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Why We Stay - Considering the Past, Contemplating the Present, and Suggestions for the Future

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Why We Stay - Considering the Past, Contemplating the Present, and

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the complex teaching landscape through historical and contemporary lenses, exploring the various societal changes and challenges that have shaped teacher motivations over the decades. The researchers use autoethnography and duoethnography methodologies to explore two educators' personal and professional lives, highlighting their resilience and adaptability amid evolving educational demands and societal pressures. These educators' narrative journeys and dialog reveal the deeply personal and contextual nature of teaching, underscoring the importance of identity, cultural background, and the ability to find joy and fulfillment despite challenges. This research sets the stage for a reflective and insightful exploration of the teaching profession and guides how veteran and new teachers can be retained.

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Chapter 1: Problem of Practice

"*A good education can change anyone. A good teacher can change everything!*"
Author Unknown

Historically, the teaching profession navigated numerous societal shifts, which have persistently influenced teachers' perceptions and (intrinsic and extrinsic) motivations to remain in the classroom. Teachers have consistently displayed resilience and adaptability, from school violence to external societal concerns, ever-changing curricula, and mounting performance pressures (Kaestle, 1983; Rury, 2015; Urban & Wagoner, 2009). The historical and contemporary intersectionality of societal changes, including but not limited to school violence, curricular evolutions, and performance pressures, have deeply impacted teachers' motivations to remain in the education profession (Fallace, 2008; Labaree, 2021; Sedlak et al., 1986). However, while challenges persist, many teachers remain driven by their foundational commitment to student success and societal betterment (Sedlak et al., 1986). The ability to find and create joy during challenging times is an essential skill to remain in the teaching profession.

In a world characterized by diverse cultures, intersecting identities, and evolving social landscapes, self-discovery remains a multifaceted odyssey. Autoethnography, as both method and narrative, offers a unique lens through which to explore the self-exploration journey (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020; Poulos, 2021). In this introspective narrative of two educators, they embarked on a duoethnographic inquiry into their lived experiences, delving deep into the layers of identity, cultural background, and social context through dialog.

As a methodology, autoethnography blends the personal with the cultural, intertwining individual stories with broader societal narratives (Hernandez, 2021; Poulos, 2021). It invites introspection and reflexivity, urging the researcher to examine their positionality within their contexts (Bochner & Ellis, 2022; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). As such, duoethnography serves as a means of self-discovery and a platform for dialogue, understanding, and connection.

Throughout this narrative, the researchers navigate the complexities of identity formation, tracing the threads that weave one's senses of self together. From the cultural heritage stories shared generationally to the social constructs that shape people's interactions, each aspect of their identities contributes to their mosaic (Hampel, 1986; Rury, 2015). Through introspective reflection and contextual analysis, this study aimed to unearth the nuances of individual identity construction, illuminating the intersecting forces that influence one's worldview.

Furthermore, this duoethnography is situated within a broader sociocultural context, and there is an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of individual experiences within larger systems of power and privilege. As such, the researchers hope to reveal how identity shapes the world by contextualizing people's narratives within broader social structures. This duoethnography is a journey of self-discovery and understanding—a voyage into the depths of identity, culture, and society. For this exploration, readers are invited to join in this introspective odyssey, fostering empathy, dialogue, and connection. It is possible to transcend the boundaries of individual experiences and embrace the richness and diversity of the human tapestry through the use of duoethnography.

Parents as Teachers Background

Joelle's Journal

During the fall of 1956, the first year of high school, my mother had an English teacher named Ms. R. Accordingly, Ms. R. noticed my mother's intelligence and studious habits. As my mother shared, Ms. R. believed she had the potential to be successful in fields other than nursing or office administration. She believed that my mother should study education and become a teacher. It is unclear when Ms. R. and my grandmother became friends, but they talked and planned for my mother's future. In 1961, my maternal grandmother passed away suddenly from nephrosclerosis, a hardening of the kidney due to hypertension. At age seventeen, my mother took a path forward under the tutelage of Ms. R. Markedly, Ms. R. was prepared to take my mother in and support her emotionally and financially throughout her college years.

Originally, Ms. R. and my grandmother planned for my mother to attend S College, but the sudden passing of my grandmother aroused my mother's desire to stay close to her family. She decided to attend H Teacher's College. Ms. R. remained a valued teacher, mentor, and friend well into my mother's adulthood. I was honored to meet Ms. R. once when I was about 12, and my mother was 42. Notably, I remember her beautiful wide smile and warm hugs. My mother perceived herself as a poor, Black, unattractive, quiet, 'birdbrain' girl who had no idea what she was doing in life. However, Ms. R. perceived her to be a bright, talented, and gifted young woman who would change lives as a teacher.

