get this going...Technology's great, new methods in school are great, but it's gonna' take a little more than that, you know. It's gonna' take some hugging, and understanding, and crying, and again, that perseverance, and not giving up, just don't give up, if you really love this.

As commitment towards students manifested through Ms. Oldham's descriptions of taking on additional teaching responsibilities, like Ms. Eastman, she also expressed consternation towards

colleagues with questionable or lacking senses of commitment. These expressions included more generalized descriptions of teachers “not really wanting to be here,” as well as colleagues whose primary motivations to teach derived from essentialized and prejudiced conceptualizations of students and their communities. When asked about white teachers from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds who came to urban contexts such as Lowell, to “teach where the need is the greatest,” or “to pay back, um, society for...the privileges they’ve enjoyed,” she responded with the following:

You know, I think it’s okay to a certain extent, but let me see how I want to say it. I don’t think they want to do it because of, they do want to pay it back, but I think that’s still a guilt feeling too, about what happened to us, going all the way back to slavery. I do believe that’s a part of it. You know, uh, they want to try to right some of the wrong that happened, and so they think, “Well, this is a good way to do it,” you know, not realizing that you’re gonna’ have to right the wrong within yourself before you can. Maybe I shouldn’t say that, before you can help somebody else, you first got to make sure that you wanna’ help those other people. Cause I’ve seen people, those teachers that come into the classroom wanting to help the underprivileged, and yet they have prejudiced attitudes that they really, you know, they have attitudes that they, “I can’t deal with this,” you know. So, that’s why I say, “Physician heal thyself,” you’ve got to heal yourself before you try to go into those classrooms and try to, uh, say you’re gonna’ help somebody else. And then, because they get impatient, when the kids are not where those, quote-unquote, *little white kids* [emphasis in original] are, or that they live lives that are “rough,” they wanna’, “Oh I wanna’ come and help them.” But then the way to help them is to be true to yourself. It’s good to come into the classroom and help them, but do you really want to

help them, or are you just there trying to get a name for yourself? You understand what I'm saying? To gain some prestige, "You know, I was in the black neighborhood and I helped them," but you've gotta' help yourself first. And once you do that, then I think you can go and be real, 'cause kids know when you're not *real* [emphasis in original]. Especially black kids, they're strange, you know, I'm sorry, but they do, they know when you're not *real*. And I get so sick of hearing people say, well they wanna' come in and help those kids that are underprivileged. You know, black kids are not the only kids that are underprivileged, but it's, you know, you seem to think our kids are all *underprivileged* and they're not. We have some smart kids, once given a chance to shine, they will. So, that's, oh well, that's what I think.

Thus, Ms. Oldham presented *commitment* in this passage as going beyond simplistic or objectified notions of being a committed teacher or commitment to *making a difference*, that one's sense of *commitment* may and should vary according to one's identities, working contextual considerations, historical oppressions, and present inequities. Described in this way, commitment to teaching takes on conceptual awareness of one's personal community, ethnic, socioeconomic background, and prejudices as well as the possibilities these present for congruences, differences, and oppressive relations with students and school communities. To do this, as Ms. Oldham described, particularly for middle to upper-middle class white teachers working in poor, high-minority urban school communities, *commitment* requires interrogation and active mitigation of one's own prejudices, despite belief in one's good intentions, lest essentialized and marginalized views towards one's students lead to classroom turmoil and failure.

As with all of the participants, Ms. Oldham's sociocultural identification with students and their families at Lowell presented through racial/ethnic, residential, economic and experiential considerations. In particular, Ms. Oldham shared stories from a variety of points in her life that reflected a profound and deeply-rooted sense of commitment to teaching, peers, community and students. For example, as we discussed generational and sociological considerations and differences regarding individuals' decisions to exit or remain as career-long teachers, she connected her sense of professional commitment to previous generational and social expectations while also describing diminishment in connections with professional prestige:

Oh, we were devoted, yes, we were plan-, we were supposed to stay, and we were supposed to do what we could do, because this was the top of the, this was really an honor to be a teacher, you remember? Oh no, you're young (laughs). It was an honor to be a teacher then, you know. But now, with everything that's going down, and you've got teachers doing stuff that they shouldn't be doing, so you don't have that honor anymore.

In addition to the impacts of diminished prestige and devotion for the profession, Ms. Oldham's responses provided stark contrast between teachers who enter education for reasons such as, "Well nothing else panned out, so I'll go into teaching," and her own spiritually and family-connected reasons for entering and remaining in the classroom for over four decades.

As said, a deep and personal sense of commitment to the profession emerged throughout Ms. Oldham's responses during our conversations and interviews, and this recurred through connections to her upbringing and family's experiences in Georgia during the era of Jim Crow. During one formal interview, she described and traced her family's commitment to teaching and education through multiple generations:

Me: Some teachers have said that it's a, um, that they got into it and stayed in it because they feel it's a calling of some kind, or a spirit, that this is a...

Ms. Oldham: It's in my family.

Me:...destiny that you've been pushed...

Ms. Oldham: And that's a fact.

Me:...or a higher power was directing you. Do you agree?

Ms. Oldham: I do. Let me give you a little background, and I'm proud of this. Mama, that raised my mother, she had not children, so her mother gave her to Mama, which was her sister. She educated my mom. She was a teacher.

Me: So, your mom was raised by her aunt?

Ms. Oldham: By, her mama's sister, right, her aunt. Big, which was my grandmother, had, three daughters. Mother was the baby. At that time, Big was not that far from slavery. I wish I could go back and show you. My grandmother, I'm telling my age almost, was not that long out of slavery...Right, and so Mother, [Mama] educated Mother, that was, Mother's education started there, okay? But I still wonder, she had not finished college at that time, but see during that time, Mama didn't have to finish college to teach. You know, teachers at that time...

As she continued in this account of her family's history and connections to education, she described female and male family members who had gone on to achieve doctorates and teach at various universities. She described her mom's work as a teacher and the independence this

afforded her to provide for their family through difficult times. She also described her parents' priorities and efforts to ensure their children's educational achievement:

Yeah, during that time there's so much. 'Cause my mom and daddy, put four of us in college at one time, all of us were on scholarships, four of us, but in the South it was like that. That's why you had to be good, I mean, you had to. You know, they wouldn't settle for anything else, you know? That was just the type of, the way my family was.

Through this and other references to personal history, such as "I knew from a kid that I wanted to be a teacher," or the following passage, Ms. Oldham clearly described her early sense of commitment to become and remain a teacher:

Why am I teaching? 'Cause I love to make that improvement, to make that difference. And because I have that I *why* [emphasis in original], I can also, because of all that, I find my *how*, my "how's."...But, that would be my *why*. You know, my *why* is I was born to do this, I just believe I was born to do this, and because I have that feeling of, that I was born to do this, I came up doing this. It was in my family. My mom, grandmamma, they were all teachers. And if they, I thought my mother was a great teacher, and if she could do it, I said, "I can do it too." And the kids loved her. So, I'm thinking that's *why*.

In connection with familial orientation and guidance in teaching, Ms. Oldham added a further facet in this exemplar to an already nuanced presentation for this theme: the importance of love for maintaining one's commitment to students and teaching. The importance of love in and for teaching was repeated throughout our interactions. In addition to the inclusion of love in several already featured excerpts, Ms. Oldham further detailed this in the following passage when describing "good teachers":

Devoted, serious about what they're doing, know the subject matter, enjoying, you know, you gotta' love this stuff, you know, you've got to live and breathe this, this. Always coming up with ideas about what you can do to move. How can I reach this kid in the class? What do I need to do to get this kid?

In another passage, she connected the fundamental importance of love for teaching to spiritual guidance or, as will be discussed further in the following chapter, *sustenance* in teaching as derived from a source greater than oneself:

Oh yes, 'cause I always say to myself, "This too shall pass. I'll be here when you're not here." This is the way I look at it, because I have a love for it, and because I have a *love* for it, the good Lord always opens those doors that I need to have opened in order to get from one step to another step, you know?

When discussing personal challenges and the idea of *resilience* as an ability to maintain one's commitment through challenging circumstances and situations, Ms. Oldham again referenced guidance from a divine source, as well as commitment towards teaching and students being increased by such challenges. Sources of challenge in her examination of her professional resilience, however, did not arise from workplace sources, such as difficulties with students or aggression from colleagues, but instead came from personal sources and, therefore, highlighted a more amalgamated and holistic view of her personal and professional lives. In very personal stories, Ms. Oldham described years of serious harm and danger faced by her and her children as a result of an abusive marriage. Many of the explicit details related by her I will not present here, but instead will state that she described herself as a steadfastly committed teacher during this

time, and in several points she described God and her work as a teacher as her “saving grace” throughout this ordeal. In the following excerpt she explained this:

Ms. Oldham: I don’t, actually don’t. It was by the grace of God that things kept going.

Me: Did that kind of stress, did that impact you as a teacher?

Ms. Oldham: Not, you know what, you mean as far as when I got into the classroom.

Me: Uh-huh.

Ms. Oldham: No because, that was my saving grace, when I got into the classroom, I put on, I didn’t, I was so busy working that I put all that behind me. And you know, it made my day to be in the classroom. I felt safe in the classroom, and then at the end of the day it came on me, as I had to go pick my children up...

In this final excerpt, Ms. Oldham brought together various considerations of the overall theme of *commitment* in a way that resonates well within her own responses, those of other participants, and others who persist and have remained committed to lives as teachers:

And we all have something that we need to be doing and it’s not about us. Because, see, when those babies that are coming in, they can’t drop their problems at the door, they bring everything in with them. But I, when I come in, I have to drop everything, I have to leave it out there, I can’t bring it, and we all should be like that. We can’t bring it into the classroom, because if so, it’s gonna’ affect the classroom. And the problems we have to deal with are the students’. We don’t need to mix them up with ours. But see I don’t have time for co-workers that are here for different reasons, you know, and that’s what I was

saying. Don't come into this if you don't love it. If you're not dedicated, if you're not willing to roll up your sleeves and get down with what you need to do. But that's what I'm afraid of, that might be why we don't, we're not going to have any more teachers. Because the old school teachers are different, you know, like you said, we were in it because we wanted to be in it, and it was an honor for us to be in it, and it was an honor for us to be teachers. You know, well, we don't have that same thing now, they don't look at teachers like they used to look at them. I wonder why?

Ms. Mack. The importance of *commitment* and remaining committed in teaching figured prominently in Ms. Mack's contributions to this work. Like other participants, she expressed a profound sense of commitment towards students, their life experiences, and their performance in school. As also seen in other participants' responses, she expressed an early and deep-seated commitment to teach, though derived from other sources, and disapproval of misguided commitments by some teachers. Unlike expressions of *commitment* described thus far for Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham, however, Ms. Mack's featuring of this theme did not include a recurring resistive, reaffirming, or recursive element vis-à-vis personal or professional turmoil. Instead, out of all participants Ms. Mack's responses were the only to feature prominent sections in which professional challenges such lack of support from students' parents, student misbehavior, and increasing focus on test-driven reform presented serious challenges to her sense of commitment to teach. Context for these challenges and their effects will be further detailed as relevant interview passages are presented later in this section.

Though not as detailed as previous participants' accounting of *commitment* as a component of their perspectives regarding resilience in teaching, Ms. Mack did provide some description of an ebbing, yet consistently returning sense of commitment to remain in her classroom teaching position at Lowell:

Yeah, I think it is. Um, 'cause there's some days you might say, 'Oh, this is...I just can't do this again,' but the next morning, you're right back. So, I think you almost have to have that, or you quit, 'cause I've seen people do that, in their first month of school, and they just can't.

In this passage, we also see allusions to failing commitments by colleagues. In addition to this reference, like all other participants, Ms. Mack also expressed disapproval of what she described as demeaning senses of commitment to teach by educators from white, middle-class backgrounds who wanted to "pay back society" by committing themselves to teach in impoverished urban schools:

Well, you know, over time, you see people who come from different areas, and they come to the inner city with the idea that they're trying to help. I really don't. I don't think too much of that. (laughs) To me, it's kind of like a put-down, you know, like "I'm here and you're way down there and I'm gonna' help you be better." I don't really care for that.

What's the result when people come in with that attitude?

Well, the kids kinda' see through people real quick, and they understand who's fake and who's not. And a lot of times, people outside don't understand, but when you work with

kids, they pick up on things, little things, real quick. So they know who's genuine and who's not. Sometimes they know before the teacher, the younger teachers, you know, but, um, when I went into teaching, it was because that's what I really wanted to do, and like I said, I'm an only child, so I always liked being around other kids, and I got a joy from that. 'Cause I didn't really think about what it paid, or anything else, it was just the fact I'm working with kids. 'Cause as a teenager, I used to do Sunday school, because I liked working with kids, you know. So, that's just, you know, but coming from other areas into the inner-city, trying to quote "help," I don't think too much of that. I mean, there are some that have actually done a good job, but I've seen a lot that didn't.

Through this passage, several other important and recurring facets of *commitment* in Ms. Mack's responses, emerged. First, while some connection may be drawn here to previously featured participants' responses regarding a resistive and recursive character of *commitment* in the face of challenges, in her response it clearly takes on a character of resistance to deficit portrayals of students by outsiders. However, as opposed to being increased by aggressive and marginalizing actions by colleagues, as described by Ms. Eastman, or a source of *sustenance* in the face of personal turmoil, as described by Ms. Oldham, in this passage proper commitment to teach involves *genuine commitment* and real affinity with students' experiences and communities. This idea connects well with Ms. Oldham's description of students knowing when someone is "real" or not, and the detrimental effects this may have on classroom interactions and success when an educators' commitments derive from inherently marginalizing perspectives. This idea of *genuineness* will be explored further in the following theme, *candor & acknowledgment*. Second, through this excerpt, Ms. Mack touched upon a deep sense of commitment through childhood and church-based activities.

In a passage that more directly engages these primary sources of *commitment* to teach, Ms. Mack further described her first experiences and motivations to become and continue as an educator:

Oh yeah, church, Sunday school teaching, and I enjoyed that. I actually started there when I think was, eleventh or twelve grade, and uh, it kinda' stuck with me. I like working with kids, and it might be because I'm an only child. That's probably a part of it, 'cause us growing up I wasn't around a lot of kids unless they were at school. So, I was one, I had to be seriously sick to stay home, 'cause I wanted to be where the kids were.

This sense of dedication to education and work in schools returned again in the following passage:

And I'm here, 'cause in my mind as their teacher I'm supposed to be here, so, uh, I'm very seldom absent. I think the last five years, I've been absent maybe, okay, last year, though, my daughter got married so I missed three days, and before then, maybe, I don't know, the last seven or eight years, maybe four days. I just come to work, I might not feel good, but I still come to work, 'cause I think me being here, whether I'm half dead or not is better than a sub. That's my opinion, so, I do believe in that.

Beyond Ms. Mack's experiences as an only-child and her role as an instructor in her church, to which she reported continued membership and participation, as formative experiences to her commitment to teach, she also reported, similar to other participants, the early influence of and admiration towards teachers from within her immediate communities, such as school and church.

As with considerations of *competence*, recognition from former students also figured into Ms. Mack's descriptions of *commitment*. Through multiple anecdotes, she shared stories of encounters with students and described how these served as a source of renewed motivation to carry on in her teaching career despite professional frustrations. In the following example, she described the importance of these interactions throughout her tenure at her previous school as a form of divine guidance:

And then I enjoy, you know, when they grow up and come back, and I've had kids, when I was at Forest Hill [Elementary], especially, 'cause I was there about 30 years, some of my young men would come back and say, "Ms. Mack, I messed up." You know, 'cause they had their little stint in prison, but they would talk to me, they would remember things that I would say, I don't remember it, but they remembered things. And, uh, I think that's kind of like a blessing, you know.

As mentioned in the beginning of this section, Ms. Mack's responses contained descriptions of particular frustrations that she reported as significant factors in her intention, at the time of our interviews at least, to retire at the end of the school year. In the following passage, she described the detriments of accountability and standards-based reform on her intrinsic motivations to teach:

Yeah, because they really suck all the joy out of teaching. Um, because everything's on a deadline, and every time you turn around, there's some new test. You know, and even, the curriculum, they keep changing, every superintendent, he wants this, "The superintendent wants this,' And then, um, nobody ever talks to teachers...but now, before school starts, I have to start teaching, from day one, what you're teaching is towards a

test. To me, that has nothing to do with education, but that's just the life you live now, you just teach for tests. You know, where the kids used to be more centered, they had geography books, they had health books, they were just more well-balanced, but now, if it's not on the test, don't worry about it. So, that to me is terrible. And then all this paperwork. (laughs) And sometimes you think, "Am I supposed to be a teacher or a secretary?" 'Cause this paperwork, they want this done by this date this done by that date. But, if you're sitting here trying to finish all this paperwork, you may have a principal or somebody else come and you're sitting trying to finish this, well, you've got to give the kids busy work, that's stupid too. 'Cause I can't do two things at once, you know, so, that just really sucks the joy out of it. It really does.

In other examples, she shared negative experiences, particularly during her previous year at Lowell Elementary, in which fifth-grade students were academically tracked into higher- and lower-performing classes. As she and the other participants shared, Ms. Mack was given the lowest-achieving group as her homeroom class. She reported significant challenges in engaging these students in the mandated curriculum, and frustration due to lack of parental, staff, and administrative support during this time. Although Ms. Mack said she did not know if her experiences during the previous year directly affected her overall commitment to teaching, she report a renewed sense of commitment during the moments in which she worked with the higher-achieving group of students, and the return to non-tracked class compositions in the following year allowed her to come "back this year with a new attitude."

Descriptions of the diminutive effects of professional challenges to *commitment* in Ms. Mack's responses, though significant in comparison to other participants such as Ms. Oldham's and Ms. Eastman's descriptions of challenges and the increasing effects these presented on their

senses of commitment, also require contextualization to present a fair and accurate picture of Ms. Mack's participatory and pedagogical work. As I would later learn from her and her peers, during the school year of our observations and interviews, Ms. Mack persisted in her classroom teaching position while dealing with the effects of a life-threatening medical condition. This condition eventually forced her to take a leave of absence in the spring of this school year, during which time she reported making good on her initial decision to retire by submitting her paperwork for retirement. However, despite described negative experiences with academic tracking and intensified testing regimen, along with recovery from her medical condition, I learned that at the end of the school year she attempted to reapply for her classroom position for the following year. She was apparently denied because of her early leave and submitted her retirement paperwork. Thus, I hope presentation of this theme for Ms. Mack's contributions to this work remains nuanced and not one of simple contrast and comparison between hers and those of her peers. This final excerpt, I believe, serves well in concluding the interpretive considerations of this section in her words:

Yeah, I had options and this was something that I really wanted to do, you know. So, you kinda' roll with the punches. Everything's not going to be rose garden, but I really love working with kids and that's, I think that's what kept me in this.

Ms. Ford. As with all the other participants, facets of *commitment* featured prominently in Ms. Ford's responses. Like them, she described the importance of early experiences and role models in her forming commitment to teach. Similar to Ms. Eastman, she described an entrance into the profession that was not as direct as Ms. Mack's, or as clearly known from the outset as Ms. Oldham's, but as with all of them, she recounted the importance of spiritual belief and community to her commitment to teach. She described deeply-rooted connections to geographic

and cultural community in this sense of *commitment*, as well as shared censure for those whose professional motivations derived from deficit views of urban, impoverished youth and their communities. In the following passage, she described the influence of a family role model on her commitment to teaching and education:

And I do know the stories. My grandmother was in eighth grade, and that was it. And they told her, “You can teach this little country school.” She didn’t have to go to high school or college, because it was acceptable for a female of higher-level thinking to be a teacher...She didn’t have any degree, it was 1910 and she lived in one of them “sally saw” parishes in, well some, “sally saw” is grandmother in Oklahoma, but this one was in Louisiana. It was like eight kids who needed their education and she knew how to read and write. So, they called her “teacher.” No, she was not a *teacher* [emphasis in original], she was seamstress.

In addition to familial roots in her journey into education, Ms. Ford also described sincere influence from her church community on her trajectory into teaching:

I grew up at a church, where, it used to be called the “teacher’s church.” Second Baptist had a lot of teachers in our congregation. As they were teaching, Sunday schools and bibles schools, I’d go home with these people for either some kind of mentoring, or ‘cause my daddy made me. And they would [in]still a lot of their educational processing with me, like, “Let’s read a book.” They let me tutor at the church when I was about ten. I would, you know, help people with their homework because mine was done and I’m at the church. Being there, tutoring, you know, it was easy, but I was about 13 another community member asked me to tutor at a multi-purpose center. Again, 13 years old,

teaching kids about how to work their homework out, different, whatever they needed to learn, 'cause I could do reading with 'em. So, by the time I was about 16, I was working at the church again tutoring and they started a group there where they would tutor and somebody said, "You need to be teacher." I wasn't really interested. I thought I wanted to be something else, like a singer, lawyer, doctor, police officer. None of that worked out...

Despite these possible alternatives and reservations, Ms. Ford expressed how she eventually came back to education and built upon her commitment to teach through the support and influence of various community and educational mentors. After starting her work as a paraprofessional and working to become a full-time classroom teacher, she described her establishment of commitment to this role:

But as I saw myself becoming a teacher, that was the year at Bryant that I got my own classroom. And I found it to be something, that this is something I want to do, stay in the classroom forever.

As with all other participants, Ms. Ford also expressed criticism towards teachers from more privileged backgrounds and identities who came to more marginalized communities to "pay back" society. In her consistent emphasis on focusing on the positive, as this passage demonstrates, her critique quickly switched to a powerful explanation of how her sense of *commitment* to serve as a teacher both aligned and differed from the perspectives of teachers coming from "outside" to work in the high-poverty, high-minority core of Butterfield:

No they don't. Theirs is a total give-back. Pay-it-forward. I feel like it's my Christian duty. I do, but it's more of a survival duty. 'Cause if this man's gonna' live, if his kids don't learn anything and they're gonna' live, in my neighborhood, they're gonna' be the

criminals either trying to steal it from me or steal it from the world, or do without, and then we won't have anything, and then we'll just have a bunch of crud and everything will fall apart...I call 'em "missionaries," and there's nothing wrong with a missionary, but sometimes missionaries believe, that's why I say mine's different, I'm not trying to save the heathen, I am the heathen that we're saving. And some missionaries come in like, you know, "I know the Lord," and you know, whatever their mission is, their mission is to convert. Mine is to hopefully make them not adapt, but adapt more than assimilate, adapt and tolerate and participate within their community, and be a part of the good life, and have the good life, because it's yours too. Not so much because I have it, but because we all should have it, or something like that. That's all, I don't know if I'm saying it right. I'm trying to think on that one. Okay, give me another question.

Through this moment in our interactions, Ms. Ford also interrogated the *othering* and constructions of deficit inherent in the derivation of outsider commitments to teach as a service to "less fortunate" or, as I have chosen as a label, "marginalized" people and communities. As she has described, the community in which she remained committed to teach was not marginalized from her. In a final statement of her *commitment* to teach and remain centered in her community, she again interrogated and nuanced the idea of simply "paying back" as a motivation to teach. In a discussion of Nietzsche's axiom that *He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how*, Ms. Mack asserted the following:

That's my *why*. That's why I teach on the weekends, and why I teach at church, and teach wherever. Because it is something that's just to give back, and I know that's maybe not what Nietzsche was saying, but to me the *why* is, for me, it's the give back. It's, 'What else could I do?' I could work at Walmart, and I could probably be the manager, or

whatever, and that's, but it wouldn't be as stressful, and I probably could even make this kind of money, you know, 'cause I don't have a master's. So, when I see teaching, I see teaching as very hard, it's very stressful, no I'm not making master's money, like some people I know will come here because they know they're going to make a bunch of money. I come here because I know I'm gonna' make something happen, some difference, I still believe in that, that I'm gonna' make a difference.

Candor and acknowledgment. The third theme, *candor and acknowledgment*, also emerged after multiple reconsiderations and configurations of other terms. Throughout the secondary analysis process, and even into the writing of this section, I wrestled considerably with differentiating, defining, and applying this theme in the face of broader or related terms. In several iterations of analysis and conceptual reconsideration, possible alternative terms and categorizations, such as separating *acknowledgment* from *candor*, or *acceptance*, *honesty*, and *sincerity* were considered at length. Eventually, I settled on *candor and acknowledgment* as means for merging all of these terms in a way that remained inclusive and valid towards the data. In this framework, *candor* most obviously takes on nearly synonymous representation with terms such as *sincerity*, *honesty* and *genuineness*, but also encompassed additional connotative/denotative components the other terms described above. Specifically, the working definition of *candor*, both interpretational as well as representational, in this work will be 'being honesty and up-front in one's communication with others; maintaining one's integrity in communication; recognizing, accepting, and acknowledging both negative and positive aspects of self and one's experience in a broader ontology of expression and discussion.'" I felt the addition of *acknowledgment*, though the term intersects with *candor* in certain ways, such as honestly acknowledging another's work as an educator, was warranted considering certain

situations, such as the importance of acknowledging oneself or being acknowledged by others, place at least equal conceptual emphasis on recognition itself as compared to being genuine about one's recognition. *Candor* and *acknowledgment* of working realities and descriptions of self; as well as the importance of *candor* and *acknowledgment* in relationships, student-teacher, teacher-teacher, parent-teacher, and administrator-teacher, is framed through the following presentation of participating teachers' stories and expressions.

Ms. Eastman. The importance of *candor* in Ms. Eastman's accounts was established through sharing of personal limitations, the sincerity of receiving recognition from former students, acknowledgment of life challenges facing students at Lowell, and critique of deceptive or partial behavior from colleagues and administrators. To begin, Ms. Eastman repeatedly expressed candid awareness and acknowledgment of the limitations of her professional position and pedagogical abilities. In one example, when describing what she believed to be unfair-to-unethical use of school funds to take an exclusively selected group of students on a field trip to a local university, she noted that she and her peers "...may be peanuts compared to [teachers at the local university], but I can tell you one thing, we ain't dumb peanuts..." In other passages, such as the following, she openly discussed her professional strengths and shortcomings vis-à-vis shortcomings in competence by less-experienced, white teachers:

Black and Hispanic people have been wronged and they [new, white teachers] must recognize this. Some of these kids have been through things that I cannot even fathom, but I still try my best to help them. The Lord knows I'm not a perfect teacher. You know, Richards, I send kids out from time to time. Sometimes we need a little break, but I don't do that too often. It's almost something you cannot teach someone to do. Either you got it, or you don't.

As was also apparent in all other participants' contributions, recognition from former students functioned as another facet of the theme of *candor* in this work through expressions regarding the importance of honest *acknowledgment* from others as well as truthfulness about the things students have accomplished in the face of various life challenges. In the following, exemplar of this, Ms. Eastman additionally expressed the idea of *candor* and *acknowledgment* as reciprocal between student and teacher, with students seeking recognition from her for their later successes, and she gaining professional sustenance and satisfaction from these successes:

Yeah, and it makes you feel good to know that kids remember you, and that they know that you, you know, want the best for them, and everything. They want you to see that they're, that they've made something, you know, out of their life, they're not just slumming around and having babies and being in gangs. You know, they finished school, they accomplished something. And I had another student, last year, uh, he came up. He gave me and Ms. Oldham graduation, you know I wasn't able to make it, but he gave us each a graduation invitation. You know, nowadays, you get a certain amount of invitations. So for him to think of us, you know, to give us two of those invitations, that spoke volumes, you know, to me. So, it just gives you an uplift and makes you feel that you're doing something in life, you know, you're not really just going every day, for nothing, you know? So, uh, it gives you some pride, you know, in what you're doing.

In another passage, Ms. Eastman again furthered this theme, except this time through recognition of students' backgrounds and current experiences with turmoil, while also emphasizing the importance of candid self-reflection towards one's competence and commitment when attempting to teach in communities such as the ones in which she has worked and lived. She

began with a description of a students' reaction to a car's backfire outside their classroom window:

Ms. Eastman: Uh-huh. And a car backfired outside. That baby jumped up, got under the table, and we were like, "What's wrong with him?!" Okay, and at that time there was an interpreter up there at the school, and he came in and started speaking his language, because he really couldn't speak too much English. And he said, "Well, he comes from a part where there's war, civil war going on, and he's used to gun shots."

Me: And he knows to take cover.

Ms. Eastman: Right. And I said, "Oh my Jesus." So, not only do we have kids who have problems coming from where they're coming from, you're dealing with kids living here in the United States who've got, you know.

Me: Gunshots

Ms. Eastman: Right! And stuff. So, if you can sustain in the urban core, you're a good one. You are a good one. So, this should let a potential teacher, that's trying to be one, let them know, "Oh, I can't do this, this is not for me."

In another component of the theme of *candor*, and as featured in previous interpretations of her contributions to this work, multiple incidents of racist and classist behaviors by teachers and administrators described by Ms. Eastman intersected with the importance of candid communication and acknowledgment between colleagues and educators. As seen in previous examples, she critiqued and expressed disapproval of white teachers complaining to administrators at Lowell, i.e. "going behind her back" about various things she chose to do in her

classroom. In another example of this, she described her interactions with a recently hired teacher, a white woman whom Ms. Eastman said the principal gave frequent recognition to during meetings and media events at Lowell. She reported that this teacher's students had disrupted her classroom several times when they passed by, making a lot of noise and destroying their bulletin boards. Ms. Eastman said she began to intervene by going to her door whenever she heard this class coming down the hallway, and during one of these instances the new teacher remarked, "All you have to do is come to your door and they suddenly get so quiet!" Ms. Eastman said that not long after this, the younger teacher shut her [Ms. Eastman's] door as they passed, as if, "She was doing me a favor. I told one of my students sitting nearby, 'Go and open my doggone door!'" She said she went to the re-opened door and told the teacher to leave her door alone. She reported that "I'd already said what I needed to say," and that she was not the type to "Go run and tell the principal." The other teacher, however, apparently reported to the principal that Ms. Eastman had become confrontational with her. Ms. Eastman said that she knew this had occurred when the principal called her to his office and behaved as though she'd been "...already arrested, tried, and convicted," before he had even heard her story.

In a final example of *candor* in Ms. Eastman's accountings, she described dissatisfaction experienced by a particularly egregious example of lack of *candor* and *acknowledgment* in communication at Lowell, an incident that all of the participants described in their responses with similar sentiments. To provide a little background for this event, a recent principal at Lowell apparently hosted a tour of the school by Butterfield's major newspaper. From this tour and a tour of a nearby high school, the news source created and published an online photo gallery with a title indicating that Butterfield public schools were now more focused on learning than previously believed or actualized. As all participants related, and as observed by me online, the

photo gallery contained more than 10 pictures taken at Lowell, and nearly all of those featured white educators or students in these teachers' classrooms. The lone exception was a photo taken of an impressive hallway display created by Ms. Oldham and her students. Neither Ms. Oldham nor her students, however, were featured in this photo or its caption. Instead, Lowell's instructional coach, a white male, is named in the caption and stands pointing to the display: an entire wall covered with individual photos of African American and Latina/o student at their desks, underneath which each listed her or his personal life goals, and a broad title across the top stating "Mission Possible."

Although additional summary could be provided by me regarding the frustration and outcome of this incident, as Ms. Eastman's detailing of it were quite extensive, I will briefly add that Ms. Eastman described that word of the photos, both online and on paper, spread quickly around the school, with white teachers speaking and emailing in a celebratory tone and black teachers reacting with vexation and critique. She described that after she and other black teachers at Lowell met to the celebratory staff email with incredulous responses such as, "Really!?", the principal called her in for a meeting. She described her interactions with him and later with the entire staff at a meeting here:

That's what I had said [to him], "I mean, but couldn't you see that something was wrong with this picture?" You know? And he said, "Ms. Eastman, to tell you the truth, I didn't even think about it." And I said, "And that's how we get lost in this, this race thing, you don't *think* about stuff." You know? "And you didn't think about how this could backfire by you just having three white teachers in this picture to represent Lowell Elementary, which is on the north end of town, which is basically black and Hispanic, which is basically what our student body is of this course, but and I'm still sayin' that should have

been the first thing that should have come to your mind. Because if I were doing this, I wouldn't have let all black teachers be in the picture, there would have been a mixture." You know? So, uh, and like I said, he admitted, he said, "Yeah, I'm wrong, I dropped the ball, I shouldn't have done that, I should have thought." You know, and I said, "Yeah, you should" (both laugh), "Yeah, you should." And then he says, "Well, where do we go from here, what do you suggest I do?" I said, "Well, I suggest the first thing you do is call a meeting with the staff, and tell them the same thing you just told me." And he did, he calls this meeting, we went in one of the teacher's rooms, here again, in the meeting, he started it off hee-hawing around, not coming to the point, and finally I said, "It's about the picturres! In the paperrr, that depicts the three white teachers as representing our schoool!" And he said, "She said it." You know, so it seems as though when it comes to face with difficult situations he's not, you know, as an administrator, he doesn't take the reigns, he doesn't come off as an administrator. You know, and I'm not gonna' lie and say that if I were in his position I could do it, you know, because when you're on the outside you can always see stuff from the outside better than you can from the inside. So, and I was satisfied really when he admitted to me that he was wrong, but don't just admit it to me, you need to tell the whole staff.

In this excerpt, we see features of *candor* both explained and exemplified. Ms. Eastman described herself candidly while also recounting a moment in which she explicitly stressed the importance of honest and open acknowledgment to administration and staff regarding ethnic diversity and the contributions of teachers of color at Lowell. Therefore, in this account, *candor* may also be viewed as intersecting with the theme of *agency*, as a means for resisting entrenched systematic oppression at Lowell and beyond by leadership and staff.

Ms. Oldham. As interpreted in Ms. Eastman's responses, *candor* in Ms. Oldham's accounts was established through honest and open evaluations of self, acknowledgment of life challenges facing students at Lowell, the of underhanded actions by colleagues and administrators, and open *acknowledgment* of her work from administrators, students, and parents. Of added consequence to this illustration of theme, Ms. Oldham also shared several stories in which she described utilizing honesty in communication as a means of resistance to interpersonal and repressive conflicts with colleagues. As has been interpreted in all of the participants' responses, *candor* and *acknowledgment* manifested itself in Ms. Oldham's accounts through open acknowledgment of students' experiences with turmoil and how she took recognition of these circumstances and events into her pedagogical approach and individual tailoring. Evidence of the importance of this kind of *acknowledgment* as a facet of *candor*, was interpreted in multiple shared stories and observations, such as those she related about students in her in Chapter 3. The importance of this honest reckoning of students' lives was described best as Ms. Oldham put it, "Because, see, when those babies that are coming in, they can't drop their problems at the door, they bring everything in with them."

In recounting and sharing these stories, Ms. Oldham, as also mentioned, candidly revealed her own personal life experiences and challenges, connected them with students' and stressed with me, "There you go. You have to lay your burdens down and pick theirs up." In addition to negative and traumatic experiences, however, she also candidly imparted less serious, and even humorous stories of incidents in which she reflected on her work or past mistakes, such as the following:

Ms. Oldham: Well, to be honest with you, I've never had stress. And I know you think that's crazy, but I have never had, you know...I think I laugh a lot of the times. When I

first did my student teaching, in high school, and how you walk into the classroom and everybody's doing something, and when I raised my voice, then everything kind of mellowed out, you know, mellowed out. But I've never had, the time I did have stress was when I did my student teaching. You know, I was nervous, 'cause I had never been in that situation. But after that, 'cause I told you when I meant to say, "Today, we're gonna' talk about the *Tale of Two*," Oh, I didn't tell you that one... We were talking language, *Tale of Two Cities*, and I accidentally said, "the tales of two titties."

Me: (laughs) Was that in this class?

Ms. Oldham: No, high school, and they just, I wanted to run out of the classroom.

On a more serious note, we also see Ms. Oldham's frank disclosure that she does not experience stress in her work as a teacher. In addition to, and perhaps alignment with, this assertion, her responses also featured a deep sense of personal fulfillment gained through working with students in the classroom. She coupled these sentiments, as the following passage roundly illustrates, with the rewards of acknowledgment from former students:

Ms. Oldham: I like to see those light bulbs come on and I like to see my students come back to me and say, "Ms. Oldham, you know, I, you've taught me so much and I enjoyed, I'm glad I've moved on." One of my students today, they were, uh, Isabelle, Elizabeth, we had read *Romiette and Julio*. I'm sorry, and we had read, um, *Battle of Jericho*, and she said, "Ms. Oldham, you know, I love those books," and she brought up one that I didn't, I gave her as a gift, in that series, and that was, uh...

Me: Are you talking about Elizabeth Vasquez?

Ms. Oldham: Yes!...And she said, “You know, I love *Winter’s End*.” I said, “You still remember I gave you that?!” And she said, “Yes, and I love that book.” That, that’s the kind of things that I like. I like it when they can come back and I can see that they have made progress. And that they thank me. I love it when I get those, that’s that gratitude, that’s my gratitude. You know, I’m grateful that they, that I made a difference in somebody’s life. So that’s that perseverance, that makes me wanna’ stay in the classroom, and see those light bulbs come on and see them moving to another, I have kids, some of them are now doctors, lawyers...That’s the kind of, that’s my resilience, you know, I stuck with, I’m gonna’ stick with it, because I know where you can go. I know what you can do.

In addition to connections drawn through encounters with former students, Ms. Oldham also described appreciation for genuine responses from parents. In the following example of this, from an interaction during one of my classroom observations, she shared a story with me in the presence of a student whose mother she called to discuss the student’s diminishing academic engagement. She began by describing the conversation she had with the parent:

“Fatima! Where are you?” You know, she’s got one of those moms. She had some trouble with me last year, didn’t you? And I had her call her mom, and she said, “Mama, a teacher wants to talk to you.” A teacher! Huh. I told her, “Fatima, you better tell her who I am.” “Mama, Ms. Oldham wants to talk to you.” And when her mom heard it was Ms. Oldham, she hurried up and put me on the phone. Boy, she tore that butt up when you went home, didn’t she? She told me, “Ms. Oldham, when she comes to you tomorrow, she will be a changed girl.” And she was. Weren’t you?”

In other examples of the importance of acknowledgment, Ms. Oldham openly and fairly described the difficulties experienced by Ms. Mack during the previous school year with her homeroom of students under the aforementioned tracking of students into higher and lower achieving classes. While Ms. Oldham explained the challenges this presented her as well, such as receiving additional students through a “buddy room” system or receiving this class at times in a chaotic fashion during transitions; as the following excerpt illustrates, she also clearly attributed this to a poorly-made administrative decision and described how she candidly told the administrator why she thought a tracking arrangement should not be implemented in the following year:

Yes, and she had those same kids in fifth grade, but she got them in sixth grade, and she felt overwhelmed. And I’m gonna’ tell you what they did do, I know why she felt overwhelmed. They put the kids in two, and I told them, “No, no, Mr. J. You’re not doing that.” A high group and a low group. I don’t deal like that. I said, they did, the fifth graders, that what they did, a high group and a low group...I told ‘em, “We’re not doing that this year.”

Beyond considerations of acknowledgment and frankness, like Ms. Eastman’s, Ms. Oldham’s contributions also engaged the theme of *candor* through frustrations experienced with a lack of *candor* from colleagues and administrators. While she mentioned the incident where Lowell’s teachers of color were excluded from media coverage, she related several other events in more detail for which she expressed disapproval towards deceitful or unethical behavior while also describing how she met such behavior with forward and honest responses. In the first example, she related how she told grade-level partner, a white woman, how to use the new online grading system and stressed the importance of having them in on time to her with the words, “Girl, you

gotta' get those grades in, 'cause those parents need those grades.'" She reported how not long after this, their principal came to her and acted as though he did not know what to say, but then told Ms. Oldham that he wanted to know what she had done to upset the other teacher so much about her grades, that this teacher had come to him crying because of something she had done. Ms. Oldham said she was very surprised by this, and told me, "Now you know, I gotta' do something." She said she went to this teacher about the matter and she flatly denied having spoken to the principal at all about her grades or their interactions. Ms. Oldham concluded that she never found out who was telling the truth, but described the matter as an example of underhanded and lack of genuineness by both her colleague and administrator, adding, "If you've got something, a beef with me, let me know."

In the final example of the importance of *candor* in her accounts, Ms. Oldham described the following incident in which a teacher, a white male, reportedly injured a black female student and then attempted to keep the incident silenced:

Yes. He snatched a student. Now I know the little girl probably exaggerated, but when she came to my room, I said, "Why, why are holding your arm? What's wrong with you?" "Ms. Oldham, can I go to the nurse?" I said, "Wha-?" and at first, now I would have been in trouble, I said, "What's wrong with you?" "My arm." And that's all she said, "My arm." You know, she said, she was all, claimed she was in tears, so I said, "Go to the nurse. Go on to the nurse." I didn't write anything, I said, "Go on to the nurse." And the kids said, "Ms. Oldham, we know what happened." I said, "Don't want to hear it, go to the nurse." When she gets down to the nurse, she tells the nurse what Mr. Romano, what Mr. Romano did. Next thing I knew, downtown is coming...when he comes back, they, uh, he was downtown a while. So, then he comes back and said, "Did you, are you

the one that told on me?”...“Let me tell you something,” and you know I had to do it, don’t you?...“I, if I had told, I would let you know,” I said, “No. She told on you. She told the nurse and the nurse told the principal, because that’s the way it is, protocol.”

In a final connection to the theme of *candor* in this work, Ms. Oldham shared a piece of wisdom that I feel well captures and expresses the importance of remaining true, honest, and up front as a teacher, while also honestly acknowledging to importance of teaching: And, yet, every doctor has to come through a teacher, everybody, every profession has to come through the teacher.