When my mother finally left the classroom in 2016, she had been teaching for 48 years. During that time, she taught all grade levels from kindergarten through college.

She experienced varying political, economic, and societal changes in education through the lens of a teacher. As her daughter, I had the liberty to experience and process it all, right by her side.

Every country has designed and implemented educational systems to intentionally change the world, country, state, and city one student at a time. The United States educational system, under the auspices of state government leadership, is rooted in the belief that its education should be free and universally accessible regardless of one's socioeconomic status and prepare its citizens for the complex and multifaceted future (Rury, 2016). Schools are the physical spaces where young people learn about democratic values and principles. The institutions provide them with knowledge and skills to prepare them for the workforce, and cultivate ideas about ethics, morality, social justice, and equity; teachers are tasked with making it all happen (Kaestle, 1983; Reese, 2011; Rury, 2015 and Urban, 2009).

Erika's Journal

My mother and father married at a Justice of the Peace in Durant, Mississippi, and the army deployed my father to Vietnam. In 1969, my uncle Charles K. was the principal at C. Junior High School in East St. Louis, and he needed an English teacher.

He asked my mother to come and teach at his school. She was the English teacher at the D. Attendance Center, a small rural school. At the time, to be a qualified teacher, one needed a degree in teaching. A class in Illinois history was the only thing required for certification but if someone had already taught at another educational institution, they were qualified. No tests were required to be a teacher in Illinois during that time. She was hired immediately and given a classroom.

After returning home from the Army, my father began working at C. Continental Oil Company. School District 1 needed an English teacher; his bachelor's degree was in English. All they needed was a degree in teaching. As my father said, "We didn't apply.

We just reported and had the job. Uncle Charles sent me to the board, and I filled out my paperwork." My father subbed for the English teacher while she was on birth-related leave. However, he was given his own classes when she returned. Illinois history was the only requirement a candidate needed to be considered certified, but if they had already taught at another educational institution, they were qualified. No tests were required to be a teacher in Illinois then.

My parents took great pride in sponsoring the National Beta Society at their respective schools. The National Beta Club was founded in 1934 by Dr. John W. Harris, a professor at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. It was initially established to promote academic excellence and leadership among high school students. The Beta Club is devoted to honoring and recognizing students for their achievement, character, and leadership qualities, as well as encouraging growth through service and comradery, with the motto to lead by example. My mother led the group at the junior high school, and my father led the high school group. Many times, I have encountered students whom both had taught. I often hear comments about my father such as "he taught me how to tie a tie, helped me get my first job or helped me buy my first car." Many lawyers, physicians, and politicians who attended my mother's classes attest to her strict teaching style and writing instruction.

Both parents retired from School District 1 after almost 40 years of service. My mother was a master English teacher and an assistant principal at C. Junior High School for twenty years before she transitioned to English Administration for the district. She retired from that role. Before the school closed, my father stayed at L. Senior High School for seventeen years and transitioned from English to French. After the closing, he moved to E. High School, where he taught French until he retired in 2005. He started a French choir as a French teacher and taught his students French Christmas carols. The students would tour the school district and sing for the elementary school students, which culminated in an outing to celebrate their hard work. When asked how he received his certification, he stated, "I was needed and took over the role. It was not complicated."

Since the establishment of schools and education in the United States, a few tenets ensued:

- Education should support the establishment and growth of a successful democracy by teaching students about the history of the United States and ways that citizens and government work together.

- Educational institutions support the employment needs of business and industry by teaching literacy and numeracy to students, as the U.S. has transitioned from farming to factories.

- Education should instill broader moral values and acceptable social norms to reduce juvenile delinquency and preserve social order (Dewey, 2011).

As the policies, purposes, and educational processes have consistently changed, the student experience and the role of teachers also continue to change (Fraser, 2007). This duoethnography examines the cultural, political, and technological challenges in education through the lenses of educators, past and present, suggesting reasons why they remained in the profession. It explores ways that systems and administrators could synthesize retention into organizational cultures and structures to recruit and retain teachers amidst the contemporary turmoil in schools across the country (Kaestle, 1983; Reese, 2011; Rury, 2015 and Urban, 2009).