Ms. Mack. As interpreted in the previous participants’ responses, *candor* likewise emerged in Ms. Mack’s sharings through description of the importance maintaining genuine commitment towards students, being clear and direct in one’s communication, recognizing and admitting one’s own limitations, and receiving acknowledgment from others. To begin, when asked about the importance of honesty and genuineness for her as a teacher, Ms. Mack stated, “Oh yeah, yeah, it does. You need to be honest with people. ‘Cause they, basically, they see through you anyway.” Despite the brevity of this response, she provided several stories further demonstrating the importance of *candor* in her role as a teacher. In the following passage, she described a contentious parent-teacher relationship, which she mentioned twice during our research sessions, in which she believed a parent expressed confidence in her abilities as a teacher based upon a candid encounter between them:

I used to do, um “extended day,” that’s what they called it then, and, uh, I was a coordinator and she brought her kids to school, this was when I was at Forest Hill, one morning during “extended day” time, at seven. I said, “Hold up, hold up,” and I flagged

her down. She just dropped them off. I said, “You need to come in, ‘cause they’re not in ‘extended day.’ You know you could enroll them?” Oh, she got to cursing. So, the kids, I just had them sit, ‘cause it wasn’t their fault. And when the principal came in, I talked to him, I said, “Well, I tried to be professional, but she’s got one more time to call me out of my name.” So, he talked to her. The funny thing about that, her oldest son, I think he was in the third grade then, um, and I didn’t, I tried not to have any contact with her when I saw her in school. Do you know, in the fifth grade, I looked up and this boy was in my room the first day, and I told my principal, Mr. Clifford, “Why would you put him in here?” And he said, “Ms. Mack, she requested you” (both laugh). I [eventually] taught both of her kids. She put both of them in my room!

Candor towards and acknowledgment of students’ challenges at home, as acknowledgment of her own abilities to successfully engage students by administrators also figured heavily in Ms. Mack’s accounting of her teaching career. In the many stories shared of particular students and families she had worked with, she acknowledged those who had made lasting impressions on her as those with the worst reputations for misbehavior at her school. As she put it, she was regarded as a strong teacher, and consequently “...would get all the crazies.” She stressed that this was not a complaint, because there was “never a dull moment” and some of these students would later return to thank her for the positive impact she had on them.

In another example, she described the importance of being “up front” with others, particularly in situations where one’s position might allow them to remain silent, and safe, in the presence oppression of others. In one example, she described how a white student spoke up to support his African American classmates who had complained to Ms. Mack about racist disciplinary practices committed towards them by a white music teacher:

Well, one thing I can think of, this was a long time ago too, there was a music teacher. Uh, and my kids did not like going to her. She was white...So, I noticed they'd do anything on the day they were supposed to go to music to get out of it, and I had a couple of young men, and then I had this other little boy, who was white, who'd done something to tick me off, and they got to talking. I said, "I don't want to hear that." They were talking about the music teacher. I said, "I don't want to hear that. You don't talk about another teacher around me. What's wrong with you?" And so, my little white boy said, "Ms. Mack, they're telling you the truth. 'Cause I can do something or say something and she don't say anything to me." So he, let me know, to wake up and smell the coffee, you know what I mean? Because there was something about her, she was still a teacher, and I just assumed, "Oh no, that can't be true." But the kids saw it. They saw it before I did.

In this passage, we also see candid reflection towards one's abilities as a teacher in the face of such circumstances.

Although the prominence of acknowledging one's limitations did not feature as prominently in Ms. Mack's contributions, she did describe similar threats to *candor* as encountered in the other participants' responses. For example, as already featured under *commitment*, Ms. Mack noted students' awareness and sensitivity towards teachers lacking in genuine commitment and candor in their interactions with students. She also brought up and expressed disapproval towards the same incident described by the other participants in which white teachers were featured in the media while Lowell's teachers of color were excluded.

Ms. Ford. Of all the manifestations and expressions of *candor* observed and derived during this project, Ms. Ford's featuring of this theme was perhaps the most thorough and robust.

As with other participants, she shared a variety of stories in which *candor* and *acknowledgment* were emphasized or played an integral role. She described personal stories, in which family members or long-time friends and mentors may have done things that were not straightforward or honest. She explicitly described herself in places as open and humble enough to recognize when she may need help, stating, “I’m very communicative, and I’m gonna’ ask somebody, ‘Is this happening to you? And what are you doing?’ I’m gonna’ look for advice, I’m gonna’ look for help, and I’m gonna’ look for support.” She openly shared self-reflections regarding her limitations through personal statements such as “Okay, so she did better than me,” and “Wow, I didn’t even get it all on point, but I got something, you know, I got it done!” Out of all the moments during our interactions in which the importance of *candor* played a significant part, however, none compared to several extended passages prompted by the following question from me: How do teachers or administrators or any other examples, and you don’t have to name names, but are there times you feel people haven’t been honest or maybe sugar coated something?

Ms. Ford’s response to this question was extensive and will be separated into several components highlighting various ways in which *candor* played a role throughout. Individual excerpts are presented in sequential, and taken in their entirety comprise her complete response with removal only in places of redundancy. In the first excerpt, she expressed appreciation for colleagues who confided their frustrations to her while also criticizing individuals who do not communicate candidly:

Okay, see, they don’t come to me that way, but a teacher came to me yesterday, a co-teacher about a comment about another teacher’s response to some students, and she wanted to know what did I think. I said, “Well first off, you know I don’t like that, I think

that's wrong." I said, "Thank you for coming to me, but," And her thing is, "We need more conversations where we talk honest." And I said, "We do. You're right, they don't. They'll either lie to your face, smile in your face and not tell you the truth, or you find yourself ignoring them."

She then moved on to nuance *candor* beyond accounts of handling situations up front and between individuals without involving leadership to describe a situation when reporting something to an administrator might also be viewed as an exercise in *candor* as acknowledging one's own prejudices against an individual. In this excerpt she provided an example in which reporting something to an administrator might act as a "test" for the genuineness of one's assertions and values, where one's conviction for what they had observed would need to be stronger than one's belief in personal superiority over another:

I'm gonna' say that without naming names, because there are certain people who will ignore teachers who they feel are beneath them or won't step up to their caliber. You know them, and I worry about them because they're the ones who misinterpret some things some people don't mean. [The other teacher said,] "Well, this teacher was rude!" Even though I like that teacher. [The other teacher said,] "She was talking about, she was rude to those kids! And she needs to be careful of how she says that, because there's gonna' be some kids who are gonna' tell it to their parent." And I said, "I don't know if you need to go directly to her," I said, "But before you get caught up in the middle, go downstairs to Ms. Streeter, don't make it me, but if you have to, I'll say something to her too," I said, "But first, go to the vice principal." I said, "I'm not even sure you want to go to the principal yet, he's kinda' judgmental too." And he's coming to me about, people like, "What do you think about so-and-so-and-so-and-so?"

Concluding with a critique of overly judgmental behavior by an administrator, Ms. Mack continued this line of disapproval by describing a colleague, who similarly appeared in Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham's accounts, she believed rushed to judgement and lacked candor in expressing her feelings directly to others. She also mentioned Ms. Eastman at this point, but reserved her critique to simply re-iterate her repeated emphasis on recognizing positive attributes in both situations and individuals:

And I'm like, you know, 'cause they know I'm not judgmental. I know people have bad days, I know people have bad character, and when I know they have bad character, I might name a couple names, Ms. Rorty, I have to know her heart too. See, she still calls me "sister," some of these other people she calls "heifers" and she needs to quit doing that, and I've told her, "You don't know that person." Just like I've told Eastman sometimes, "But you don't know that person. All you know is what you see, that flippant or that insecurity, and actually that's a deeper person."

Ms. Mack then provided some examples of individuals, white female teachers, one of which was featured in the already mentioned racially exclusive newspaper tour and publication, whom she worked closely with. Through what she described as honest appreciation of their efforts, direct recognition of cultural differences, and description of persistently pursuing open dialogue across these differences and in the face of entrenched racialized contention at Lowell:

Kelly, yeah, I just don't know her." She's a little, young white girl, she can be a little flighty or slick, but she's not, she's a very serious-minded woman, and Ms. Rorty called her "messy." And I'm like, "How you know? What'd she do messy for you?" ...Maybe she didn't lead it to your style, but she gathered all of them young white girls, they

understood her,” I’m sorry! (laughs) You know what I’m saying? You have to understand what *she*’s trying to do, and she might, and I make her make me understand, and I’m like, “What’d you mean we all need to do this and that and have some of these and all that? So tell me.” And in the end, Joy Gables, she’s was another. She was a little, young white girl, and they keep giving them to me because I don’t care, I like to see ‘em grow. It’s just like you, my goodness, my God, if he can’t grow and be what he’s gonna’ be, then that’s going back to saying that I shouldn’t have grown to be what I’m gonna’ be. This may be all I’m going to be, but that’s good enough, for me. Joy was really smart but she was a little slow in her talk to them and she wasn’t as exuberant. [Other teachers said,] “Ooo, she’s so boring.” “That ain’t got nothing to do with it! She was telling you about some good stuff, ‘til you was on this. You all need to be listening!” So, the first year, they played her off.

Ms. Mack continued with an account of the positive results of her efforts to mend previous constraints to communication through continued engagement with ethnicity and examples of authentic communication:

The next year, Eastman and them were, “Hey! Where’s that little white girl, Joy? Tell her to come here!” I said, “Okay, I’m gonna’ tell her to come here, but I ain’t gonna’,” But I said, “Hey, they said little white girl Joy, come here.” And I thought, but Annie was cool enough you could say that, like you, you could say that to her. Next thing I know, they were best friends. I’d come in the morning, she’s in her room, showing them stuff. Her and Oldham meeting up with her. I mean, it didn’t totally stop them talking about her behind her back, but they started respecting her. And I don’t know if that’s your question,

but it seems to be to me. There are some teachers who don't see the worthiness of everyone. They still come with their old stereotypes and beliefs...

Nevertheless, constraints to communication because of racially exclusive behaviors, particularly those enacted by a specific teacher also mentioned in various places throughout this work as engaging in these behaviors by Ms. Eastman, Ms. Oldham, and myself, remained a source of challenge in this response. In the following passage, she described her perceptions of such exclusionary behavior and featured it as a cause for a lack of candid communication by particular white teachers towards teachers of color at Lowell:

Ms. Ford: I just went there because somebody challenged me on my "black card" one day, 'cause I was sitting with [a group of white teachers] again 'cause they're my teammates and I enjoy what they're saying to me. I used to couldn't each lunch with 'em, 'cause they get too "cliquey" and all that, and [now] some of them are gone. I couldn't each lunch with Ms. Grant, even though me and her could get along as teachers, I could not each lunch with Ms. Grant. I know I used her name for you because I know you know who I'm talking about. There was just something in what she would, it would always get to me, and it would almost be like, "Why did you say it like that?!" You know.

Me: Do you feel that race played a part in what she was...

Ms. Ford: I do, but I don't think she did it totally on purpose to make me crazy. I think it's where she came from. Like you told me, you knew the "Baker-line story," she still has the "Baker-line story". And I don't think she's changing her paradigm to see that even though it's still so damn real, but that you cannot use those, um, boundaries to work with people. That's when you have to come out of that boundary, you know, and there

would be days that she could, but then I still couldn't do the lunch thing. It was too, there was something about that. It was, and I, it said something to every time I had a team, she'd snatch them up and she was eating with them.

Additionally, in this excerpt, the "Baker-line" referred to a street, described in Chapter 2, considered a geographic dividing line between black-and-white/poor-and-rich neighborhoods in Butterfield. With this reference, she acknowledged my *candor* in describing the prejudiced views I once held about this divide in our city. In the following and conclusory passage to her response, Ms. Mack connected my expressed openness to another white male teacher who also candidly described the marginalization of minority groups within the community at Lowell by Ms. Grant and other white teachers:

Mr. Drew, I don't think you knew him that well, he said, "You know what, you might Ms. Ford, they say stuff and sometime," and he's a young white guy, you know, he's gone off to Asia too, he said, "Sometimes they say stuff that almost sounds racial, because it wasn't black and white, it was racial, it was Asian, it's Hispanic, it's racial." And he couldn't understand that at this school, that the teachers could still talk that way. And not so much in our common joke stuff. Sometimes we do it out of our stereotypical jokes.

Agency. The fourth theme, *agency*, developed out of an initial categorization of descriptions of resistance by the participants to oppressive actions, such as resisting racist aggression from co-workers or resisting deficit assumptions made towards students. As a such, the potential theme of *resistance* as a source of *sustenance* was matched by a category of professional challenge for the participants in the form of *oppression/racism*. As positive and

negative factors and sources coalesced into single themes during the axial coding process, however, I eventually centered these countered themes within idea of *agency*. With *agency* as a theme, acts of resistance and other assertions featured in the participants' responses could be included and used to illustrate the importance of taking action against detrimental forces, while accounts of oppressive actions could be viewed as challenges because of the threats they presented to group and individual freedom of action.

The definition of *agency* in this study does not seek to ontologically privilege the idea of a free will over more deterministic, structural, or even chaotic worldviews, but instead dwells within the assertion that individual's and group's choices and actions may be negatively influenced or limited through situations and/or the actions of other agents. Conceptual framework for this theme comports well with Hewson's (2010) definition of agency as "the experience of acting, doing things, making things happen, exerting power, being a subject of events, or controlling things", and acts in opposition to factors that cause individuals and groups featured in the participants' response "to be acted upon, to be the object of events, to have things happen to oneself or in oneself, to be con-strained and controlled" (p. 12). As a useful lens for disaggregating situational descriptions of action and constraint observed in the participants' accounts, presentation of findings in this section further draws upon Hewson's differentiation of agency into three categories: *individual*, *proxy*, and *collective*. As will be further detailed, participants described numerous moments in which they exercised individual agency in the face of a variety of external factors and behaviors, acted as proximal agents on the behalf of others in the face of oppression, and collectively acted against exclusionary or harmful individual and organizational actions.

Ms. Eastman. Ms. Eastman's contributions to this work featured heavily in individual, proximal, and collective considerations for the theme of *agency*. Individually, she depicted numerous moments in which individuals acted in ways that presented potential constraints to her work and freedom to act, but against which she was able to exercise *agency* and advocate for herself, others, and collectively. As has been featured in numerous stories thus far, Ms. Eastman often described herself as an independent agent acting in the face of oppressive behaviors from several sources, such as colleagues and administrators. In the following example, she illustrated a time in which she utilized her personal experience, confidence, and determination to effectively counter discriminatory administrative action early in her teaching career:

Me: Was there a particular reason you wanted to transfer from there?

Ms. Eastman: The, uh, principal, at that time, she and I didn't see eye to eye. And, uh, I think that, I guess because I was new to the District, she thought that she, you know, she could pull various things and I wouldn't recognize. At that time we had IC's, and the instructional coaches jobs were to, you know, help new, incoming teachers and things like that. And every time she found out the IC was in my room trying to prep and help me she would find a reason to pull the IC from my class. Basically, the only thing that really saved me was that I had taught previously, you know, I wasn't meek, I had been on that trail before, teaching, so that's basically the only thing that saved me.

In another account, from a time later in her career, she communicated her decision to remain in classroom teaching position despite numerous factors, such as retirement eligibility, offered financial rewards, and hostile leadership, that might have influenced her otherwise, and expressed her desire to exit the profession on her own terms:

Yeah, I could have with that last buyout, I could have retired then. But I had this thing, whereas, because the superintendent that we had at that time, that was, you know, along with my philosophy, and a few, a lot, of other people, he was here for, to be a hatchet man. And he did, he raised that hatchet and dropped it. You know, and he got rid of teachers that shouldn't have gotten, he shouldn't have gotten rid of. And in the wake of his *hatcheting*, he left some, undesirable teachers. So, uh, and I think that was due to principals' evaluations, you know? And, uh, so when that last buyout came about, even with the first buyout, I was like, "You're not going to *push* me out. I'm going to leave on my own accord. You know, not because you pushed, or forced me out. So, you have no reason to push me out, test scores are still strong. I can manage my class. I do, you know teach, I'm not saying you know, I teach every day, because I have bad days just like, you know, a human, but I still, you know, go to work every day to make a difference, you know. So, uh, you have no reason to force me out." That was just my stance, you know...So, now I can leave on my own accord.

In other moments during our interactions, Ms. Eastman shared insights, stressed also by all other participants as well, regarding the importance of remaining focused on one's work and avoiding all-too-common negative professional community practices, such as gossiping or dwelling on negative aspects of one's work environment. In numerous places, she described the importance of professional focus and observing "what's going on", of at times going "rogue on some of 'em," in order to remain an active agent instead of an individual caught up in negative influences and "hype" from others. In the following excerpt, she described a time in which she informally mentored, and thus fostered the agency of another, a beginning teacher, a young white

woman, about the importance of maintaining one's ability to act independently in the face of workplace negativity:

I said, "Find out for yourself, and you don't have to be a rocket scientist to just sit back and listen and watch, and see what's going on, you know, before you step into something." You know, and she said, "You're right Ms. Eastman," and she says, uh, (laughs) "You have a great personality and I'm glad I talked to you," and I said, "Any time." You know, and she says, "You should have been my mentor." I said, "But you got one. Stick with her, 'cause it's almost over with." You know, but if you are true to yourself, and you want to be fair and things like that, you won't feed into these people who come to you and tell and talk to you about other teachers, you know.

In another example involving proximal *agency*, Ms. Eastman illustrated her continuous advocacy on behalf of students at Lowell, particularly in the face of racist and classist marginalization by white teacher from higher-SES backgrounds. Here, in a passage that also connected with ideas of cultural *competence* and *candor*, she described an incident, that I also well recall, in which she attempted to counsel a Teach For America teacher who had broken down emotionally amidst a heavily vandalized classroom after school one day:

I mean, because, you know, kids know when you don't like them. You know, and uh, your persona, your conversation, your mannerisms, they know when you don't particularly care for them, you know. And just like the two that we had, the, uh, Teach For America, and, uh, that day when she was balling in the classroom and talking about, "Well, the kids don't like me." And I'm like, "Why do you think so?" [She replied,] "Because I'm white and got blond hair." And I said, "Are you serious?" You know, I

said, “Are you really serious?” You know? And I said, “If they don’t like you it’s because you show them that you don’t like them.” You know? “The way that you act around them, the way you talk to them. You don’t want to get next to them, you don’t want to get close to them. You don’t want to do anything. You don’t want to bond with them.” You know, “So, they know this, they sense that. So, it’s not them, it’s you.”

Along these lines of exercising *agency* vis-à-vis racial and classed oppression, as has already been described in numerous moments, Ms. Eastman described the importance of resisting such aggression towards herself, of remaining an active and independent agent amidst a number of situations and aggressive behaviors from administrators and colleagues. In several situations already encountered in the discussion of previous themes, she described her efforts and intentions to work against these actions on behalf of herself and other teachers of color at Lowell. Collectively, she described her and Ms. Oldham’s online resistance via email to the time when the principal led newspaper reporters on a tour of the Lowell in which only white teachers were featured in the resulting publication. In another example of collective agency, she recalled participating in several teacher strikes several decades earlier in her career. She also related numerous times in which she resisted aggressive behavior from particular white teachers, members of a group she referred to as “the clique”. I believe the following passage well represents, and concludes, these situations and the importance of *agency*, both individually and collectively, in her contributions:

I said [to the clique], “Don’t come to me with this crap.” You know, I said, “Now you can go back to your other, uh, group members and tell them what I just said. I’m here for one thing, I’m not here for you, I’m not here for the principal, I’m here for these students and I’m here to teach. You all keep too much stuff going on, and I’m going to be a party

of this, this henpeckin, you know, so stay away from me with that crap.” And, of course, it got around to the whole school, and a couple a’ teachers who were basically not in the clique (laughs) came to me and said, “Good for you Ms. Eastman! You told ‘em.” And I said, “All of you guys need to stand up and let them know.” I said, “Because you know as far as I see, they basically run the damn school, you know, and if you don’t speak up then that means they run you too.”

Ms. Oldham. Like Ms. Eastman’s, Ms. Oldham’s portrayals of *agency* in her stories and perspectives contained individual, proximal, and collective components; and feature many of the same incidents, such as collective participation in teacher strikes, as well as similar situations, such as resistance to discriminatory behavior by a colleague. Ms. Oldham’s accounts of two of these situations were described in such detail that they each will stand alone without a lot of commentary from me regarding how they connect with the overall importance of acting one’s personal behalf in her responses. In the first example, she described her participation in two teacher strikes:

Me: Have you ever been in a teacher’s strike?”

Ms. Oldham: Oh my gosh, yes, two.

Me: They were stressful times?

Ms. Oldham: Right, mainly because, during that time I was young with a family. That was when I joined the credit union, because during that time, we could have a signature loan. You know, money was not coming in. And that was stressful. The one thing, the joy of that, my principal came out on the line to pull me in. You know, she said, “You gotta’

come in because they're going to do something crazy." Downtown was, they were getting ready to get rid of teachers, so she pulled me in.

Me: Did they break the strike that way? Or did you keep going?

Ms. Oldham: No, they didn't. I think we kept, many of them kept going. I can tell you something. I can remember [a former peer], had a motorcycle. We went over to Arthur [Elementary] and put putty in the, so teachers couldn't go in, in the key, in the door. The front doors, we puttied the front doors so the principal couldn't...(trails off)

Me: You rode on the motorcycle with her? And puttied up the front door so they couldn't open the building.

Ms. Oldham: And the back (laughs). Oh, I can tell you, oh my God, but I was never in jail, *per se*, but I did get in trouble. But I never went to jail *per se*. I can't see, I mean, you, we were rebels. We were really rebels. 'Cause what they have now is because of what we, what happened with us. We didn't back down. In the snow, I mean, meeting, rallying, that morning, you picketed around the building. And you met at the, uh, union office, and rallied, you know, had a rally, you know about, and how we cried together, went out the next day. Over and over again. Yeah, I've been through two.

In the other example, she illustrated a particularly intense situation with a white colleague, also mentioned in Ms. Mack's and Ms. Eastman's accounts, who attempted an aggressive and racist accusation and reprimand towards Ms. Oldham. Her described response to this teacher and description of her response well illustrate the importance of individual *agency* in her accounts. In the following description of this incident, Ms. Oldham began by describing how this teacher, Ms.

Peabody, came to her class after a meeting to confront her because she believed, and mistakenly at that, that Ms. Oldham had “corrected” her at a meeting:

Ms. Oldham: Well, it was just a, she felt that in a faculty meeting that I had corrected her, and it wasn't me. It was Rorty [a black teacher]. So, she comes to my room, and all that came out of me, she said, “We need to talk.” [I said,] “About what? I'm on my way out the door.” “I need, we need to talk because you corrected me in the faculty meeting.” “What?!” And yes, she kept, oh no, I just had to deal with that. I said, “You better get the hell out of here,” that's what I said, and I had my hand in her face, “You better back her out of my room.” And I was on my way out the door and I said, no, I can't let this get handled like this. I went and threw my bag down, I was upstairs at the time, and had to go back down because she was in the office with the, uh, instructional coach. I said, “As long as you live, you don't do me like that,” you know, I said, “You don't know what you're talking about,” just like that. And the instructional coach said, “You're wrong,” she told [Ms. Peabody], “You were wrong. Oldham wasn't the one that corrected you, that was Rorty.” See, [Ms. Peabody] was afraid of Rorty. I don't think she was bothering with me and I said, “We can take this out on the playground,” that's what I told her. I was just that angry. “Oh I'm not gonna' ...I wouldn't lower myself.” I said, “But you lowered yourself to come in my classroom, in my room, on my way out to tell me something crazy.” So, then the next day, Mr. Spellman had us in conference...And then, uh, she apologized. And Mr. Spellman asked me did I accept her apology. I said, “Not really, but as long as she stays in her space and doesn't come in mine.” And from that day on, she just couldn't get enough of, you know, smiling.

Me: Being nice?

Ms. Oldham: Oh! It made me sick. I told Eastman, “Oh, she’s getting on my nerves.” You know, “Oh Oldham, I’m just so sorry!” You know. But she, she saw a side of me that, I haven’t brought that out in a long, since I left Georgia, that militant part. ‘Cause I felt like, “Yes suh! Yes, yes sir.” That’s the way I felt. I felt like a white person trying to get, what is it? What they’d used to call it? You know, when black folk used to bow and, was it Tom Jones? Tom.

Me: Jim Crow?

Ms. Oldham: Jim Crow. I felt, you know, “Yes suh, yes suh, if you say so, yes suh” Oh no! You got the wrong one. And that feeling came out. You know, and how everything came out, being in Georgia, you can’t drink water here, you have to drink “Colored Folk Only,” all of that came out of me at that time. I could see all of that. You know, you can’t get at Dairy Queen, you have to go to the back to get ice cream, you can’t eat at a restaurant, all of that came out of me, when that lady walked into my classroom and did what she did, yeah.

To round out this theme for Ms. Oldham’s contributions, several brief and additional examples will reinforce the importance of exercising individual *agency*, both professional and personal, in her work as a teacher. In the first examples, she described the importance of maintaining one’s professional sense of *agency* in the face of external influences, such as negativity shared among colleagues...

One thing is, with my co-workers, and this, I don’t get caught up in the criticism. You know, I stay true to what I’m here for. I don’t have time to get caught up in the “he-say she-say.” I mean, when I close that door, it’s not, it’s about my students and it’s about

me. I enjoy working with them, but I also, I don't, um, I just keep somethings at a distance. I don't get, I don't have time for anything else. I don't have time for the stuff that's not focused on what I'm trying to do, and I can't afford to be knocked off the journey, this journey, and this is, you know, this is like a beach, you know every, this is a journey.

...as well as possible constraints from constraining and tumultuous leadership:

Right, I can't get caught up in, the demands, I mean they're there, but I have to think. What can I do? You know. What's it? Brighten the corner where I am. I can't get caught up in the downtown stuff, you know. I mean, I know it's there, but I kinda' have to look over it sometimes and do it my way, *I did it my way*, you know.

In a final illustration of the importance of *agency*, the following passage features a moment in which Ms. Oldham referenced her, also previously described, personal experiences with domestic abuse while also maintaining her professional and personal roles as a classroom teacher and mother of two. The following is an excerpt from this time in her life, when she and her children fled in an unreliable car to live in a hotel far from her school and children's schools, while also expressing the importance of recognizing one's strengths to act in the face of life-altering and threatening circumstances:

Coming off on that, it's a hotel out a little. We stayed out, I stayed there. Over a year almost, until I was able to get all my money from school. Every time I would get a, make a check, it went into paying the hotel. Twenty dollars, at that time, that's why I say, "Look. Can't anybody tell me what you can't do," and then driving back into the city, to

go to school and take my children to their school, and I would go to school. Pick them up, every night.

Ms. Mack. The various forms of *agency* interpreted through this section also clearly manifested in the perspectives and stories shared by Ms. Mack. In the following passage, she described participating in several teacher strikes during previous decades of her teaching career. Although she did so with encouragement, unlike Ms. Oldham, from a personal source of influence, like Ms. Oldham she described a collective spirit and sense of empowerment among teachers in the district at that time that she felt had diminished in more recent years:

I sure did. And the first one, um, was it my first or second year of teaching? I didn't really want to, uh, but my husband, he was, well he was an ironworker then, and he was union, and he said, "You don't cross the picket line." And then I thought about the first day it started, I really thought about going to work and, of course, he's against it, but I'm gonna' do it anyway. And then when I got there, I saw all these people were around the building, I think it was Clark, and I said, "I'm not going in." I went on back home. And then, of course, the second one they had, I was expecting, so it didn't really affect me that much, you know, but it was kinda' sad, because it broke up staff, people, you know what I mean? If you're crossing and you're not crossing, and it brought up bitter feelings, but it was stronger, the whole district was stronger back then, much stronger.

In comparison with this strong featuring of personal participation in in acts of collective *agency*, Ms. Mack's responses also featured acts of personal and individual *agency*, though perhaps with more subtlety. She described herself, as other participants did, as carrying a strong desire to resist detrimentally common behaviors and avoid conflicts with colleagues. As she said,

“...all through my teaching, I’ve tried to stay in my room, and get my work done. I don’t have time for a lot of hanging out and gossiping, you know what I mean?” In the following excerpt, she reiterated challenges faced during the previous school year in which her homeroom students were tracked into a class of the lowest achieving students. As she would describe in several places, this arrangement presented serious challenges to her will and commitment to remain in her classroom teaching position. As she stated here, however, she was able to reconnect with her motivation and sense of commitment:

Ms. Mack: Mmm...I don’t know. Last year was kind of a, a year for me that was super challenging. ‘Cause I had all the *low* ones.

Me: They were tracked?

Ms. Mack: Oh my God, yes. They were like crabs, you know, pulling each other down, and just, now that for me was rough. But, I was back this year with a new attitude!

In this passage, we also see expression of frustration towards constraints to the *agency* of students brought on by deliberately concentrating students dealing with heightened amounts of educational turmoil. As she described, the proximity and marginalization of these students in one class further heightened this turmoil. In addition to this accounting of threats to *agency* for individuals and groups, Ms. Mack, like Ms. Eastman, also stressed the importance of individuals exercising personal initiative, willpower, and strengths to overcome difficult circumstances. In the following passage, she described the importance of parent responsibility while also acknowledging circumstances that might constrain their abilities to act on behalf of their children academically:

I don't know, and parents just don't make it, well not all of them, a lot of them don't stress what they need to be doing. Now, some of them don't understand, like with the math homework, uh, some of the parents don't understand how to work the problem, which is a problem. I don't know, the reading skills, for some of the parents, you know, so they really can't help them, but the ones that can, you know, should do a better job.

In this assertion, we also see advocacy on behalf of students. The importance of proximal encouragement of *agency* for students also took on notions of individual *agency* by Ms. Mack's direct actions. This was most apparent in the previously described incident in which she utilized the candid assertions of her students about racist behavior towards black students by a white music teacher. As the following passage illustrates, Ms. Mack described herself as acting independently, despite initial misgivings about encouraging general respect for the position of teachers, to disrupt oppressive behavior towards her students:

“No, you're going to music” (laughs). One day I had a couple kids in the room, 'cause I don't know what they had done, and so, my little white boy said, “Ms. Mack,” 'cause they got to talking. I said, “I don't want to hear it.” “She is prejudiced.” I said, “Boy, please.” He said, “She is.” Now this is a white child talking to me, telling me that the black kids, you know, she picks on 'em, and anything they do, you know, she's ready to put 'em out or send them to the office or whatever. And then I thought about, and I said, “Maybe these kids do know what they're talking about.” So, I started noticing her, and sometimes I'd hang out in music. I didn't say anything to her, but I'd kinda' hang out five or ten minutes to see how it was going. 'Cause some of 'em, actually, before they got in the room, you start noticing things. She would, before they'd even get in the room, she's

fussing, you know? And so, you know, but I don't know if she caught on or what, but she soon, with my kids she started doing better with them.

Ms. Ford. Stories featuring *agency* in Ms. Ford's accounts likewise connected with collective, proximal, and individual aspects of increasing the ability of self and/or others to act in the face of possible constraints. As featured in other participants' presentations of this theme, Ms. Ford described professional moments in which she worked together with colleagues and peers for the collective good. Of all participants, her accounts of collective action most heavily emphasized the importance of recognizing differences and working with others despite external perspectives and past experiences, such as those involving personal, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic differences and discrimination. In the following exemplar of this, with additional connections the theme of *candor*, she described experiences she had with a white teacher at a district-wide professional development event, in which they initially disagreed about recent protests at a nearby university and eventually developed a collaborative relationship based upon openness and honesty:

Ms. Ford: Uh, I let the class go on and afterwards I said, "I didn't agree with you on that. They did a nice, easy protest, before it escalated." But the way she said, it was something she said about a "negative" and "How'd they get a positive, how'd they get a consequence like that over such a negative behavior?" Of not going to class, and something like that. And I had to explain to her, "But it was a problem," you know, whatever. And she said, "Oh I didn't mean it like that!" But I knew she said that, but since then, we've had the most, the deepest conversations about whatever. Probably because she knows I don't care, because I'm gonna' come to you with my honesty of what I feel, and if I'm wrong, I'm wrong, but I'm gonna' say it just like what you said,

and I didn't do it in front of everybody, I did it with just her. And I think that told her, "You're an honest person." And so now, the last, we had our last class Monday, she actually came to my table, 'cause all my other friends left, all the black people left, not that they're my friend either, (laughs) and I stayed because I wanted to hear what's going on in the rest of the class...She actually came over there, started telling me about a project she's doing and asking my opinion, you know, sometimes I go, "Okay, this is a set-up," and it might even be and I don't care, but I took her for face value and we talked. We talked about how her project was, she's at a school that also has multicultural students, and I said, "Yeah, I think that's gonna' work. That's gonna' really bring in some cultural talk." And I'm glad she came to me. For her, it was both, it could be for healing, meddling, picking, I don't care. I think the honesty part is what you need to go ahead and work it through.

In other accounts, Ms. Ford shared experiences and perspectives regarding proximal encouragement of her students' sense of agency. In the following exemplar of this, she described students' experiences with turmoil, referenced interventions she made, which I had observed during a previous visit, with a student dealing with a number of serious life challenges.

Every day, somebody's got some sad-ass story to tell me in this room. There's something that happened out there. Yes! And again, I have to teach 'em, "You know what? It's gonna' happen, and in the meantime, your mama died and your daddy's the one that killed her and he's in jail. I bet somebody who's in this world, mama whose dead or daddy's in jail, who wants you to succeed. So let's teach you how to succeed." 'Cause you right, it's like that all the time here. Like I said, this time of the year, when it's cold and my gas is off, this little boy, I sat him right here, little white boy, Christian, over

there clowning? Man, I kept trying to talk to his parents about “What’s happening? What’s happening? What’s happening?” Talking about daddy’s on drugs, mama’s done that, mama told me one day the lights was off. So, we started a new regime, me and Christian, “I don’t care what the heck is going on at your house! When you get to my room, you put your best foot forward and do better!” He sits by himself now, right by me...

And finally, Ms. Ford provided rich and extensive accounting of acts of individual *agency*. In places, she described how she acted against oppressive and discriminatory actions, from both colleagues and close peers. In others, as the following passage attests, she described individual resistance to pressures and constraints from beyond her immediate working context. In this moment, she described how societal pressure, such as job status, diminished in importance throughout her career:

I think in the beginning I was so excited that nothing ever bothered me, and I thought everything I did was right on point. Then there was a time when I was like, “Man, I keep missing that. I keep missing that a lot. I didn’t get that point. She did much better than me. I need to do better.” Now, I’m at a, “Okay, so she did better than me,” and “Wow, I didn’t even get it all on point, but I got something, you know, I got it done!” Like, my grades get in on time and they makes sense and they match up and parents nod their heads. Nobody’s reported me, mistreated me on my grades or my child because eventually, again, I’ll find the resilience and the tolerance to stay up, get it done, make it work out, fix it, work with that particular child so he can grow because he was the one. It’s, um, I’ve learned to work smarter, than harder. That part. And I’ve learned to not take it as personal about me, because I am older and things in my life are more personal than

me having this career. At one time, it was real important to have this, a career that sounded decent and great. So, when somebody'd say, "What do you do?" "Oh, I teach!" you know? "I don't just work at McDonalds as the manager." But now, I could do that and be happy. "Hey, I'm the manager at McDonalds and I'm good at it," but I don't have to because I can teach. So now it's out, I can teach. I'm content.

Connection. The final of these categorical themes, *connection*, presented perhaps the most difficult hurdle, as well the greatest opportunities, for analysis. Initially considered an obvious category in the first coding of the data, after deductively returning to the data to further delineate this theme, I found the definition, and hence importance, of this idea expanded to include many of the already established and sorted categorical data. For example, the importance of *candor* in communication with others may certainly also speak to the importance of establishing solid and clear *connections* with others. This "spillage" of the idea of *connection* into the other categories presented somewhat of an existential crisis to my categorization scheme, and I considered reconstructing everything around the idea of connection through categories such as *connection to one's craft*, *connection to students*, *connection to a community of peers*, *connection to greater community*, *connection to self*, and *connection to spirituality*. After consulting with my committee's chair, however, we decided it best to retain the thematic strands defined thus far, with *connection* taking a final and paramount place within the categorical scheme.

As it stands in this study's analytical framework, the importance of *connection* encompasses both personal and external sources of sustenance and challenge. As evidenced through the various, yet connected, perspectives and stories shared throughout this section, the

establishment and maintenance of connections to family, self, support groups, colleagues, peers, mentors, students, spiritual beliefs, professional expectations, and community have played significant roles in all of the participants' responses. Things not conducive to the formation or maintenance of *connections* between the participants and these sources professional sustenance represented significant sources of frustration and challenge. While one might also wonder why this final category has not been more simply termed as *relationships*, and certainly the importance of engaging in meaningful personal and professional relationships permeated the participants' responses, certain components of this theme, such as the importance of *connection* to one's spiritual beliefs or *connection* through continued professional development, seemed better described through the broader connotations of this term.

As the theme of *connection* runs heavily through the already featured themes and examples, two to three exemplars of this theme from each of the participants' contributions will serve to complete the analysis of their contributions.

Ms. Eastman. In Ms. Eastman's accounting, we see the importance of *connection* manifested in numerous ways. We see the importance of connection with peers, through her longtime friendship with Ms. Ford, grade-level partnership with Ms. Mack, and "pact" with Ms. Oldham to continue teaching for one more year, year after year; as well her connection with all of these teachers in solidarity as black women professionals in facing challenges, in the form of racial and socioeconomic discrimination, on behalf of themselves, their students and community of residence and upbringing. Through a community of peers they shared mutual support, respect, and appreciation for each other's strengths, shortcomings, commitments, and professional competencies. Through *connection* to her community within the city of Butterfield, a community though located centrally geographically has remained in "in the margins" (hooks, 1990, p. 341)

socially and economically, intersections of spiritual guidance and support through personal and organized religious practice emerged. Through recognition of this external marginalization, Ms. Eastman described connections to self and students in expressions of solidarity, shared agency, and sustenance:

I mean, because it's not like I was raised in the suburbs, you know? And like I tell a lot of them, "I come from the same place you come from." You know? And a lot of kids, you know, they ask me where I live. And I say, "Well, I live right here in the urban core." [They say,] "You don't live in Deerfield [a suburb of Butterfield]?!?" "Well, no." "You don't live in Rainville, Beaumont?!" "No!" You know, and one of them even asked me, "Well, why you live in this area?" I said, "Because I feel more comfortable, in this area. I can relate better, you know, and basically, everything that I'm associated with is in this area. Where I go to church, you know, my friends, you know, familiar areas and things like that," and I said, "A lot of areas, basically where I grew up and moved to, they're not the same anymore or they're not there anymore, you know, but I'm still right here, 'cause I'm not trying to be, not saying that if you move out to the suburbs you're trying to be more than what you are, but I'm comfortable right here. I don't have to move, uh, fifty miles from my place of where I work or my place of worship, or my friends or anything like that." So, they're really surprised when I tell them, "I live right here, as you all call it, *the hood*."

As further examples of the importance of *connection* in her accounting, Ms. Eastman offered numerous examples of conflict and detrimental outcomes resulting from teachers', whose communities, identities, experiences, and perspectives remained external to those of their students and their communities, attempting to "help the down and trodden." As this final

example attests, these failures to establish meaningful connections, by teachers and administrators lacking in necessary responsiveness and competencies, constituted the primary source of professional challenge and frustration in Ms. Eastman's accounts as well as primary source of professional motivation, renewal, and action:

Ms. Oldham: Uh, I remember one incident, I was at Greenwood, and this little boy, he had come to school and he got sick. And, uh, one of the teachers asked him, "Well, did you eat breakfast this morning?" And he said, "Yes." And she said, "Well, what did you eat?" And he said he ate spaghetti. And she was like, "What? Spaghetti?" You know, and so when I heard the tone in her voice, and saw the expression on her face, I said, "Woh, woh, woh! That's probably all they had," you know.

Me: All he could get to.

Ms. Oldham: All he could get to, you know. So, whether it made him sick or not, he had something to put in his stomach, you know. Everybody doesn't have cereal, bacon and eggs, and things like that. So, you know, they don't understand that, you know, a lot of kids are, uh, they're poor. And they don't have certain things, that you know, you can't expect them to. And some teachers, they expect kids to have this, they expect kids to have that, you know, and even now, I've said a couple things to a couple teachers. One teacher said, "Well don't come back to school without any socks on!" or "Don't come to school looking like that." And I'm like, "You can't say that," you know, "Maybe the child doesn't have socks." You know, you've got to be sensitive to these kids' needs...because it's not their fault, anyway! (laughs) Tell the parent that, you know, don't tell the child that. So, I think when you get into this business for other reasons,

other than to teach and you want kids to learn and want them to be successful, I think you're going about it the wrong way, your thinking process is not, you know, there for the right reasons.

Ms. Oldham. As seen in her responses relating to *competence* and *candor*, Ms. Oldham's also emphasized the detriments wrought by teachers coming from outside contexts to work in an urban context such as that Lowell Elementary who refused or were unable to interrogate and improve upon their own limited perspectives and prejudices. Connecting with this idea, we also saw the importance of *connection* through love and acceptance for students, their community, and one's work with them in these times and spaces. For, as she quoted, "Love is not love that alters when alteration finds." In the following passage, she described this level of devotion for effective teachers and furthered the importance of *connection*, through the idea of knowing one's students in order to actually express care for them in a relational sense (Noddings, 2012b):

Devoted, serious about what they're doing, know the subject matter, enjoying, you know, you gotta' love this stuff, you know, you've got to live and breathe this, *this*. Always coming up with ideas about what you can do to move. How can I reach this kid in the class? What do I need to do to get this kid? You know, we don't all work the same way! You know, guided reading is great, but I have to approach it from the way I can approach it, not from the way, you know, take what the text has, but know how to get into what you're doing, know how to, know those kids! You gotta' know the kid.

In addition to the idea of *teaching as love*, Ms. Oldham's accounts, like all of the participants', featured the importance of *connection* with professional peers, divine guidance, the role of early mentors and inspirational figures, and competent leadership. Her responses also clearly

expressed the importance of *reciprocity* between oneself, one's students, and the profession in terms of both contributing and receiving strength and learning. In a final featuring of her contributions to this chapter, she clearly described the sustaining aspects of these connections:

But it makes me stronger, because it makes me be more, you know, it makes me , um, it makes me want to meet the challenge. You know? And it makes me, believe it or not, the more I more I get involved, the more I learn. I say, "Oh, I didn't even realize this was there. Oh, I can take this and put it with what I know." You know, that's a strength, taking what you're learning and putting it with what you already know. And to me, that's uh, that's the way I look at it. Yeah, I do believe that, it does make me stronger, because every year, it's like *To Sir with Love*. You remember that movie?