Historical, Social, and Cultural Context

Historical Context

Horace Mann (1796-1859), who was considered a pioneer in reforming public education, understood the symbiotic relationship between preparing the country's youth for citizenship and the importance of teachers (Baines, 2006). His vision of the U.S. educational system is often called the common schools movement (Tozer et al., 2013). He believed that education should be universally accessible to all citizens

regardless of their socioeconomic status. During his time as the secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education (1837-1848), Mann advocated for several significant reforms that contributed to the foundational development of public education in America. He passionately believed in education as a tool to foster democratic values, reduce crime, promote individual upward mobility, and establish social harmony (Baines, 2006).

According to Tozer et al. (2013), Mann argued for the professional preparation of teachers. The growing respect for teachers during his position as secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, was also fueled by the development of teacher training programs, such as "normal schools" and teacher colleges, which enhanced the professionalism and status of teaching (Kaestle, 1983; Reese, 2011). These initiatives helped to standardize educational quality across different regions (Rury, 2016). Furthermore, the strategic approach to education provided prospective teachers with both subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills which prepared them to manage classrooms and foster student learning effectively (Fallace, 2008; Fraser, 2007). Additionally, Mann's programs allowed for the expansion of education to broader populations, including those living in rural or underserved areas (Sedlak et al., 1986). These institutions prepared teachers for the specific challenges of the graded school system and played a significant role in transforming teaching into a recognized profession. During the early years of the United States, especially in rural and frontier areas, teachers were widely regarded as crucial pillars of the community, often revered as critical contributors to the nation's progress and promoting democratic ideals (Fraser et al., 2001).

Examination of the early years of American public education highlighted the importance of common schools from the post-Revolutionary era to the Civil War. American citizens supported educational institutions and how they influenced the structure of American democracy, nationalism, and civic values (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). The intersections of political, religious, and societal forces demonstrated the critical importance of schools regarding the development of the U.S. national identity and political values as they grappled with challenges like regional differences in slavery and economic industry (Kaestle, 1983). A review of one hundred years of American classroom teaching focused primarily on the twentieth century. Notably, there has been consistency of pedagogical methods despite waves of educational reforms, technological innovations, and societal changes (Kober et al., 2020). Attitudes toward teachers during the post-World War II period were at their highest peak, as there was also a time of significant expansion in public education driven by the G.I. Bill and the baby boom (Urban et al., 2013). Teachers continued to spearhead the changes in the evolving educational structures. Nonetheless, as access to education broadened, teachers were tasked with instructing diverse students in race and ability, regardless of their socioeconomic status (Rury, 2016). The historical context of public education in the United States is complex and ever evolving.

Although the establishment of teacher training colleges significantly professionalized the teaching profession and improved the quality of education, much work is needed to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on the importance of teacher preparation and development. Darling-Hammond (2020) argued that providing well-prepared and

qualified teachers is critical. She highlighted that states that invest in comprehensive teacher education, certification standards, and ongoing professional development tend to experience better student achievement results.

Although various programs prepare teachers for real-life practice, there is still a need for more research on best practices in various school environments. It is essential to have a well-prepared and qualified teaching force to improve the quality of education in the United States. Teacher preparation programs should be rigorous and comprehensive to provide teachers with the skills and knowledge needed for success in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Additionally, ongoing professional development opportunities are essential to keep teachers abreast of current teaching practices (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Awareness of current trends in education ensures that teachers provide students with the best education to assist them to make informed decisions about college and career upon graduation from high school (Sancar et al., 2021). According to Svendsen (2020), those who participate in such programs seem to be teachers prepared for real-life practice; however, second-career teachers need more training and support. Second-career teachers or long-term substitutes are often assigned a classroom, curriculum, and best wishes as they begin their teaching careers. Given that classroom management is taught in theory, teachers need to be immersed in classroom environments in which students have learning challenges and behavioral issues. H

The need for comprehensive teacher preparation programs is magnified by the entry of second-career teachers who often exhibit strong motivation and commitment to the profession, frequently driven by a desire to make a difference and find more meaningful work. This intrinsic desire could enhance their teaching practices and

relationships with students, which suggests that second-career teachers are ideal candidates to aid in education reform (Tigchelaar et al., 2008). These individuals choose education as a second career for several reasons: a passion for education, work-life balance, professional fulfillment or meaning, and sharing life experience and expertise with students. Teaching provides a more predictable schedule, regular school holidays, and opportunities to spend time with family and pursue personal interests outside work. (Hobbs et al., 2003). Teaching offers a rewarding and fulfilling career path that allows individuals to make a difference in their students' and society's lives (Buchman et al., 2007). Despite the strengths they contribute, second-career teachers face unique challenges. They may need assistance with classroom management or an adjustment to the cultural shift from previous employment experiences (Mayotte, 2003). They may also need assistance as they adjust to the bureaucratic and procedural aspects of teaching.