Ms. Mack. The idea of *connection* through *reciprocity* is furthered through Ms. Mack's accounting of teacher-student-community relationships. As seen throughout this chapter, Ms. Mack's responses heavily featured the role of meaningfully connections with students in sustaining her commitment to teach, and particularly through later encounters and meetings with former students who returned to share appreciation for her work as their teacher. She also described moments in which she enjoyed moments with students where student-teacher connections were furthered by mutually shared learning, where, for example, students taught her how to use new technologies. As also featured in other participants' accounts, breakdown in potentially reciprocal *connections* between teachers and students often derived from racist, and as she described in the following passage, classist, views of students and their community by teachers:

Yeah, but not, it's not all the time, it's just that when you see it you see it, and the kids feel it, you know, because, um, we've had, 'cause I can think of some black teachers who, well they can't be racist against their own people, but at the same time, they felt like they were better, you know? And like, this little kid, their hair's unkempt, and they just stay away, and don't want to touch, I don't like that either. 'Cause kids can't help it when they have issues, 'cause that's from home, you know, they can't overcome that. So, it's a two-way street.

As she noted, such breakdowns in *connection* with students could create situations of reciprocal mistrust, with students quickly recognizing a lack of genuineness and commitment by their teachers. These failures in *connection* were described as a source of challenge for Ms. Mack and other participants as they negatively impacted her students and the overall school culture.

Yet, despite threats to *connection* from others, as well as the detrimental effects described by Ms. Mack of a high-stakes testing regime to her "joy" to teach, like other participants she also offered reinforcement to the notion of *centeredness* through *connection* to one's self, place, and work. As the following passage indicates, Ms. Mack also expressed a developed sense of remaining focused and centered on her work in the classroom throughout tumultuous changes in leadership and policy in the Butterfield school district:

Well, the superintendents, since I've been here, it's been so many, it's gotten so I don't even pay them any mind, because they're so far away from me, unless you have, now we did have one superintendent who brought in a whole new system of everything, books. Of course, he didn't last long...

The importance of remaining centered, through personal regulation of *connection* to possible sources of turmoil also extended in Ms. Mack's accounts to effectively recognizing one's abilities to bring, or not bring, about positive change in difficult circumstances. As she described in her final passage of this chapter, *connection* might also be regulated through *candor* regarding the life challenges of her students and the effects this might have on her emotional and professional stamina:

There's been a lot of 'em. But that's a challenge, but then, you know, and then I can remember, a family, the little boy was so nice, and his mother was going through an abusive thing. And she came up to the school, and, 'cause I had called her 'cause he was changing, I could just see it in his attitude and I couldn't figure out, "Where is this coming from? He's always been super nice." And so, they were in a shelter. And she was explaining stuff to me and she got to crying, her boy was crying, I felt like I was getting ready to tune up too. Three weeks later, she's back with him. And so, I was a young teacher then, and I said, "I can't get mixed up in stuff like that, because it wears on me," you know. So, and then I've had kids, that, you know, mom's in jail or on crack, and you just feel sorry for 'em. Kids shouldn't have to go through stuff like that, you know. But this is what it is.

Ms. Ford. In a final delineation of *connection* in the participants' contributions, we see another reckoning with the themes of *competence*, *commitment*, *candor*, and *agency*. In the following passage, through *connection* with self, Ms. Ford related the importance of candidly evaluating her strengths and moments of limitation, maintaining commitment to professional improvement, and taking action despite everyday challenges:

I'm gonna' try to use my own initiative to go and see what it is that I am missing, that I can possibly improve myself everyday on. I'm not that total improve myself every day, but I do have to check myself a lot and say, "Was that necessary? Do I need to be upset with that? Or do I just need to handle that and move on, and figure something out?" Like today, I finally sent a little boy out for a buddy room. I don't send my kids out for buddy rooms. I try to make that challenge happen with me. 'Let's go ahead and fix this and focus and change it around.' So, what are the *how's*? To know myself and know my strength. To know that there's a possible way to solve it positively.

She then extended the importance of evaluation and acknowledgment of limitations to include candid evaluation of one of her most important mentors in her beginning years of classroom teaching:

It's why we teach here! And it's why we think we can handle it and stay here, because we've seen it and we know you can improve it, we can better with it, and we change somebody's life, even the bad. I believe in Malcolm X, I believe in, "Yes. I was a criminal, but I found something that told me, 'That's not gonna' help me.'" That even though he left crime and went to the Muslims, he still believed everything that man said, like they say, you know, until he found out the truth, "You know, I gotta' judge you different too." Same thing, same thing with me and Gladys Beam. My hero. Something happened one time, and she just acted really silly with somebody. I was like, "What's all that about?"...I'm like, "You can't use your personal opinion here, you the principal!"

Thus, we are reminded of the sophisticated views of colleagues, peers, administrators, and mentors presented throughout Ms. Ford's accounts of professional sustenance and challenge.

Within this idea, we again see the importance of remaining centered in one's work and professional trajectory; in this case, through *acknowledgment* of one's own limitations and strengths while also relying on one's strengths to ensure maintenance of one's own continued commitment and improvement in the face of challenging situations and actions from others.

Final Thoughts

In the preceding sections of this chapter, we have seen how the themes of *competence*, *commitment*, *candor*, *agency*, and *connection* manifested in the participants' contributions. In the following and final chapter of this project, the sources of challenge and *sustenance* described by the participants are cast in terms of their significance to the themes delineated in Chapter 2's review of relevant literature. As a final note, and introductory point for the following chapter, it is now clearly apparent that the themes in this chapter have been developed through a largely inductive, grounded approach unique to the literature concerning teacher perseverance, longevity, and African American teachers. Therefore, some preliminary description for how the inductive themes of this chapter and the deductive themes from the literature will be connected is warranted. As will be seen in the following chapter, a point-by-point comparison will be problematized between these thematic threads, and comparisons between these frameworks, in terms of content and structure, will be utilized to highlight, fill, and push empirical and theoretical gaps.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Through the findings of the previous chapter, we see how the themes of *competence*, *commitment*, *candor and acknowledgment*, *agency*, and *connection* provide framework for answering the guiding questions of this work:

- Why have the participants remained classroom teachers for their respective tenures in marginalized, urban schools?
- What do they describe as the most significant challenges in their career paths and pedagogical practices?
- What do they describe as significant in their abilities to meet or navigate these challenges?

To briefly tie things back together from the findings, answers to the latter two questions are clearly found throughout the findings, with things described as increasing or high in value towards the five themes being significant in the participants' abilities to meet or navigate challenges, and things described as detrimental or diminutive towards the themes being sources of challenge. Although the wording and conceptualization of the term "challenge" assumed within my question and other portrayals in the literature will later be critiqued through the findings of this project, for now it should be sufficient to point out and remind that examples from the previous chapter such as a lack of *candor* or *acknowledgment* by an administrator in a particular situation describes a challenge (of sorts), or joy received from *acknowledgment* by former students evidences a source of motivation and continuous professional and personal reward.

Regarding the first question, while its assumed perspective allows for a more externalized interpretation of the participants' responses, through the conduct of my interview protocols (see Appendices) and framing of this write-up, I have hoped to reckon with it through the words of the participants as much as possible. While specific examples and stories provided by the participants regarding this, such as continuous reward from teaching students competently, speak to reasons why they have remained teachers, this question has also been engaged thoroughly through the participants' words and messages regarding deep-seated beliefs, formative experiences, and interactions with various agents, be they communal, spiritual, or both, described as greater than themselves. Through profound depictions of *commitment* to self, community, and spirit; *acknowledgment* towards students' lifeworlds, the guidance of community and spirit, belief in one-and-others' *agency* to excel with *competence* and resist, and fluid *connection* between oneself, others, milieu, and spirit through time and space, these teachers have provided multifaceted and connected answers to this primary question. Through their provisions, multiple points of critique and opportunities emerge to "push" frameworks established through the literature. To do this, I will begin with a discussion of these pushes and interrogations starting from themes and portrayals offered in the literature. As a point of clarity, I will not reiterate the relevant frameworks *en masse* from the literature and critique them, but instead, use particular themes and perspectives from the literature as starting points for establishing relevance for and situating findings in this study. After doing this, a secondary discussion focused primarily on the themes of this study will compose the second section of this chapter. The final sections will include introductions and grounding of two possibly useful theoretical concepts, directions for continued research, and a final note about the importance of this study.

Discussion of Findings: Pushing Away from the Literature

A major push provided by this study to the literature is the continued importance of considering and including participants' identities, backgrounds, and connections in relation to their professional milieus amidst persistent societal and systematic inequities. As noted, some of the extant research on teacher perseverance/longevity contains little to no engagement with the intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic class (Patterson, et al. 2004; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014) or relies primarily on the perspectives of white teachers (Brunetti, 2006; Yonezawa et al., 2011). The perspectives offered by both participants and researcher in this project run counter to excluding the role of intersectionality in teaching in urban contexts, and they certainly run counter, and even resist, deficit portrayals of urban communities in some of the reviewed literature (Brunetti, 2006; Patterson, et al. 2004). Moreover, the perspectives offered by the participants regarding the continued presence of oppressive conditions in this work continue to un hinge and shift foundational considerations for sources of professional challenge and, as seen in the literature's presentation of *administrative support*, even what may be considered a "challenge" or "source". With regard to some of the above mentioned works, in which "urban" environments are described as essentially places of reified challenges for teachers (Patterson et al., 2004) or where teachers working in "inner-city" schools may be described as "under fire" (Brunetti, 2006), while the participants in this study candidly acknowledged particular challenges and sources of turmoil in their professional contexts, they generally did not describe these as detrimental or "push-out" factors in their career trajectories.

A primary example: Administrative support. As may be noted, studies and works reviewed thus far have typically framed professional challenges and supports to teachers' longevity in terms of explicit sources, both internal and external. A ubiquitous, externalized

theme encountered throughout the literature focuses on the importance of *administrative support* to teachers' career successes and longevities (Boyd et al., 2010; Brunetti, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2003; Kersaint et al.'s, 2007; Kokka, 2016; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Sources of frustration and challenge found in this study's findings, however, did not manifest nor have they been presented through explicitly internal or external sources. While one may trace the importance of administrators' actions and inactions throughout the participants' responses, these have been presented through the framework of *competence, commitment, candor and acknowledgment, agency, and connection*. Ms. Oldham and Ms. Mack described frustration due to a lack of competence by administrators; Ms. Eastman's, Ms. Oldham's and Ms. Ford's descriptions of administrators acting in unethical and underhanded ways have been framed as threats to *candor and acknowledgment*.

If we continue with the aforementioned differences between this work's more holistic framing of the participants' responses regarding administrative (in)actions and the literature's distinct treatment of administrative support, several possible avenues emerge for reframing what has been and might be said about the role of administrators in teachers' career trajectories. First, if we start with the theme from the literature *in situ*, we see that the findings of this study do not reaffirm or confirm the importance of administrative support *per se* in the career perspectives of the participants. Aside from general descriptions of leadership styles, participants in this study did not describe administrators in terms of their ability or willingness to directly support them in their classrooms, and instead, their stories featured leadership through exhibitions or lack of *competence, candor, and commitment*, or through threats to *connection*. Typically, *support from administrators* has been interpreted in terms of providing or not providing external supports to teachers' work, such as disciplining students or providing sufficient classroom materials, by both

researchers and participants (Boyd et al., 2009; Ingersoll, 2003; Kokka, 2016). In this study, however, administrators more prominently featured as leaders and potential role models whose actions might improve one's pedagogical practice. Although all participants described administrative support for providing discipline, structure, and materials as important in their descriptions of "ideal" schools, in their personal stories of career and life in classrooms, administrators were cast in differing roles and degrees of importance. Through examples such as the vital mentoring roles played by former principals in Ms. Oldham's and Ms. Ford's accounts, or as those who might occasionally make one's work more difficult, such as Ms. Eastman's resistance and exercised *agency* to transfer away from the principal she did not "see eye to eye" with, descriptions of school administrators as supporters or detractors to the participants' classroom careers bypassed typically ascribed administrative roles. Even more predominantly, administrators were featured in roles of secondary importance to the work of the participants, often worthy of critique, but at times also worthy of less. As Ms. Mack described, "...since I've been here, it's been so many, it's gotten so I don't even pay them any mind."

Thus, if we move beyond more empirical attempts to confirm, deny, and match the findings of this work with the larger body of literature, we see a possible methodological shift for *how* the role of administrators might be investigated and conceptualized in future research. Instead of assuming administrators to largely occupy more fixed and externalized roles as providers of discipline, instructional, and material supports, perhaps they should also, or alternatively, be considered in terms of other roles and potentialities. Work featuring and investigating the malleability of their roles in the careers of different teachers, shifting through time, contexts, and intersubjective relationships may also be of worth. As Kokka (2016) found with her participants, while administrators were explicitly described in terms of a "lack of

administrative support for discipline and classroom management” (p. 172), participants also described the importance of being “left alone” by their principals. Similar sentiments also featured in this study but were nuanced by teachers’ judgment of specific administrator’s exhibitions of *competence*, *commitment*, and *candor*. When compared to the findings and presentation of this study, we see a shift away from fixed roles often associated with the term “administrator” or “principal” to more fluid and situated definitions, relatable through multiple conditions, contexts, and interpretations. Administrators might also serve as supporters in both personal and professional ways, such as Ms. Oldham’s story of a previous principal pulling her in from the teacher picket line because she had insider information about upcoming layoffs and knew Ms. Oldham needed her job amidst trying to escape an abusive relationship with two small children. Or, administrators appeared as potential perpetrators of both personal and systematic racial marginalization, such the principal who led the media tour of exclusively white teachers’ classrooms at Lowell and later avoided responsibility for doing so. Stories like these certainly expand more common notions of “support” and “lack of support” from administrators encountered in empirical discussions of teacher retention and attrition.

Continued examples and critiques starting from the literature. If we remain in the vein of structuring the findings of this study around findings from the literature we see additional (dis)connections between the two. As noted, this study fills a needed gap by looking inductively at the career experiences and perspectives of African American teachers with long-term classroom careers and commitments to teach in a specific urban school context. Much of the extant work looking at teacher longevity, perseverance, and resilience has focused on the perspectives of early-career teachers (Boyd et al., 2010; Gonzalez et al, 2008; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014), teachers in a variety school contexts beyond those characterized as urban

and impoverished (Ingersoll, 2003; Nieto, 2005; 2015b), and groups of predominantly Euro-American (Brunetti, 2006), ethnically diverse (Kokka, 2016), or non-identified teachers (Patterson et al., 2004) working in urban school contexts. In filling this gap, as the above example attests, predominant portrayals of “factors” influencing teachers’ career longevities, such as *support from administrators*, have been pushed to include more fluid and contextualized interpretations.

In continued examples, we see how things described as detrimental to teachers’ work, career maintenance, sense of satisfaction, etc. in the literature were not described by participants or framed as such in this work. For example, instead of causing detriment, sources of contention for the participants might have been described as increasing motivation, such as Ms. Eastman’s contention that a lack of support from her colleagues during her early years at Lowell, when considered through intersections of racial and economic repression, increased her sense of *commitment* to teach and do so with *competence*. Or, common challenges given in the literature referencing student misbehavior and/or discipline (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Ingersoll, 2003; Kokka, 2016), though acknowledged as challenging, particularly in Ms. Mack’s contributions, were described as foundational points from which to find success with students through affirmations of *competence*.

Shifts in what may constitute professional challenge for teachers with long-standing careers in impoverished urban schools continue beyond the discrete themes and factors encountered in the literature. Of particular salience within investigations of teacher retention and longevity are the negative effects of intensified standardized assessment and teacher accountability. This has been widely recognized in large-scale, quantitative investigations (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Kersaint et al., 2007), as well as more

personal accounting of teachers' experiences and perspectives (Nieto, 2005; 2015b). Findings in this study, though admittedly much smaller in contextual scope and participant sampling, offer particularly strong points for comparison and consideration within both lines of research. In comparison to larger, more quantified treatments of sources of teacher (dis)satisfaction, we see a generally contradictory inroad regarding the negative effects of standardized testing and accountability. While current uses of state and district-level standardized assessments was described by Ms. Mack as detrimental to her intrinsic sense of "joy" and "fun" in teaching, for the other participants, standardized tests were not only acknowledged as an unavoidable part of their professional work but also given as evidence of their successful work with students. This stands in relatively stark, though limited, contrast to broadly established depictions of standardized testing and teachers' viewpoints.

As may be recalled, many of the teachers' accounts in Nieto's 2015 work, *Why we teach now*, were also dominated by the constraining effects of educational reforms, which she also suggested might better be termed educational "deforms" (p. 12). Throughout the featured teachers' accounts, various experiences and emphases were placed on constraints presented by standardized testing and curricular, lack of teacher input, top-down policies, lack of teacher input and the heightened effects of these on marginalized groups. In one African American woman's account, realities of high-stakes testing and reforms, were presented as problematic and misguided, but also well-intentioned and as something part of a greater cycle of inevitable change in education. This was contrasted with a European American man's accounts in which the policies of accountability and standardization dominated his message for the audience. The former of these individuals, Mary Jade Haney, related intimate experiences in the community in which she taught. Like the participants in this study, she described the importance of early

educators, experiences with racial repression, connections to spirituality, receiving acknowledgment from students, and connections between her work as a teacher and her community of residence. For example, Ms. Haney's description of surviving a store robbery and posing the question about former students, 'How do we want to see them?' (p. 108), resonates with Ms. Ford emphasizing the importance of teaching her students well because they will live in her neighborhood and either contribute to the community's and her improvement or detriment. Ms. Haney's concluding sentence, "As we also 'fly to the east and fly to the west,' I want each of them to know *I love them best*" (p. 110) harmonizes with Ms. Oldham's repeated emphasis of love in teaching throughout various tumults, that "*Love is not love that alters when alteration finds.*" Amidst such stories and emphases, the high-volume critique of standardization and accountability among educators and researchers, while deservedly present, is certainly diminished in the face of repressions and turmoil created well-before *A nation at risk* (1983). Such connections and contrasts again contribute to possible routes for continued research into sources of teacher dissatisfaction and the importance of providing critique through differences in individual, historical, and community perspectives and voices.

Although perhaps unavoidable in ways, comparisons here between identities and the experiences shared by Ms. Haney (Nieto, 2015b) and the participants in this study are made in the hope of not essentializing their individual stories based on race, gender, and community. From the perspective of a white male teacher and scholar lacking better, less *othered* presentations of the participants as African American women and teachers among the appreciable fluidities of my own, the participants', and this work's readerships' subjectivities, I will attempt to broaden connections to the literature through the previously reviewed research focusing exclusively on African American teachers with longstanding careers (Foster, 1993;

Stanford, 2001). Beyond possible beneficial, and (de)constructive interpretations, perhaps important connections will emerge in the service of equitably increasing and retaining numbers of African American teachers in public school classrooms. As has been noted, expressions of spirituality, such as *commitment* derived through spiritual guidance, and the importance of spiritual community, such as fellow church members serving as role models in one's early sense of *connection* to education, featured prominently in the contributions of all the participants in this study. This centrality of faith and involvement in a church community, specifically, connection to African American church families and practices as intersecting with teachers' professional lives, was also thoroughly highlighted for participants in both Stanford's (2001) and Foster's (1993) studies. These connections are additionally furthered through several other works reviewed in this study involving participating teachers of color (Kokka, 2016) or non-identified racial/ethnic identities (Patterson et al, 2004). When framed in terms of teachers' professional *resilience*, the importance of spirituality is further bolstered by Patterson et al.'s (2004) findings that 12 out of 14 of their study's participating teachers, teachers not identified racially/ethnically, "pointed to their personal spirituality as a source of resilience" (p. 7). Thus, generally speaking, the role of spirituality remains one of further consideration for both researchers and those concerned with equitable and effective teacher recruitment and retention of African American teachers as well as teachers likely to succeed and remain in classrooms in urban and impoverished communities.

In addition to the role of spirituality manifest in this study's participants' responses and elsewhere, additional intersections between the participants' accounts and their identities and experiences as black women and women of color in a marginalizing society, provide further connection and thought towards findings and discussion in the extant literature regarding teacher

longevity. As noted in the reviewed literature (Nieto, 2015b; Kokka, 2016), experiences with racism as children and adults in schools figured significantly in the participants' stories. Additional connections between the findings of this study and the literature include the importance of intimate knowledge and experiences in one's school community (Nieto, 2009; Nieto, 2015b; Kokka, 2016), a historical and communal sense of *commitment* and practice (Nieto, 2015b; Foster, 1993; Stanford, 2001), sustaining influences of foundational experiences with early educational role models (Nieto, 2015b), the importance of maintaining pedagogical approaches that include both academic achievement and emotional development for students (Nieto, 2015b; Foster, 1993; Kokka, 2016), and clear acknowledgments of race and the roles it plays in the experiences of students, teachers, and communities (Nieto, 2015b; Kokka, 2016; Foster, 1993; Stanford, 2003). Though presented in briefly here in a whirlwind of deductive themes, I feel these considerations may be better treated by shifting away from framings originating in the literature to one framed through the findings of this study in the following section. Hopefully, in this way, each of the themes from this study will present in a way that better recognizes the contributions of the participants as not contained within frameworks deduced from external scholarship. Additional ideas not clearly encountered in the literature, such as descriptions of individual and communal resistance to racism by teachers in study, may also be included in considerations of identity and position for persevering teachers. I believe this to be particularly justifiable based upon possible and various recognitions of intentions, identities and identifications occurring throughout the reading of this text.

Reframing Discussions of Teacher Longevity and Perseverance Through the Five Themes

If we shift primacy away from frameworks offered in the literature to the categorical framework utilized in this study, we continue to see shifts and new directions for discussions of

the career trajectories of veteran classroom teachers. As an example of this, we shall consider sources of reward described by the participants. In discussions framed as sources *commitment*, Ms. Ford said she does not teach for the money but because she believes she is “gonna’ make something happen, some difference.” She also, however, described that she did not enter the profession necessarily to be a teacher, but that “it was about having some money to feed [her] son.” She further described how many of her fellow teachers made more money than she did and that she believed this was a significant factor in their decisions to remain teachers. Furthering the importance of financial reward, Ms. Eastman admitted that “money is always going to be a factor. That’s as simple as that.” As shared in the previous chapter under the theme of *agency*, the money Ms. Oldham earned as a classroom teacher allowed her to escape an abusive, potentially fatal, relationship. With further consideration towards the participants’ unanimous affirmation that teaching was one of few prestigious and well-paying career paths accessible to African American women during their younger days, reasons for professional dissatisfaction provided in the literature (Ingersoll, 2003) regarding *low pay*, take on possibly new orientations.

Furthermore, if we revisit Lortie’s (1975) assertions regarding the primacy of “psychic,” i.e. intrinsic, rewards in teachers’ commitments to the their work and students, we see that additional considerations regarding the added significance of external rewards, such as financial or prestige within one’s own community, have been left out of a widely held, normative version of sustaining factors in teachers’ professional lives. The stock story of the self-sacrificing, willing-to-work-for-next-to-nothing teacher is, thus, placed in need of evaluation via personal and professional motivations and situations, as well as intersections of race, gender, and socioeconomic background. Taken further, discussions of teaching as a profession undertaken and maintained for reasons other than external rewards and factors may further be interrogated in

light of the participants' emphases of *competence* of others, *acknowledgment* by others, collective *agency* among peers, and *connection* through guidance by spirit. Though linked to and manifested internally, all of these sources of reward and support were described by participants as originating outside of themselves. In the following sections, normative descriptions, rigid categorizations, and dichotomized interpretations of teachers' careers and perspectives will be critiqued through the conceptual framework established through this study's findings.

Competence. Intersections between expressions of *competence* in this study and those encountered in the literature provide both affirmations and critique. Competence as a concept important to sustaining the work of teachers appears in several key representations from the literature. The importance of teaching competently is inherent in Lortie's (1975) assertions regarding intrinsic rewards as derived from one's ability to reach students, for "reaching students" certainly requires pedagogical competence. In Kokka's study of *Urban Teacher Longevity: ...* (2016), competence represents a key component in the theoretical framework and is defined as a needed feeling that increases longevity when satisfied. Although Kokka differentiated between white teachers and teachers of color, no differences were established for satisfaction of this need by differing groups of teachers and competence was rated second in importance to the facet of *relatedness* in her conceptual framework and findings. Finally, in Foster's (1993) of exemplary African American teachers working predominantly urban contexts, *Education for Competence in Culture and Community...*, notions of *competence* move beyond normative portrayals of instructional competence to consider knowledge of culture and community norms and experiences. Competence in this study intersects heavily with teachers' "kinship, connectedness, and solidarity" (p. 376) with their students' and students' home communities.

Findings in this study push and extend featuring of *competence* in the literature in several ways. Descriptions from the participants certainly affirm the intrinsic value of *competence* as represented in Lortie's (1975) findings. They also, however, extend the discussion beyond the idea of *competence* as a requirement for reward. Regarding Kokka's (2016) conceptualization and findings, *competence* in this study presented as something more than an existential need to be fulfilled. Although *competence* manifested as an externalized source in both studies, in Kokka's work failures on the part of the administrators to effectively support teachers' work or reinforce school discipline are described as threatening to teachers' senses of professional competence, whereas in this study *competence*, or lack thereof, on the part of the administrators, though described as important, for most of the participants did not present as a threat to their commitments or abilities to effectively teach. Only in the participants' descriptions of the straining effects of ability-tracking on Ms. Mack's classroom environment, teamwork with peers, and professional stamina did this threat present itself. As Ms. Oldham shared, however, this threat was mitigated through various acts of teachers' *agency*.

Through presentations of teaching competently at Lowell, in all of the described intersections of race, gender, social class, culture, and shared history, findings in this study strongly comport with Foster's (1993) descriptions of cultural and community *competence*. Given the age of Foster's study, this work renews her assertions and, hopefully, meets a continued dearth of "positive portrayals of black teachers in the literature" (p. 373). Shared knowledge and "kinship" between the participants and their students, through both observed classroom interactions and *emic* sharing of experiences and perspectives by the participants indicate continued importance of these competencies for teachers in urban contexts. Community and cultural *competence* are furthered by this study, by taking on qualities of resistance not

described in any of the reviewed literature. As may be recalled resisting racially repressive behavior by white colleagues through evidence of one's *competence* with students featured heavily in Ms. Eastman's accounts. Ms. Mack described utilizing cultural *competence* with students to intervene on their behalf in the face of prejudiced disciplinary practices by a white teacher towards her black students. Ms. Oldham appealed to the importance of developing one's *competence* with students in the face of a white male teacher's denigrating demands.

Drawing upon descriptions of marginalizing and oppressive actions and other contributions by the participants, teaching competently at Lowell and in the Butterfield district for teachers' from more economic and socially privileged backgrounds was presented as dependent on their willingness to evaluate, reflect upon change, and resist one's socialization. As Ms. Oldham noted through the maxim, "doctor heal thyself," one's experiences and privileges in a stratified society must be interrogated and worked against for the betterment of one's pedagogy in classroom contexts such as those at Lowell. This further pushes possible connotations of pedagogical *competence* beyond a compartmentalized view of improving one's instructional methods or classroom management. In this way, the presentations from the participants eschew simplistic and normative notions of instructional effectiveness, such as those described in *But that's Good Teaching!* by Ladson-Billings (1995), and move towards a more contextualized, yet, also holistic view of teaching competently in urban and marginalized contexts.

As noted, resistance through *competence* appeared through participants' sharing moments when they presented evidence of their educational effectiveness in the face of repressive actions by colleagues and administrators. In one example of this, Ms. Eastman described her standardized test scores as providing both motivation and anchor against racist aggression and marginalization by colleagues. Beyond considerations of resistance, her use of standardized test

scores in evidencing *competence* for herself and lack thereof for certain colleagues contribute another facet to discussions of pedagogical competence. As already noted in this chapter, though often described as significant sources of professional intensification (Valli & Buese, 2007), frustration, and potential reasons for leaving (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Kersaint et al., 2007), three of the participants in this study shared students' scores and growth on standardized assessments on several occasions each as moments of success in their professional work. Ms. Mack, the only participant to apply for retirement after my time at Lowell as researcher, described the emphases placed on test scores in her school and district in terms of "suck[ing] the joy out of teaching," but also did not describe this as a factor in her final decision to retire. Thus, assumptions about the effects of today's accountability and testing regimes in schools, though not discounted for *leavers*, are certainly pressed in terms assumed detriments on all teachers.

The framing of *competence* in this study also transcends portrayals in the literature regarding support offered by collegial relationships. The importance of peer collaboration and support was found to be a significant factor in teachers' maintenance of career longevity and perseverance (Brunetti, 2006; Kokka, 2016; Nieto, 2009; Patterson et. al., 2004), with support from peers/colleagues not being contingent on fellow educators' *competence*. For participants in this study, however, through descriptions of the importance of mentors, support from capable school leaders, and communal reliance on fellow teachers recognized for their abilities to effectively teach students at Lowell and other Butterfield schools, *competence* became a crucial factor in determining whether or not professional relationships and interactions might serve as a sources of support in one's career. In this way, the differential framing between *colleagues* and *peers* introduced in the previous chapter comes into play. With *peers* being considered as equal,

through their recognized competencies as teachers, these individuals are presented as significant sources of support through collaboration, feedback, sharing of information, and collective resistance to marginalizing behavior. This both comports and expands theoretical considerations for *communities of practice* as defined by Wenger (1998; 2000). In this study, potential for support depends on one's demonstrated *competence* as an educator. Otherwise, working with someone, i.e. a *colleague*, was generally not described as source of support, and in some cases was represented as a source of challenge. Qualification for one's recognition of potential collegiality and mutual support among colleagues, however, varied between participants.

At this point, one might point out the significant corpus of work concerning teacher self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008) and the implied connections this has with teacher competence or at least the informants' perceptions of competence. To this, I would contend, epistemologically, that this work did not seek to investigate teachers' perceptions and expressions of their professional effectiveness, and that, ontologically, or at least metaphysically, *self-efficacy* as a concept fundamentally differs from *competence* in this study. In much of the literature concerning self-efficacy, this concept is presented as an internalized state or belief and may be correlated with teacher effectiveness or provide means for professional perseverance. In this study, however, *competence* manifests as an end in the expressions of the participants. Teaching their students competently was presented as a necessary and sanctioned goal. Additionally, *competence* presented as a theme engendering to itself. Similar to Dewey's (1938) conceptualization of *growth* as that which leads to continued growth, those who lack in *competence* fail to engender *competence* in their charges, e.g. Ms. Oldham's description of administrators lacking in *competence* as leaders because they failed to model academic competence for their staffs. Those who fail to teach competently and engender *competence*,

through all intersections of community, culture, social class, and academic expectations, should not be in the profession, present themselves as unwelcome interlocutors, and as Ms. Eastman emphasized, compare to “thieves in the temple.”

Commitment. One of the greatest areas of critique offered by the findings of this study remains the differences in perspectives regarding sources of detriment in the literature and sources of (re)affirmation for this study’s respondents. When asked to share their thoughts on *resilience* and the differences between *how* and *why* in their work as teachers, all of the participants recounted numerous “challenges” that might also be identified in the literature, such as challenging behavior from students, administrative ineffectiveness, poor working conditions, varying degrees of parental support and community turmoil. Additional, significant sources of professional contest, such as racial marginalization and repression towards themselves and their students, were also described. For all participants, though, these potential sources of challenge were not described as depreciatory, at least according to definitions of *resilience* found in the literature focused on teacher perseverance in urban contexts, to their senses of *commitment*. Such challenges were either acknowledged as part of the job, “Everything’s not going to be a rose garden” or described as increasing to the participants’ commitments to teaching. Again, this provides critique for normative presentations of teacher careers and professional lives in the literature, whereby the participants’ stories of identification and affinity with their students’ communities and experiences add contrast to descriptions of *resilience* focused on the experiences and frustrations of non-identified or middle class, white teachers working in high-minority, urban school contexts. *Resilience* as a theoretical concept will be further engaged under the theme of *connection*. In support of this, Kokka (2016), while not engaging *resilience* in her theoretical framework, likewise emphasized the importance of considering teachers’

commitments to teaching and their teaching contexts vis-à-vis their backgrounds and ethnic identities. Though problematic in ways already discussed, her study featured a particular teacher's expression of *commitment* to her home and work community that also resonated with expressions of residential and experiential solidarity featured in this study:

When asked if she would ever consider teaching in a suburban school, she quickly responded, "Oh heck no. No, nothing against that. That's fine, but I feel that I can have more impact in here, you know, in the neighborhoods, in the schools that I'm from because this is where the struggle is" (p. 174).

A secondary expansion within the theme of *commitment* features participating teachers' deep-seated and formative experiences with education in their early years. Participants in this study, similar to Foster's (1993) study of exemplary African American teachers described fundamental experiences in segregated schools, as well as the importance of education within their home communities as a means of resistance and upward mobility. As mentioned, these formative experiences often occurred within church communities, and overall, spirituality played a major role as a source of professional and personal commitment accounts across participant contributions in this study and others (Foster, 1993; Nieto, 2015b; Stanford, 2001). Thus, the findings and discussion in this work further indicate a need for more holistic and fluid approaches for representing and discussing the interplay of personal and professional factors establishing, contributing or working against teachers' commitments. As has been indicated and will be discussed further, breakdowns presented through this theme of *commitment* and others blur demarcations established within much of the scholarly work focusing on teacher longevity.

Candor and acknowledgment. Conspicuously absent from the literature involving teacher longevity are expressions regarding the importance of *candor and acknowledgment*. As seen in this study, however, these practices and orientations featured heavily in participants' narrations of their career experiences, values, and beliefs, and operated through both internal and external considerations. As detailed in the findings, these teachers both candidly acknowledged personal limitations, mistakes, and challenges presented by turmoil in their students' "lifeworlds" (Zipin, 2009), and also described the importance of remaining honest and genuine in communication with others, both adult and child, during their professional and personal interactions in schools. Externally speaking, in no small measure of featured stories, a lack of *candor and acknowledgment* by others resulted in negative outcomes for students and selves, while *acknowledgment* from students, former students, and parents was described as a major source of reward and motivation by all participants. This again pushes the notion of intrinsic rewards operating as the primary motivator in teachers' work. Though arguably affective and intrinsic experiences, eliciting behaviors, such as receiving compliments from former students, originated externally and, therefore, may also be considered extrinsic sources of motivations. Such originations and destinations may also be viewed through a lens of *internalization*, as Kokka (2016) did in her examination of teacher commitments, but internalizing assumes an internal absence to be filled by an external presence. In the example she provided, external rewards and motivators may lead to internalized motivations towards tasks initially considered as undesirable. For participants in this study, affective notions of commitment and the importance of genuineness in one's life work were described as present from the outset of careers through early experiences with community and education and sustained, or not, through continued enactments of *candor and acknowledgment* by others.

Additionally, stories describing the detriments of dishonest and disingenuous behavior often involved racially and socially repressive actions by teachers and administrators. Thus, intersections between these considerations and dispositions perhaps further implications in terms of their influence on teachers' career longevity, perceptions, and effectiveness. Diligence regarding *acknowledgment* of teachers' accomplishments and success with students on the part of administrators, honest interaction and recognition between staff and administrators, and genuine commitments to students and their communities, appear as important considerations for supporting and sustaining the participants' careers at Lowell, and these likely remain important in similar school milieu.

Agency. Viewed through this study's categorical framework, the importance of *agency* appeared in various places and ways throughout the literature. As seen in some accounts (Nieto, 2015b) the importance of remaining centered through challenges and tumults in, perhaps inherent to, the realm of public schooling and school reform becomes an act of individual *agency*, and the accounts of the participants' in this study clearly resonate with this. Likewise, threats to *agency*, through constraints from an intensified testing regime, particularly towards students' *agency* and growth, and lack of curricular input for participants, also comported with assertions in the literature (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Kersaint et al., 2007; Nieto, 2005; 2015b). As already described in this chapter, *agency* as resistance to and mitigation of systematic inequities against students also featured in teachers' accounts from both the literature (Foster, 1993; Nieto, 2015b) and this study. However, accounts of specific acts of resistance to repression through collective *agency* by black teachers and educators, such as the participants' collective (re)actions towards exclusion and misappropriation of their work during the previously described media event at Lowell, are generally absent from the literature

regarding teacher perseverance, longevity, and resilience. Again, these findings lend further support to the importance of *communities of practice* (Wenger, 1998; 2000) among practitioners, in this case, teachers, while also contributing to a resistive facet of this theoretical body.

Connection. Perhaps most profound throughout the categorization of themes in this study is the meta-level importance of *connection* established within the participants' responses and throughout all other categorical themes. From a phenomenological perspective, *connectedness* has been operationalized in terms of affective beliefs and attitudes as well as assessed behaviors (Nasir et al., 2011). Beyond Foster's (1993) direct treatment of *connectedness* between African American teachers and their students, and possibly Kokka's (2016) analysis of urban teacher longevity through the importance of *relatedness*, much of the work done describing and investigating connection and connectedness in schools has focused on phenomena and subjectivities broader than individual teacher's professional and personal senses of connection within their school and community contexts. Examples include research focusing on teacher-student relationships (Figueroa, 2014), students' institutional and social connectedness (Nasir et al., 2011), and broad conceptualizations of connection across cultural, pedagogical, and virtual spaces in schools (Abawi et al., 2011). Although some work not reviewed thus far has been done to explore the importance of connectedness for teachers as individuals, such as Sindberg's (2011) investigation of isolation and connectedness for music teachers, much of the focus has remained on connection as a way to operationalize relationships between individuals or individuals and groups. In this work, however, connotations of *connection* have been expanded to include relationships with others for the participants through various nuances as well as connections to community, spirituality, professional competencies and expectations, and self. This expansion has embraced both personal and professional considerations.

The blurring of personal and professional aspects of their career experiences and perspectives for the participants represents a final expression of *connection* to be discussed here and offers possible direction for future work. Moreover, a general muddling of certain conceptual dichotomies from the literature emphasizes the importance of conceptualizing *connection* in a more holistic and fluid approach towards examining and increasing teacher success and longevity. Examples of dichotomies from the literature include separating personal and professional reasons for leaving in large-scale research of teacher attrition (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll & May, 2012; Kersaint et al., 2007), or casting of administrators primarily as professional and material supporters of teachers' work in classrooms (Boyd et al., 2009; Ingersoll, 2003; Kokka, 2016). Findings presented here push interpretations of a body of literature dominated by categorical interpretations and separation of various "factors", however slightly, to more holistically examine and connect with teachers' working contexts, lived experiences, identities, relationships, beliefs and their narrations of all of these. Examples of possible "pushes" include break downs of personal and professional bifurcations. For example, if we consider participants' descriptions of spiritual connections, which most would contend to be a deeply personal, we also see how they present as profound sources of inspiration, motivation and sustenance in their professional lives. Or, if we look at relationships among *peers* as described by the participants, particularly in an era where professional relationships are characterized through structured collaboration, e.g. *Professional Learning Communities*, we see how they carry both profoundly personal and professional connections. Additional examples of the fluidity between the professional and personal relationships for the participants include Ms. Ford's formative experiences at Second Baptist, the "teacher's church," Ms. Eastman and Ms. Oldham's ongoing pact to put off retirement for yet another year, and all of the participants' described avoidance of

negative personal interactions among colleagues, such as gossiping, and preference to surround themselves with peers engaging in positive outlooks and professional practices.

Connections between personal and professional also took on temporal as well as socio-spatial considerations. Separating these into differing aspects of teachers' experiences generally assumes separation between in-school and out-of-school lives for teachers. For many teachers in Butterfield Schools and other urban centers, traveling from wealthier predominantly white suburbs to their places of work, this demarcation may seem more relevant or profound. For those who grew up and have resided in the communities in which they teach, within and without factors may more likely overlap or be the same. Through time, early experiences with educators held in high regard by the participants were described as fundamental in their journeys into teaching. Through residence and participation in African American neighborhoods in a marginalizing metropolitan landscape and milieu, experiences portrayed as professional "challenges" and situated in an *other*, such as Patterson et al.'s (2004) featured passage about the teacher traveling through her school's community on a bus, become both personal and professional and are situated both within and without school walls as lived experiences. As Ms. Ford noted, "I'm not trying to save the heathen, I am the heathen that we're saving."

Theoretically speaking, breaking down these dichotomies and de/re-centering predominant perspectives of teachers' experiences and perceptions through a more holistic addressment of *connection* also provides profound critique for presentations of *resilience* in the literature reviewed thus far and beyond. Two pieces of research reviewed thus far have directly addressed and defined this concept for teachers in urban contexts. In Patterson et al.'s study (2004), *resilience* was explicitly defined as the participants' ability to use "energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions" (p. 3). As a reminder, in Brunetti's

(2006) article, *Resilience under fire*, he defined it as “a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and recurring setbacks” (p. 813). He concluded that in order to continue “productive work in the inner city classroom” teachers must utilize *resilience* “despite the serious problems and setbacks they encountered on a daily basis and despite their feelings of heartache, discouragement, and frustration” (p. 821). In both works problems experienced by teachers are likewise situated in the *other*, i.e. the students, their community and their schools. They are presented in terms of *adversity*, or things in opposition, dichotomous, and adversarial to one’s professional work and commitments, and through metaphor for war by placing teachers *under fire*. Participants in these studies “stay the course” (Brunetti, 2006, p. 821) and are “less likely to leave urban environments” (Patterson et al., 2004, p. 5). In these studies, a lack of *connection* between the participants and their school environments is assumed *a priori*. But what about teachers for which teaching in their home communities is not simply a matter of staying or leaving? Through the findings of this study, the privileged center through which *resilience* is portrayed in these studies is, thus, shifted from one situated outside of schools’ socioeconomic and sociocultural contexts to one(s) situated and more closely connected within these communities. As one may recall, sources of challenge and critique for the participants in this study were not described as threats to their senses of *commitment*, and more so described as reinforcing to their personal and professional commitments to teach and reaffirming of the connections they described between themselves, their work, their students, and their communities.