Social Justice Context

Our parents were the last generation to traverse K-12 education when racism and segregation were the law of the land. During their formative years, they resided in St. Louis, Missouri, and Biloxi and Durant, Mississippi. They attended schools where the demographic representation of educators was African American and often in physical spaces inferior to their White counterparts. However, they understood that they carried the hopes and dreams of a family, friends, and community. While their options were limited upon college graduation (teaching and education, religious leadership, entrepreneurship, and civil rights), they chose to become teachers during the rise of the Civil Rights era.

Background of Parents as Teachers

Joelle's Journal

My mother did not plan to become a teacher. As the middle child of eleven

siblings, she thought she might continue working as a pharmacy clerk, as she did in high

school, or become a librarian due to her love for reading. A passion, which garnered her

the family nickname, 'bird brain', meant less as a compliment to her intelligence, but

more of an insult born out of their ignorance and limited formal education.

My grandmother had an elementary school education and worked in manual

labor. My grandfather worked as a bookkeeper for a local furniture company. Everyone

in the family matriculated through the public school system. The older siblings enlisted in

the military or studied trades like dressmaking, millinery, and shoe making. Though my

grandparents had limited education, my mother was exceptionally bright, earning two

academic promotions in elementary school. As a child, my family often discussed my

mother's steady and rapid progress through school at family events. Some family

members wondered if some of her academic success was due to the educational support

that she provided to her older sister, who struggled in school. Whatever the case, my

mother graduated high school at 16 and college at 20 in 1964.

In 1964, my mother, a recent college graduate, planned to work as a St. Louis

Public Schools teacher. She once shared with me that the events of 1964 profoundly

influenced her opinion on the role of education and her role as a teacher. The enactment

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an essential piece of legislation that banned racial, color,

religious, sexual, and national origin discrimination, represented a symbol of

transformation and advancement for her (Legal Highlight: The Civil Rights Act of 1964,

n.d.). This legislation tackled employment discrimination and enforced integration of schools, which directly influenced her future education career.

Though she did not actively protest in the nonviolent demonstrations in the southern states, she believed that education was a form of political activism to achieve racial equality. Martin Luther King Jr., who was once briefly a teacher, influenced her perspectives and methods as an educator, as he emphasized the significance of egalitarianism, fairness, and access to education for all pupils, irrespective of their racial heritage. As a teacher who was once a student in the same public-school system, she intimately understood her students' challenges. She planned to play a significant role in making changes and developing an equitable and just educational environment.

Erika's Journal

My mother, D. Johnson, fell in love with teaching at an early age. The eldest of eight siblings, she taught in a small rural school in Durant, Mississippi. Her younger siblings were among the students in the class. She was the first of her generation to complete college in her family in 1966, which began a legacy for her siblings and other family members to attend college. Segregation was still prevalent in the Deep South. My mother told me stories about being required to go to the "Blacks only" doctor through the back door. This experience would shape the way she viewed education. According to her, education was a way out of poverty and a vehicle for social mobility. A proper education equaled opportunity, opportunities that were not available without it.

Several landmark events that catapult change in the educational and civic landscape are interwoven with their secondary and postsecondary education. Table 1

captures some events that influenced the academic environment and our parents during this period.

Table 1

The Intersection of Education, Civil Rights Events, and Our Parents

Date	Event	Parent Graduations
1954	Brown v. Board of Education	
1955	Brown v. Board of Education	
1956	Southern Manifesto	
1957	Little Rock Nine integrates Central High School	Parent A - graduates from high school
1960	Ruby Bridges integrates New Orleans elementary school	
1961	Six Black students sued the University of Alabama after expulsion for participating in civil rights activities. St. Louis School Desegregation	
1962	James Meredith faces violent resistance to integrating the University of Mississippi	Parent A graduates from college Parent B graduates from High School
1963	Jefferson Bank Protest in St. Louis March on Washington, DC	Parent C graduates from High School
1964	Civil Rights Act	
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act Higher Education Act	
1966		Parent B graduates from college
1968	Washington University Sit-ins in St. Louis Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King	Parent C graduates from college

In the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, the Supreme Court declared state laws that established separate public schools for Black and White students unconstitutional. This ruling was a federal attempt to overturn the "separate but equal" doctrine nationwide (Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483,1954). In their decision, the Supreme Court ordered all school systems to integrate without giving state authorities discretion in timing and method of the process. In 1956, the Southern Manifesto Resolution was adopted by Southern members of Congress who opposed the

desegregation of public schools, specifically in the South. It was an attempt to resist the Supreme Court's submission on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case.

In 1957, nine African American students (known as the Little Rock Nine) endured resistance and violence when they attempted to integrate into the Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas (Doyle, 1963). President Dwight Eisenhower sent federal troops to maintain peace and order while ensuring their safety and enrollment (National Park Service, 2023). In 1960, Ruby Bridges, six years of age, became the first African American student to integrate into the William Frantz Elementary School, a New Orleans Public School (Coles, 1995). In 1961, in Alabama, six Black students sued the University of Alabama when they were expelled for participating in civil rights activities. During the same year, St. Louis Public Schools were integrated (Storch, 2020). In 1962, James Meredith encountered violent opposition when he attempted to enroll at the University of Mississippi, 'Ole Miss,' which resulted in a federal intervention by President John F. Kennedy to ensure his enrollment. Our parents grew up and attended college during a time of protest and unrest. The nature of education K-16 was changing. Federal laws were passed, and local demonstrations occurred. The parents were educated amid a social justice revolution and chose teaching as the career they would pursue.

The Impact of Socio-Cultural Challenges

In March 2020, the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus across the United States required all industries to cease face-to-face interactions immediately. Several sectors in the world economy were able to seamlessly pivot into a virtual environment. For those in education, the shift in delivery of instruction was difficult. Teachers charged with the responsibility of continuing education for the approximately 47.7 million students (about

twice the population of Texas) enrolled in the public-school systems and districts across the U.S. were shaken and quickly realized how inadequately prepared they were to meet the needs of their populations in the digital environment (Riser-Kositsky, 2022). Families were asked to dedicate spaces in their homes for children to learn; school districts distributed various forms of technology, such as Chromebooks, tablets, and internet hotspots, to be used in homes (Dykstra-Lathrop, 2022). Educators worldwide thought creatively about how they would continue teaching.

During the pandemic, for a brief shining moment, people celebrated teachers. Parents were forced to confront the realities of working with their children. Teaching is complex and parents who were required to support their children's academic needs realized the difficulty of this feat. However, as the fall of 2020 approached and there were no accurate answers to the COVID-19 crisis, understanding deteriorated into anger. Families filed lawsuits across the country to force schools to open. As Hemphill et al. (2021) reported, in Florida, a legal battle unfolded in August 2020 when the state's most prominent teachers' union sued the governor and other state officials regarding an order mandating schools to physically open five days a week and teachers back into classrooms. The union argued that the order was unsafe for schools to open given the state's high COVID-19 transmission rates at the time. In California, a group of parents sued the state in July 2020, arguing that distance learning measures had denied their children equal access to education. They called for the state to provide in-person learning options, which negated the need to consider the needs of the educational staff.

COVID-19 Journal Entries

Joelle's Journal -

The May 19, 2021, zoom meeting discussion between the United States and Istanbul teachers was amazing. It was interesting to learn how the pandemic dramatically altered the education landscape, highlighting issues of equity and access in our two countries to the forefront. Remote learning exposed the same challenges for teachers and students in Istanbul as in the United States. As a panel, we agreed that the pandemic highlighted facts that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds disproportionately suffered greater limitations to technology and internet connectivity than others. Teachers from Istanbul shared their experiences working through these challenges and innovative strategies that they employed to ensure the continuity of education for all students, much like many teachers in the United States.

When the moderator asked if the challenges of the pandemic made us think about leaving the teaching profession, many answers revolved around their deep-seated commitment to their students. Despite the challenges, several educators found the pandemic a time of profound professional growth and learning. They adapted to modern technologies and teaching methods, developed new strategies to engage students remotely, and often formed stronger connections with their communities. We shared experiences of overcoming these hurdles and how they reinforced our passion for teaching and our belief in the power of education to transform lives. The pandemic highlighted the critical role we play in society.