Terms for (Re)Conceptualizing Discussions of Teachers’ Career Trajectories

As discussed in this chapter, differences in findings and framing between this study and the wider body of relevant research offer multiple points for interrogation and expansion of

thought and investigation focused on teacher longevity and perseverance in urban contexts. To round out this discussion, as culmination of a work that has emerged, in part at least, as a process of *grounded theory* (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009; Mills et al., 2006) I offer several conceptual and theoretical terms brought about through the findings of this study. I believe two terms, *life commitments* and *sustenance*, may be of use for describing current and future work involving the career trajectories of teachers.

Life commitments. The former of these terms refers to teachers with *life commitments* to the profession and, specifically, their roles as classroom teachers and the contexts in which they teach. In this usage, the word *life* encompasses socio-spatial, temporal, psychic, and existential connotations. Socio-spatially, such commitments refer to the spaces in which teachers work and work to improve. As presented by the participants in this study, *commitment* to the school and community in which they worked was not presented as a foreign place or place inhabited by a marginalized and, to use Ms. Eastman's term, "downtrodden" *other*. Indeed, such perspectives were invariably criticized by all the participants on both ethical and pragmatic grounds. Instead, the participants in this study remained committed to their lives and the lives of others in these spaces without demarcation. Temporally, *life* refers to a lifetime or lifelong commitment to teaching. For the participants, who unanimously agreed with assertions from the literature (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Johnson, 2007) that women, particularly women of color, in previous decades viewed teaching was one of few gainful professions available to them, and thus it was often entered with the intention of remaining in this position until retirement.

Adding to this interpretation, however, from an insider's perspective, Ms. Eastman, Oldham, Mack, and Ford described their commitments to the profession as going deeper than

structural interpretations that might be thrust upon their personal lives, career trajectories, and senses of *agency* in the face of systematic racism and sexism. Regarding Cochran-Smith's generational argument that lifetime commitments to teaching may not be as applicable to the career expectations of younger generations, *life* in this sense might also be applied to teachers, with fewer years of experience than the participants in this study, having commitments to teaching for their foreseeable lives. Or as Lindqvist et al. (2014) noted, teachers who might leave and re-enter classroom roles over the course of a lifetime. Psychically, a *life commitment* refers to attentive, emotional, and spiritual/meaning aspects of deep involvement in one's work as a teacher. As engaged with Lortie's (1975) description of the "psychic rewards" of teaching, the depth of one's *commitment* to teaching involves, scientifically speaking, a deep and thorough psychological involvement and dominance in one's mindful attention. The internal, affective aspects of *commitment* here, however, might also cross internal-external divides to include actions evidencing and sustaining of teachers' commitments. Spiritually speaking, as described by the participants, *commitment* to teaching may involve *connection* to guidance and purpose from a source recognized as greater than oneself. This may, as Stanford (2001) noted, be extended to include personal sets of values for those not affiliated with any particular religious identity or beliefs. Considerations of spiritual beliefs, ontologies, and positions will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter. Existentially, a *life commitment* involves a realignment, consecration, centering or, perhaps, consummation of one's life purposes. Referring back to this work's introduction, I believe this idea is well illustrated by Ms. Oldham's description of the protagonist's change of heart in *To Sir, with Love*, to education and the education of one's students. As a teacher and teacher mentor of some years at Lowell and other

schools in the Butterfield district, I alone can attest to the life-consuming requirements across all of these connotations.

Need for the term *life commitments* emerged through struggles encountered in this project to appropriately describe the career perspectives and trajectories of teachers in this study and others. During this work's proposal stage, I initially sought to describe potential participants' careers as *significant* in terms of their longevity and success with students. However, this descriptor became too subjective and reliant on judgments I did not feel comfortable making, and still do not in perhaps unavoidable ways to be discussed later, regarding the life work and accomplishments of the participants. During the developmental and writing up phases of this project, I have used terms such as "veteran" and "longstanding" to describe their careers and those of others with significant years of teaching success through challenging circumstance. In addition to these descriptors, numerous other terms from the literature, such as "stayers" (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Henry et al., 2011), "resilient, persevering" teachers (Stanford, 2001), "experienced teachers" who "persist" through "resilience" (Brunetti, 2006), "resilient teachers" (Patterson et al., 2004;), "exemplary" and "experienced" teachers (Foster, 1993), and "long term" teachers possessing "longevity" (Kokka, 2016), have appeared throughout this work. Through what has been described in this chapter between the literature and this study's findings, I believe that describing the participating teachers' careers through their *life commitments* to teaching more credibly addresses their expressions of work, perseverance, and resilience through various challenges.

Sustenance. Similar problems finding appropriate terminology also emerged as I attempted to describe sources of professional encouragement, strength, reward, and/or satisfaction for participating teacher, particularly with regard to these positive factors and

influences operating in the maintenance of successful career trajectories for teachers. As noted in other extant presentations of teacher's sources of professional (dis)satisfaction, a dichotomous relationship exists between these tangible sources of support, such as *administrative support* or *support from peers*, and innate and trait-oriented factors that might lead to or increase career longevity, such as personality traits, *resilience*, beliefs, etc. Though, like more recent notions of *grit* (Duckworth et al., 2007), *resilience* has been conceived as an innate trait, it has also been conceptualized as dependent on external factors and the interplay of internal, external, and cultural considerations. As Ungar (2011) described it:

Resilience as a process of negotiation in which cultural elites (i.e., those whose influence in the social discourse is greatest, such as mental health professionals, politicians, and the media) decide the outcomes associated with good growth requires a cultural lens for interpretation. This cultural perspective underlies the atypicality discussed earlier. It also helps to explain the complex interactions between factors. (p. 9)

In this vein, as Day and Gu (2014) asserted, *resilience* as a theoretical concept, though originally developed as a psychological construct to explain positive life outcomes amidst negative environmental factors, has been recognized as “influenced by multidimensional factors that are unique to each context” and “it enables individuals to move forwards towards their goals and pursue what is perceived to be important to them” (p. 7). However, despite these moves towards contextualization and relational considerations for *resilience* as an analytical tool, its use nevertheless requires situating it within or upon an agent. That is, mitigating factors from one's environment, backgrounds, or intervening connections must nevertheless manifest in and through the individual to say one has “developed,” “demonstrated,” or in some way possessed *resilience* through challenging circumstance. As noted already in this study's categorical framework, this

remains problematic as what may be considered “challenging” has been shown to be highly contextual through comparisons of findings in this work and others. Furthermore, what may be considered as sustaining or mitigating in the lives of teachers likewise resists clear demarcation.

Thus, through analysis of the participants’ responses, a term emerged that I believe shifts conceptualization from a trait-oriented model of internal-external bifurcations or internalization of external factors to one that focuses on the actions and effects of both external and internal considerations on teacher longevity and success: *sustenance*. Under this conceptualization, factors that individuals bring with them into the profession, such as previous experiences, personal beliefs, connections to community, commitments to students, etc., and external sources of support, such as the role of competent mentors, administrative effectiveness, acknowledgment by others, etc., may both be considered as sustaining to the individual as she or he navigates various personal and professional challenges. In some ways, this relates to Nasir et al.’s (2011) discussion of “connectedness” as a “relational construct” (p. 1785) for student trajectories in a high-minority, urban high school; where what one brings to an environment and what the environment does or does not provide may be predictive of one’s success or disengagement and eventual failure. In other ways, it relates to Wong’s (2007) description of “sustenance” for her study’s participating teachers as originating from “no single energy supply” and reliant on one’s conscious decisions and/or abilities “to connect and orient oneself involved in a state of openness which included being open to and seeing the newness, learning opportunities and possibilities and potentialities that were continually present and being presented” (p. 235). The importance of *connection* to successfully maintaining one’s school and professional trajectories in this study both receives and provides support through these related frameworks.

The concept of *sustenance*, illustrated through the inextricable personal and professional beliefs, commitments and connections described by the participants, in this study “fits” with multiple sources of encouragement and discouragement. In attempting to engage the significance attached by participants to spiritual belief, religious community participation, and divine guidance, I believe the Biblical connotations of this term are likewise fitting. The importance of *sustenance* in this study moves beyond related conceptualizations in the literature by addressing both external and internal components utilized by and influencing the participants in their continued successes as teachers. In this way, instead of seeking teacher candidates with particular traits, beliefs, and attitudes, or seeking to instill these through *internalization*, we might seek to recognize potential and realized sources of *sustenance* candidates bring with them, encourage connections between these and the contexts in which they teach or will teach, and also provide external sources of support as a better means for providing continuous *sustenance* in their professional and personal developments. Instead of attempting to demarcate and define distinct contributing factors that lead to or diminish teachers’ effectiveness and longevity, we might consider how improving access to sources of *sustenance* as both personal and external, as things brought, sought and provided, will positively influence their competencies and commitments. Thus, *sustenance* in this conceptualization takes on the importance of external conditions for teachers as well as the orientations, beliefs, and experiences teachers bring with them and maintain as means for sustaining their tenures and quality of work. Furthermore, the work they do and the successes they find further provide sources of *sustenance* in their career paths. In this way, *sustenance* becomes both a mean and an end for increasing teacher longevity and success.

Directions for future research

I believe that through these examinations and interrogations of categorically objectified, trait-oriented and dichotomized views of teachers' career trajectories, or capacities to effectively maintain their classroom positions, alternative avenues of investigation and analysis have emerged. Shifting away from trait-dependent and internalized views of *resilience* in teaching, or even away from more external, structural portrayals of the forces at play in teachers' professional experiences and paths, i.e. teachers exit their positions prematurely because of lack of administrative support, pressure from high-stakes testing, challenges in the classroom, etc., future research may also consider how teachers navigate their career paths through various considerations outlined in this study's methodology, thematic framework and theoretical grounding.

Reflexive implications. Despite reflexive efforts throughout this work to establish and examine my identities and positions in relation to those of the participants, and despite attempts to establish particular affinities and close proximities with their professional, residential, and cultural worlds, these portrayals nevertheless remain reside within my perceptions and the systems of oppression that have committed to my development and cultural lenses. In my efforts to make bare these positions and intersections, I have also attempted what Pillow (2003) described as a "confession that often yields a catharsis of self-awareness for the researcher, which provides a cure for the problem of doing representation" (p. 181). Quite obviously, such a cure is impossible given my privileges of identity, capital, and position in our stratified society. Even should gendered, racial, and cultural inequities be nonexistent or thoroughly mitigated at some point, my position as a researcher alone, as Segall (2001) pointed out, inherently produces a form *othering* through attempts to discursively (re)produce the actions of the participants in

this research, and, citing Lather (1991), to work in the postmodern vein ‘is to write paradoxically aware of one’s complicity in that which one critiques’ (p. 10). Thus, methodologically speaking, continued research might focus on the representational *crises* and issues arising through this work, and, personally, perhaps work towards examining potentials for building practices of *uncomfortable reflexivity* (Pillow, 2003) for myself as a researcher.

Building upon a *crisis of reflexivity* developed through this work, future work might also address an epistemological-ontological issue I came to increasingly recognize during these final stages of the writing process. Originally, my primary research questions sought not only to state *why* the participants have remained classroom teachers but also *how*. That is, I would seek not only the reasons they provided for staying but also more objectified, perhaps externalized, reasons and factors that enabled or required them to stay. Although I removed the *how* component from this question, believing it to be too much of an undertaking for representational and critical reasons, the *how* has remained depending on one’s perspectives and beliefs. As described throughout this and the previous chapter, the role of a higher power was described by all of the participants as a, if not *the*, fundamental source of support or *sustenance* in their lives and work as teachers. In this way, one might argue that all of the categorical reasons provided through *competence, commitment, candor and acknowledgment, agency, and connection* are subsumed by this belief. As shared in multiple places by the participants, only “by the grace of God” or “if the good Lord’s willing”, were challenging circumstance overcome.

If the participants believe that a higher power, that God, has provided the ultimate reasons for *how* and *why* they have been able to succeed as classroom teachers in contexts typically considered as “challenging” who am I to question this or say otherwise? In this way, perhaps, this investigation is presented with its most serious limitation. While I can describe

things said by the participants about their “beliefs,” “divine guidance” and “spirituality”, and that these beliefs have served to sustain their work throughout various tumults, is this enough? How can I seek and assert something about why these teachers have maintained their trajectories without acknowledging what they have described as their ultimate source of guidance, of *sustenance*? In some ways, my experiences with the participants and wrestling between my own ontological perspectives have changed my view of spirituality as a source of *sustenance* in teaching. As noted, I was raised amidst regular religious practice and belief, but for the course of my adult life and time as teacher I have typically avoided and at times critiqued spiritual beliefs and religious adherence. Even during my first year of teaching, at a school where close to 100% of the students and staff were black, when school assemblies took on clearly church-like attributes through what seemed like unplanned singing of gospel songs or preaching by teachers and administrators, I sank low in my seat or walked out. I justified my avoidance of these spontaneous celebrations through liberal ideology regarding the importance of separating religion from public schools, while also experiencing self-consciousness about pressure, and perhaps my prejudices, towards participating in African American church practices and performances. I also, however, remember a profound moment while sitting in the computer lab that year and reading a poster the computer teacher, an older black man who played gospel while the students worked, had posted on the wall: For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Despite my non-beliefs at that time, I recall the influence this message had on my decisions to remain a classroom teacher instead of pursuing a medical career. Reflecting back on these moments, as well as the spiritual sharing of the participants in this study, I wonder if I might have lasted longer as a classroom teacher in the Butterfield schools if had a stronger sense of *connection* to spiritual belief and community? I am pressed to

accept, as I write this now on the verge of completing this write-up, some truth in Ms. Oldham's words about my doctoral studies, "That's what God meant to happen to you. You on a mission now! And you're gonna' finish this one." At the very least, my views about the importance and possible *sustenance* offered by spirituality for teachers and teacher candidates have increased, and this presents opportunities for further investigation of the roles played by faith, perhaps as a possible "reservoir" (Stanford, 2001, p. 85), in sustaining teachers' career trajectories and *life commitments* to the profession.

Empirical and theoretical directions. Returning to possible directions for continued research grounded in the literature and empirical findings of this study, multiple areas and limitations present need for continued work. As indicated by this study's expansion and nuancing of concepts commonly demarcated in the literature, such as *administrative support*, further investigation through intersections of administrative competence, school contexts, and connections to community norms and practices is warranted. Need for continued research and theoretical development into this area echoes similar calls found in Boyd et al. 's (2009) as well as Kokka's (2016) work. Investigation of additional themes from the literature that have been critiqued or pushed by this study should generally include addressment of more fluid, holistic, and contextualized categorizations and identifications of teachers' selves, experiences, communities, personal lives, students, and professional milieus and the potential intersections between them.

Potential areas for future research through the five themes of this study include the following. Differences in descriptions and depictions of *competence* as a fundamental need for teachers of various identities, career stages, and professional settings may prove of use for

increasing teacher longevity and success in various communities and school contexts. This need furthers and expands Kokka's (2016) recommendation for continued research into the needs for competence for teachers of color. A second prominent direction for future research might be a continued look into teachers' with accepting, more-than-negative, or positive views of standardized testing. As noted, teachers' general disapproval, and abhorrence, of current enactments of standardized testing and its detrimental effects on their professional trajectories and perspectives has been well-documented. Future research seeking teachers who not only accept the prominence of testing in their professional work, but even employ the results as evidence of their *competence*, in acts of *acknowledgment* of their *colleagues* work, and as a means to resist to repressive actions, may further detail this as a phenomena occurring beyond the confines of this group of educator's community of practice at Lowell. A third area for research includes continuing to look at the roots of teachers' commitments, across time and intersections of culture, community, and place. This is an area that has, and remains, of salience given changing demographics within our school systems' student populations and teacher workforce.

Theoretically speaking, a significant direction for continued research moves in the direction of continuing to engage with conceptualizations of *resilience*. Though heavily critiqued through this work, resilience within a conceptual framework for improving retention of effective teachers may prove useful through continued research and engagement with practitioners. Indeed, all of the participants in this study described it as a relevant and fitting term for their daily and long-term work as teachers. In describing *resilience* through a socially constructivist lens, Schoon (2006) argued for the following:

A more detailed knowledge of the factors and processes enabling individuals to withstand and overcome adversity might be helpful to other individuals facing similar adverse circumstances and might help them to redirect development in a more adaptive direction, improving the odds of a desired outcome. (pg. 17).

In this case, the desired outcome would, of course, be to extend the careers of successful teachers. Moving beyond the trait-oriented view of *resilience* in teaching will require not only a more sophisticated, nuanced view of teachers and the manifold sources of adversity and strength encountered and utilized in their daily lives, but perhaps also require serious consideration that the overwhelming complexities and contextual-dependencies of the problem merit an admission of our limitations in analyzing the problem at the individual level. Through continued research in this area, we must avoid reducing teachers to *resilience*, *their resilience*, or as simply *resilient*. Furthermore, because of the interdependence of effectiveness and *resilience* (Gu & Day, 2006), what is considered as “good” teaching may be further called into question, situated, contextualized. As this also intersects with considerations and portrayals of race (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009) increasing teacher effectiveness and longevity may also benefit from interrogation through critical race theoretical perspectives.

Finally, further development of theoretical concepts built from the “ground up” within this work, such as *colleague/peer* dichotomies, *life commitments*, and *sustenance*, warrant further construction and definition through engagement with data obtained through this study, other literature, and continued work in other contexts with participants. Continued engagement with these theoretical concepts may yield additional insight and thought into already established concepts such as *resilience* and *communities of practice*.

Final Note

Before the events of last November, many would contend our educational system was already deep in the throes of curricular homogenization, increasing inequities, de-professionalization, privatization, and disintegration of public school systems in impoverished and urban contexts. Given leadership choices, policy indications, and supporting reactionary public sentiments wrought under the current administration, exacerbation of neoliberal educational policies and continued re-segregation of schools seems likely for the foreseeable future. Some would also contend that given these circumstances, those of us charged with preparing teachers to enter into this educational landscape may be doing our charges a disservice through expressions of critical perspectives, that students passing through our schools of education are better served through preparation to function within the current status quo as opposed to attempting to resist it and likely burn out, or that “pedagogical progressivism” (Rury, 2015) has long lost-out to “administrative progressivism”.

To this, I would contend that social systems may be fairly considered as infinitely complex in their contained spaces and the spaces they occupy, in the interactions of their agents within and without, and in the ways their actors interpret all of the spaces and situations they encounter. Thus, as social arrangements, our systems of education at various levels may be considered effectively infinite through spatial, social, temporal, and interpretational considerations. Increasing complexity and apparent chaos within the combined continuums of space, both literal and metaphorical, and time makes appreciation, prediction and, thus, control of outcomes increasingly difficult. Therefore, to say a cause or an idea, such as pedagogical progressivism in education, is lost and worth abandoning because of an event or trend in human space and time, apparent gains or failures in a social movement, or shifts in centers of resistance,

remains unfounded and shortsighted. Ideas can survive under hostile conditions and across time. They may smolder, spark, or fester, and given the right conditions, they re-emerge, and may consume or collapse a system when most of its actors least expect it. I think the generally unexpected results of our most recent political elections demonstrate this.

The stories and perspectives of the African American women and teachers, both individual and shared, featured in this work have operated, and will continue to operate, in the margins of our segregated metropolitan area, school systems, minoritizing society, academia, and other potentially oppressive systems. The spaces they offer across time for critique of and resistance to dominant policies, portrayals, and emphases; the wisdom they offer for improving educational opportunities in a multicultural society; and the potentials they provide for fostering *competence, commitment, candor, acknowledgment, agency, and connection* in teachers and teachers of teachers within our current educational systems should not be denied. My sincere hope and intention remains that through this work their messages have and will further ground and expand possibilities for meaningful educational reform and re-centering of what it means to persist with excellence in this profession we know and love.

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Appendix A

Initial Interview Protocol

First Interview Protocols

Set 1 - Educational Background, Entrance, Beginning Years, and Setting

1. Tell me a little about where you grew up and went to school.
2. Why did you become a teacher?
3. Where have you been a teacher? For how long in each place?
4. How would you describe your district?
5. How would you describe your current school?
6. Are you eligible for retirement? If so, for how long have you been?
7. Tell me about your first year of teaching? What were your greatest challenges during your first years of teaching?

Probe: How did you deal with these challenges?

8. What was the most difficult school you worked in? Why?

Probe: How did you deal with these difficulties? Do you feel you succeeded?

Set 2 – Challenges as a Teacher

1. Have you ever considered leaving the profession or retiring? Why or why not?

Probe: Why didn't you take the buyout packages when they were offered?

2. Have you ever considered teaching somewhere else, such another district or outside of the city? Why or why not?

3. What are the greatest challenges facing teachers in general?

Probe: Have these challenges changed during your career?