This dialogue showed that we are more alike than different. While our languages, culture, religion, and policies might be different, this conversation illustrated the universal challenges and triumphs in the field of education during an unprecedented time.

Erika's Journal -

During the epidemic, I made the decision to work for myself, guiding families through online education. I started leading virtual learning pods for kids in small groups who were struggling to adjust to their new school setting. I kept a daily journal of my experiences. On September 14, 2020, I arrived a little late. I tried to be here by 9 am, but Boy 1's hamster died, and I wanted to purchase flowers for him. Small gestures made the biggest difference for kids. I made the mistake of going to the back door. Boy 2 came out to meet me while Boy 1 reprimanded me and said that I should not come to the back door anymore because he would prefer it. I answered, "Yes, sir, that is correct." I was corrected by an 11-year-old and conceded because he is right. Education is so much more than teaching; it is about relationships.

The first class of the day on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the boys is "family group." Boy 2 told me that his teacher was struggling with the app again, and I could hear her exasperation. Boy 2 is determined and focused, though. He has been reliable despite all the adversity of our new reality. The teacher said, "I know we're having difficulties, and you all look so sad. Now that is making me sad." This experience has been difficult for all of us. The session ended, and the boys needed a smile. I told them that I would bring my sushi bazooka if they wanted to make some. Boy 1, "I like that you are bringing new foods for us." I replied, "I will make this a pleasant experience for you. We are going to be fine." I spoil kids. I do not want any, but I love them. They make me want to be a better person. And this is an adjustment for me. This time of year, I typically have a room full of children who go from room to room, decorating and getting to know various personalities. This year, I made a different decision. Now that the pandemic has spread, we all stare at each other oddly, even when we cough, for fear of infecting someone with the coronavirus. Afraid to go out or see a concert…. The children absorb our fears.

Truly, I want them to have a valuable experience. Virtual learning is hard for anyone, but adding a worried mom, nervous kids, and a pod leader, none of whom knows what to expect is a perfect recipe for chaos. However, leading with love and genuine concern is the only way we will get through this.

Chapter 2: Statement of the Research Problem

Although teachers, considered experts in their disciplines, are charged with preparing students for work and citizenship, the career path for teaching and transition into a teaching job in the past was simple. Most states require that a teaching candidate acquire a bachelor's degree from a teacher's college, fulfill state-specific requirements, and complete the district's required paperwork to become employed. Our parents retired from lifetime education careers, averaging 40 or more years in public education. They taught middle school, high school, and college; were certified at the time as 'generalist,' and fulfilled the teaching needs of their employer. As educators, they served as active participants amidst many federal, state, and local educational challenges. In Missouri and Illinois, they worked through personal frustrations in classrooms where communities were resistant to integration. They remained malleable to a change in curricular standards and united with unions to advocate for better compensation and working conditions. As children, we observed these things. We could not comprehend the events and why they mattered fully. As adults and teachers, we are only beginning to understand and process and the chaos of their time and the resilience that they embraced to call education their life's work.

Approximately 67% of teachers left the profession within the first five years of employment, with higher attrition rates observed among teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools (Gray et al., 2015). Another 8% of the educators changed schools during their first five years. Factors that contribute to teacher attrition and mobility included dissatisfaction with school conditions, lack of support, and low salaries. Personal reasons, such as family or health issues, also played a role. Teachers who

participated in induction programs or had access to a mentor were less likely to leave the profession than those who did not receive such support.

The media is replete with material pertaining to the difficulties encountered by public schools in the United States. Whether discussing the lack of young people who choose education as a career or teachers who leave the profession after a brief period, empirical evidence shows that current leadership needs to develop an awareness and understanding of why teachers leave the profession. The urgency to address the high teacher turnover rate due to attrition and mobility could negatively impact student achievement and further contribute to the growing teacher shortage. Policymakers and school administrators who commit to understanding the factors that influence teacher attrition and mobility could help building level leadership develop strategies to better support and retain teachers, especially during the crucial early years of their careers.

Research Objectives

This duoethnography explored the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators of educators who accidentally became teachers and remained in the teaching profession for over 15 years. The researchers shared their individual experiences through journal entries. They transcribed dialogue and chronicled the observed experiences of their parents who were also educators who navigated the same public education systems in Missouri and Illinois from the 1960s into the twenty-first century.

Significance of the Study

A duoethnographic study that emphasizes why teachers stay in K-12 education, particularly in schools with diverse student populations, presents a unique and significant contribution to educational research and practice. This methodology allows researchers to

engage in deep self-reflection and conversational style writing regarding their experiences through clear and interwoven contexts that provide space for both voices to be heard. This investigation offers a comprehensive and complex understanding of the professional and personal drivers that encourage teachers to stay dedicated to their work in demanding and diverse learning environments.

This study foregrounds teacher voices and lived experiences, offering an intimate understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence teacher retention. It suggests how teachers navigate schools with diverse student populations and highlights how teachers can find fulfillment in environments with language barriers, cultural and socio-economic differences. Finally, this study serves as an aid for teachers who desire to develop culturally responsive pedagogies and build meaningful relationships in challenging environments, which are often overlooked in more traditional research methodologies.

Moreover, a duoethnographic approach allows the exploration of two different yet interconnected narratives. This duality provides a platform to compare experiences, which leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the commonalities and divergences in teacher experiences in diverse settings. Comparative analysis is imperative for discovering systemic patterns and individual strategies that factor into teacher's resilience and commitment.

Additionally, this study has the potential to provide valuable insights for policy and practice in education by emphasizing the importance of support systems, professional development opportunities, and institutional cultures that effectively promote teacher retention. Stakeholders might enhance their ability to support and retain educators by

exploring the personal perspectives discussed in this study. This informs their abilities to create targeted interventions. This aspect could enhance the educational experience for students in diverse schools. Thus, a duoethnographic study related to teacher experiences in diverse K-12 educational environments is significant for its depth of personal insight, comparative richness, and practical implications. It is a powerful tool for understanding and addressing the complexities of teacher retention in some of the most challenging yet rewarding educational contexts.

Research Questions

This duoethnographic dissertation explores the unique experiences and personal stories of two accidental educators who remained committed to K-12 education. This study seeks to reveal the many layers of the researchers' journey inside the education sector by analyzing their personal accounts and transcribed dialogue. The research questions focus on the educators' personal and professional journeys and how those experiences could contribute to a broader context of why teachers leave or stay.

1. What are the personal narratives, experiences, and dialogue of two accidental educators who have chosen to stay in K-12 education?

2. How do their stories provide insights regarding the factors that contribute to teacher retention?

Gaps in Existing Literature

The total effect of school closures on students during the COVID-19 pandemic is not apparent; significantly few articles currently exist on the subject. A recent study of elementary students by Hammerstein et al. /92021) showed that children from low socioeconomic status (SES) families were more affected by the pandemic than those from

high SES backgrounds. The adverse effects for elementary students were partially due to a lack of access. The positive impacts for high school students were partly due to an increased ability to self-directed learning. Although there is a lack of current research on the effects of COVID-19 school closures, empirical evidence suggests that the learning and employability skills gap has widened for at-risk students, placing a burden on school administrators and communities to devise strategies and options for students after they graduate from high school. (Bailey et al., 2021). Several studies investigated why teachers leave the profession, but few examined why teachers stay. This study provides leaders with insights into ways to improve teacher satisfaction.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations primarily involved the self-reflective nature of the research. Confidentiality and informed consent issues are nuanced since the researchers were also participants. The researchers shared subjective experiences while maintaining the privacy of others mentioned in the narratives, such as colleagues, students, or institutions. It is crucial to anonymize any identifiable information about third parties or to obtain their consent if their experiences intersect significantly with the researchers' stories. The researchers' reflexivity necessitates ethical attentiveness, as they consistently recognized and considered their biases and viewpoints, that guarantee a just and truthful portrayal of human experiences.

Limitations of Study

The study's limitations stem from its intrinsic nature. Duoethnography, while rich in personal insights, might only be generalizable to some teaching experiences. It is rooted in the individual contexts of the researchers; therefore, its findings are specific to

their unique journeys. The subjective nature of the methodology might limit its applicability in broader contexts. Additionally, the reconstructive nature of memory could influence the accuracy of recounted experiences, and the interpretation of these narratives might be affected by the researchers' current perspectives. This methodology relies heavily on the depth and honesty of self-disclosure, which could be challenging and impact the breadth of the topics explored.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research are indispensable, as they provide a guiding compass for the inquiry process and help to shape the direction of the study and the interpretation of data. They are crucial, especially in a dissertation, as they serve to not only anchor the research within existing literature but also frame the researcher's thinking, offering a coherent narrative for the phenomenon under study. The selection of an appropriate theoretical framework was crucial in this duoethnography, as they needed to align with the intensely intimate and intricate character of the subject matter. This study is grounded in five theoretical models: Maslow's hierarchy, chaos theory, resilience theory, care theory, and teacher identity theory.