4. What are the greatest challenges facing teachers in your district and school?

5. What are the greatest challenges you currently face as a teacher?

Probe: How do you deal with these challenges?

6. What challenges have you faced as a teacher?

Probe: How did you deal with them?

7. Do you have any regrets as a teacher?
8. Who are some colleagues you consider to be excellent teachers?

Set 3 – Perspectives of Teachers and Teaching (Possible Questions)

1. What are greatest challenges facing teachers entering the profession?

Probe: What advice would you give to these teachers?

2. What, if anything, do you love about your job?

Probe: Have you always felt this way? Have your feelings about teaching changed throughout your career?

3. What makes a good teacher?
4. Does experience matter? How?
5. If you could look back on your time teaching in these places and times, what would you want people to know about you?

Appendix B

Second Interview Protocols per Participant

Ms. Eastman 2nd Interview Protocol

A. One researcher, by the name of Schubert (1991), argued that we “can marvel at a fine study that logs 15,000 hours of investigation by researchers...but essentially disregard over 30 *years* of inquiry by career teachers.” Thus, during this interview, we are going to draw upon your experiences , expertise, and wisdom that you’ve accumulated over your years as a teacher.

B. Table 2

Mean scores and standard deviations of interviewed Teachers on
Job Satisfaction Items (ETS) – 1(weakest) – 4(strongest agreement)

1. I look forward to coming to work each day.
2. I would like to still be teaching in five years.
3. If I had it to do over I would choose the teaching profession again.
4. I am satisfied with my job. (adapted from Brunetti, 2006)
5. Student misbehavior makes my job difficult.
6. Lack of family support is a problem for me as a teacher.
7. Setbacks in the classroom have made my career difficult.
8. My principals have generally supported me.
9. Standardized testing helps me improve my instruction.
10. Our adopted curriculum supports my students’ learning.
11. I am proud of my work as a teacher.

C. What are some things that would make for the best possible school? What are some things that would make for the very worst kind of school? Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1-10 between these possibilities in your current role as a teacher? Where would you say your career has averaged on this scale?

D. The philosopher, Nietzsche, once said, “He who has a *why* to live, can bear almost any *how*.” (Adapted from Stanford, 2001) Do you feel this maxim applies to your time as a teacher? How?

E. Some teachers in urban schools say they want to go where the need is greatest, or that they want to pay back society for the privileges they’ve enjoyed. How have you seen this sentiment play out in your career? What happens when teachers enter the profession with this perspective, i.e. a deficit perspective of their students and families?

F. Some researchers have theorized many women, particularly black women, went into teaching during the later 20th century because this was one of the few career paths available to them. How do you feel about this theory? Furthermore, they state that these teachers have stayed in teaching because in your generation, people expected to keep the career they started out in for the rest of their working years. Do you have any thoughts regarding this?

G. You were raised in this community, correct? You currently live in it. What personal challenges or difficulties have you faced while living here? Do you have any personal difficulties

in your life that you feel have made you a stronger person? Has there been anything in your personal life that made it difficult to go on as a teacher? Do you ever feel that teaching has helped you manage difficulties in your personal life?

H. Do you have anyone in your family or during your childhood with a connection to teaching or education?

I. How much has money and benefits been a factor in your career choices? To stay or leave the District? The profession?

J. If you can do so with as few as words as possible, how would you describe your students? Your school? Your district?

K. Have you experienced any teacher strikes during your time here? What have been the greatest challenges faced by teachers as a whole in this district?

L. Was your first principal at NRC white or black?

M. We've talked about some of the challenges you faced as a teacher from colleagues and administrators, such as your school store activity. I'm wondering, can you describe in detail the challenges you faced during those years where you mentored our first TFA teachers? (Describe a time you came into conflict with colleague and/or administrator?)

N. Do you feel race has played a part in any of the tensions experienced at this school or others that you've worked out? If so, how did you deal with this situation?

O. What are your views on discipline in schools? Do you feel it has changed in schools? How is a classroom best managed?

P. Urban schools are often described as places with "overcrowded classrooms or outdated textbooks..." where "Difficult community contexts of impoverished neighborhoods, homelessness, or gang violence can contribute to a challenging professional context" (Yonezawa, 2011). Do you feel this is a fair description of schools like Whittier? Would you add or subtract anything from this description? Do you feel things like this are the greatest challenges you've faced, or made your job the most difficult, as a teacher?

Q. The ability of teachers to continue teaching in these schools, is called "resiliency" by researchers. This is also applied in other circumstances, such as abused children growing up to be healthy adults, survivors of war, etc. Resilience for teachers has been defined "as a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions..." (Brunetti, 2006) Do you feel this is an accurate description of teachers? Of you? Do you feel maintaining your commitment over the years and through various changes has been a challenge?

R. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Do you feel you've been successful as a teacher? What are you most proud of, or perhaps, what do you feel best about as a teacher? Have you always felt this way?

Ms. Oldham 2nd Interview Protocol

A. One researcher, by the name of Schubert (1991), argued that we “can marvel at a fine study that logs 15,000 hours of investigation by researchers...but essentially disregard over 30 years of inquiry by career teachers.” Thus, during this interview, we are going to draw upon your experiences, expertise, and wisdom that you’ve accumulated over your years as a teacher.

B. Table 2

Mean scores and standard deviations of interviewed Teachers on
Job Satisfaction Items (ETS) – 1(weakest) – 4(strongest agreement)

1. I look forward to coming to work each day.
2. I would like to still be teaching in five years.
3. If I had it to do over I would choose the teaching profession again.
4. I am satisfied with my job. (adapted from Brunetti, 2006)
5. Student misbehavior makes my job difficult.
6. Lack of family support is a problem for me as a teacher.
7. Setbacks in the classroom have made my career difficult.
8. My principals have generally supported me.
9. Standardized testing helps me improve my instruction.
10. Our adopted curriculum supports my students’ learning.
11. I am proud of my work as a teacher.

C. What are some things that would make for the best possible school? What are some things that would make for the very worst kind of school? Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1-10 between these possibilities in your current role as a teacher? Where would you say your career has averaged on this scale?

D. The philosopher, Nietzsche, once said, “He who has a *why* to live, can bear almost any *how*.” (Adapted from Stanford, 2001) Do you feel this maxim applies to your time as a teacher? How? Nietzsche also said, “That which does not kill me makes me stronger.” Do you feel that any of the challenges in your life, some we discussed during our previous interview have made you a stronger teacher? Do you ever feel that teaching has helped you manage difficulties in your personal life?

E. How has stress in your personal life impacted you as a teacher? How has stress as a teacher impacted your personal life? Have your experiences with stress changed over time? If so, how? In our last interview, you related a difficult time in your life, a time in which you sought refuge from an abusive relationship. At what point was this during your teaching career? How did you navigate all of these challenges and remain an effective teacher?

F. Some teachers in urban schools say they want to go where the need is greatest, or that they want to pay back society for the privileges they’ve enjoyed. How have you seen this sentiment

play out in your career? What happens when teachers enter the profession with this perspective, i.e. a deficit perspective of their students and families?

G. Some researchers have theorized many women, particularly black women, went into teaching during the later 20th century because this was one of the few career paths available to them. How do you feel about this theory? Furthermore, they state that these teachers have stayed in teaching because in your generation, people expected to keep the career they started out in for the rest of their working years. Do you have any thoughts regarding this?

H. Describe the community in which you were raised? The schools? Where have you lived for most of your career?

I. How would you describe your school? Your district?

J. Have you experienced any teacher strikes during your time here? What do you think has been the greatest challenges faced by teachers as a whole in this district?

K. Can you describe in detail the challenges you faced during those years where you mentored our first TFA teachers? (Describe a time you came into conflict with colleague and/or administrator?)

L. Do you feel race has played a part in any of the tensions experienced at this school or others that you've worked out? If so, how did you deal with this situation?

M. Urban schools are often described as places with “overcrowded classrooms or outdated textbooks...” where “Difficult community contexts of impoverished neighborhoods, homelessness, or gang violence can contribute to a challenging professional context” (Yonezawa, 2011). Do you feel this is a fair description of schools like Whittier? Would you add or subtract anything from this description? Do you feel things like this are the greatest challenges you've faced, or made your job the most difficult, as a teacher?

N. We talked about administrators last time, different ones you'd worked with over the year, I'd like to hear more about a few things regarding that in particular. Do you feel some administrators should not be in their positions? Why do you think they chose this path? How do you think they gained these positions? Can you describe any of your experiences with such administrators?

O. What are your views on discipline in schools? Do you feel it has changed in schools? How is a classroom best managed?

P. The ability of teachers to continue teaching in these schools, is called “resiliency” by researchers. This is also applied in other circumstances, such as abused children growing up to be healthy adults, survivors of war, etc. Resilience for teachers has been defined “as a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices

despite challenging conditions...” (Brunetti, 2006) Do you feel this is an accurate description of teachers? Of you? Do you feel various changes, classroom challenges, staff challenges, and administrative challenges have made maintaining your commitment to teaching difficult?

Q. You spoke during our last interview about honesty and being true to yourself and your co-workers. Can you tell me more about how do you remain this way in current work as a teacher in this school? Can you think of any examples or stories of how you interact honestly with others (students, co-workers, administrators). Can you think of any stories in which people did not behave in this way?

R. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Do you feel you’ve been successful as a teacher? What are you most proud of, or perhaps, what do you feel best about as a teacher? Have you always felt this way?

S. Who or what do you feel has been a source of personal and/or emotional support throughout your career? Who or what has been the greatest source of professional support and development throughout your career?

T. What are two or three pieces of advice you would give to someone entering into education in schools similar to the ones you’ve worked in?

U. We’ve talked a lot about the various changes you’ve been through as a teacher. Throughout these comings and goings, how (do you see your development as a teacher) have you developed as a teacher? How important has this development been to you and your career?

V. Have you made any choices in your career that you regret? Can you share one of them?

W. There may come a day when someone will call me out. They may say something like, “You’ve made a research career using the stories of other teachers, teachers who have gone through things you have never, as a white male, experienced. Who are you to tell their stories and use them for your benefit?”

X. Who or what do you feel has been the greatest source of personal and/or emotional support throughout your career? Who or what has been the greatest source of professional support and development throughout your career?

Y. What are two or three pieces of advice you would give to someone entering into education in schools similar to the ones you’ve worked in?

Ms. Mack 2nd Interview Protocol

A. One researcher, by the name of Schubert (1991), argued that we “can marvel at a fine study that logs 15,000 hours of investigation by researchers...but essentially disregard over 30 *years* of inquiry by career teachers.” Thus, during this interview, we are going to draw upon your experiences , expertise, and wisdom that you’ve accumulated over your years as a teacher.

B. Table 2

Mean scores and standard deviations of interviewed Teachers on
Job Satisfaction Items (ETS) – 1(weakest) – 4(strongest agreement)

1. I look forward to coming to work each day.
2. I would like to still be teaching in five years.
3. If I had it to do over I would choose the teaching profession again.
4. I am satisfied with my job. (adapted from Brunetti, 2006)
5. Student misbehavior makes my job difficult.
6. Lack of family support is a problem for me as a teacher.
7. Setbacks in the classroom have made my career difficult.
8. My principals have generally supported me.
9. Standardized testing helps me improve my instruction.
10. Our adopted curriculum supports my students’ learning.
11. I am proud of my work as a teacher.

C. What are some things that would make for the best possible school? What are some things that would make for the very worst kind of school? Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1-10 between these possibilities in your current role as a teacher? Where would you say your career has averaged on this scale?

D. The philosopher, Nietzsche, once said, “He who has a *why* to live, can bear almost any *how*.” (Adapted from Stanford, 2001) Do you feel this maxim applies to your time as a teacher? How? Nietzsche also said, “That which does not kill me makes me stronger.” Do you feel that any of the challenges in your life, some we discussed during our previous interview have made you a stronger teacher? Do you ever feel that teaching has helped you manage difficulties in your personal life? Do you have any personal difficulties in your life that you feel have made you a stronger person?

E. What words come to mind when you think of a good teacher?

F. Has stress in your personal life impacted you as a teacher? Has stress as a teacher impacted your personal life? Have your experiences with stress changed over time? If so, how? How have you navigated all of these challenges and remained an effective teacher?

G. Some teachers in urban schools say they want to go where the need is greatest, or that they want to pay back society for the privileges they’ve enjoyed. How have you seen this sentiment

play out in your career? What happens when teachers enter the profession with this perspective, i.e. a deficit perspective of their students and families?

H. Some researchers have theorized many women, particularly black women, went into teaching during the later 20th century because this was one of the few career paths available to them. How do you feel about this theory? Furthermore, they state that these teachers have stayed in teaching because in your generation, people expected to keep the career they started out in for the rest of their working years. Do you have any thoughts regarding this?

I. Describe the community in which you were raised? The schools? Do you feel this community is similar to the one in which you work?

J. Do you have anyone in your family or during your childhood with a connection to teaching or education?

K. You mentioned in our last interview that you'd spoken with people from your church regarding your planned retirement. Can you tell me more about that?

L. You spent some time during our last interview describing various students in bad situations that you worked with over the years. Of all these students, could you tell me of a few who you feel you made a difference with? Were there any you felt you couldn't help?

M. How would you describe your school? Your district?

N. Have you experienced any teacher strikes during your time here? What do you think has been the greatest challenges faced by teachers as a whole in this district?

P. Urban schools are often described as places with "overcrowded classrooms or outdated textbooks..." where "Difficult community contexts of impoverished neighborhoods, homelessness, or gang violence can contribute to a challenging professional context" (Yonezawa, 2011). Do you feel this is a fair description of schools like Whittier? Would you add or subtract anything from this description? Do you feel things like this are the greatest challenges you've faced, or made your job the most difficult, as a teacher? Schools like the ones you've taught are often considered to be the most difficult to work in, let alone succeed in as teachers. What do you think of this perception? If so, why teach in schools like this one?

R. We talked about administrators last time, different ones you'd worked with over the years, I'd like to hear more about a few things regarding that in particular. Do you feel some administrators should not be in their positions? Why do you think they chose this path? How do you think they gained these positions? Can you describe any of your experiences with such administrators?

S. What are your views on discipline in schools? Do you feel it has changed in schools? How is a classroom best managed?

T. The ability of teachers to continue teaching in these schools, is called “resiliency” by researchers. This is also applied in other circumstances, such as abused children growing up to be healthy adults, survivors of war, etc. As an example, you spoke last time about various students you’d worked with over the years who’d come back to see you after going through some difficulties in life. For teachers, resilience has been defined “as a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions...” (Brunetti, 2006) Do you feel this is an accurate description of teachers? Of you? Do you feel various changes, classroom challenges, staff challenges, and administrative challenges have made maintaining your commitment to teaching difficult?

V. What role has honesty and being up front with people played for you as a teacher? Can you think of any stories in which people did not behave in this way? How do you remain this way in current work as a teacher in this school? Can you think of any examples or stories of how you interact honestly with others (students, co-workers, administrators).

W. Have conflicts with other teachers, staff members, or administrators been a significant challenge during your career? Can you recall a time you’ve come into conflict with colleague and/or administrator? Do you feel race has played a part in any of the tensions experienced at this school or others that you’ve worked out? If so, how did you deal with this situation?

X. How much has money and benefits been a factor in your career choices? To stay or leave the District? The profession?

Y. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Do you feel you’ve been successful as a teacher? What are you most proud of, or perhaps, what do you feel best about as a teacher? Have you always felt this way?

Z. Who or what do you feel has been a source of personal and/or emotional support throughout your career? Who or what has been the greatest source of professional support and development throughout your career?

A1. Have you made any choices in your career that you regret? Can you share one of them?

B1. What are two or three pieces of advice you would give to someone entering into education in schools similar to the ones you’ve worked in?

Ms. Ford 2rd Interview Protocol

A. One researcher, by the name of Schubert (1991), argued that we “can marvel at a fine study that logs 15,000 hours of investigation by researchers...but essentially disregard over 30 *years* of inquiry by career teachers.” Thus, during this interview, we are going to draw upon your experiences , expertise, and wisdom that you’ve accumulated over your years as a teacher.

B. Table 2

Mean scores and standard deviations of interviewed Teachers on
Job Satisfaction Items (ETS) – 1(weakest) – 4(strongest agreement)

1. I look forward to coming to work each day.
2. I would like to still be teaching in five years.
3. If I had it to do over I would choose the teaching profession again.
4. I am satisfied with my job. (adapted from Brunetti, 2006)
5. Student misbehavior makes my job difficult.
6. Lack of family support is a problem for me as a teacher.
7. Setbacks in the classroom have made my career difficult.
8. My principals have generally supported me.
9. Standardized testing helps me improve my instruction.
10. Our adopted curriculum supports my students’ learning.
11. I am proud of my work as a teacher.

C. What are some things that would make for the best possible school? What are some things that would make for the very worst kind of school? Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1-10 between these possibilities in your current role as a teacher? Where would you say your career has averaged on this scale?

D. The philosopher, Nietzsche, once said, “He who has a *why* to live, can bear almost any *how*.” (Adapted from Stanford, 2001) Do you feel this maxim applies to your time as a teacher? How? Nietzsche also said, “That which does not kill me makes me stronger.” Do you feel that any of the challenges in your life, some we discussed during our previous interview have made you a stronger teacher? Do you ever feel that teaching has helped you manage difficulties in your personal life?

E. Has stress in your personal life impacted you as a teacher? Has stress as a teacher impacted your personal life? Have your experiences with stress changed over time? If so, how? In our last interview, you related a difficult time in your life, a time in which you sought refuge from an abusive relationship. At what point was this during your teaching career? How did you navigate all of these challenges and remain an effective teacher?

F. Some teachers in urban schools say they want to go where the need is greatest, or that they want to pay back society for the privileges they’ve enjoyed. How have you seen this sentiment

play out in your career? What happens when teachers enter the profession with this perspective, i.e. a deficit perspective of their students and families?

G. Some researchers have theorized many women, particularly black women, went into teaching during the later 20th century because this was one of the few career paths available to them. How do you feel about this theory? Furthermore, they state that these teachers have stayed in teaching because in your generation, people expected to keep the career they started out in for the rest of their working years. Do you have any thoughts regarding this?

H. Describe the community in which you were raised? The schools? Where have you lived for most of your career?

I. How would you describe your school? Your district?

J. Have you experienced any teacher strikes during your time here? What do you think has been the greatest challenges faced by teachers as a whole in this district?

L. Do you feel race has played a part in any of the tensions experienced at this school or others that you've worked out? If so, how did you deal with this situation?

M. Urban schools are often described as places with “overcrowded classrooms or outdated textbooks...” where “Difficult community contexts of impoverished neighborhoods, homelessness, or gang violence can contribute to a challenging professional context” (Yonezawa, 2011). Do you feel this is a fair description of schools like Whittier? Would you add or subtract anything from this description? Do you feel things like this are the greatest challenges you've faced, or made your job the most difficult, as a teacher?

N. We spoke a lot during our first interview about where you live, it's people, your family, things you've experienced. How has living in this community shaped you as teacher?

O. We talked about administrators last time, different ones you'd worked with over the year, I'd like to hear more about a few things regarding that in particular. Do you feel some administrators should not be in their positions? Why do you think they chose this path? How do you think they gained these positions? Can you describe any of your experiences with such administrators?

P. What are your views on discipline in schools? Do you feel it has changed in schools? How is a classroom best managed?

Q. The ability of teachers to continue teaching in these schools, is called “resiliency” by researchers. This is also applied in other circumstances, such as abused children growing up to be healthy adults, survivors of war, etc. As an example, you spoke last time about how proud you are of your younger sister, about how she has been able to keep coming back after various setbacks and become somebody who's recognized for what she knows. For teachers, resilience

has been defined “as a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions...” (Brunetti, 2006) Do you feel this is an accurate description of teachers? Of you? Do you feel various changes, classroom challenges, staff challenges, and administrative challenges have made maintaining your commitment to teaching difficult?

R. During our first interview, you mentioned that a lot of your experiences as a paraprofessional was “team teaching with some really good teachers.” Can you describe one or two of the teachers and what made them good teachers?

S. You spoke during our last interview about honesty and being true to yourself and your co-workers. Specifically, you mentioned the way you were raised and Ester Ray’s style of talking to people in this way. Can you think of any stories in which people did not behave in this way? How do you remain this way in current work as a teacher in this school? Can you think of any examples or stories of how you interact honestly with others (students, co-workers, administrators).

T. Have conflicts with other teachers, staff members, or administrators been a significant challenge during your career? Can you recall a time you’ve come into conflict with colleague and/or administrator? Do you feel race has played a part in any of the tensions experienced at this school or others that you’ve worked out? If so, how did you deal with this situation?

U. How much has money and benefits been a factor in your career choices? To stay or leave the District? The profession?

V. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Do you feel you’ve been successful as a teacher? What are you most proud of, or perhaps, what do you feel best about as a teacher? Have you always felt this way?

W. Who or what do you feel has been a source of personal and/or emotional support throughout your career? Who or what has been the greatest source of professional support and development throughout your career?

X. What are two or three pieces of advice you would give to someone entering into education in schools similar to the ones you’ve worked in?

Y. Have you made any choices in your career that you regret? Can you share one of them?