Maslow's Hierarchy

While several studies examine children's needs for safety in the classroom, this study identifies that teacher needs for personal safety in the workplace are equally important. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory that is segmented into a five-tier motivational model of human needs. Often depicted as a pyramid with the lowest, most fundamental need shown at the bottom, Maslow (1943) argued that an individual should satisfy the requirements at one level of human need before the next

levels of desired human needs could be met. The first two tiers of this motivational model are a person's desire for physiological needs and safety with security. Maslow listed basic needs such as air, water, food, shelter, and safety regarding health and employment as a person's emotional security needs (Maslov, 1954). According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, which was used in this study, educators' needs might be met by the stability of a teaching contract and the salary that comes with it for a predetermined period.

The final three levels of Maslow's hierarchy, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, address an individual's social and emotional well-being (Maslow, 1943). In an illustration of Maslow's theory, self-actualization is at the apex of the pyramid. Self-actualization happens only when all other psychological needs have been satisfied (Maslov, 1954). It means that an individual has satisfied all other needs and could then seek opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfillment (Hughes, 2012). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a foundation to address teachers' basic to advanced needs and suggests that the prioritization of physiological needs, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization could improve job satisfaction and retention. Educators are more likely to be retained if a supportive work environment that meets the various levels of needs is created.

Chaos Theory

"*I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.*" - Maya Angelou

Chaos theory is a branch of mathematics and physics that studies the behavior of high-powered systems that appear disordered or random but are governed by underlying

patterns and established laws. The theory aims to understand and describe complex

systems in ordinary occurrences (Gleick, 1987). Chaos theory in education focuses on the

incremental changes, such as unplanned moves and schedule changes, imposed in schools

by administration cause personnel frustration that makes them less likely to remain in

education (Finch, 2001). Therefore, this theoretical framework could assist school leaders

to recognize and navigate the impact of unpredictability on teachers in educational

systems.

Erika's Journal

This is a eyewitness account of a school shooting on October 25, 2022. I am the

building substitute at C, and I am a professional jazz singer from East Saint Louis.

Likewise, I graduated from the same high school as Miles Davis. I was a student in the

same jazz program as Miles Davis. However, I have never sung for the kids or my

coworkers.

Miles Davis saved us. Miles Davis was in the building. Amazingly, all the

teachers were there that day, so I always held my position by the security desk. I heard

the security guard, G., yelling as the other security officer, MDL, ran down the steps

behind Officer F. I thought I heard shots, so I went to see the security cameras. I saw the

children running, saw the shooter, and I heard more shots. I stood beside Ms. W. and told

her to lock down the 3rd floor. I ran to the principal's office and told her to lock

down...our code. Miles Davis is in the building. I invoked the power of my ancestors to

cover us. Dr. S. trusted me, did not hesitate, calmly announced, and hid in the closet. She

is truly a great leader. The children and the school were locked down, and the police were

there in three minutes. We heard the exchange of gunfire, and we waited. I was under a

desk with the secretary. I was not going to die today, and nor were my coworkers or those kids. The police banged on the door, and we had to come out of the school with our hands up. We successfully moved the children to the grocery store parking lot, and they were safe. I was numb...I think I still am. I left my purse, computer, and car keys. I did not receive my possessions back until Thursday, Oct.27, 2022, and we have been in constant meetings since then.

I lost a coworker and a student on Monday and am not entirely okay. The funerals are scheduled for this week. I am better than I was because I know we did a good thing, and it could have been much worse. Miles Davis kept us safe. Because of my relationships with everyone in that building, the trust that we built and shared saved our lives.

Joelle's Journal - Undated - A Gun in my Classroom

A student brought a BB gun to school, but I did not know that it was a toy; I thought it was a gun. It was my final afternoon class. I went about doing things in my usual manner. I provided students with the agenda for the class period and suggested that they take out materials to get started. This class had a few students who were routinely difficult. As I was taking attendance, one of those students approached my desk and asked for a pass to go to the restroom. I paused in response because the class had just begun; when I looked up, I saw terror on the student's face. The student mouthed the words, "He has a gun." I froze. I had no training on how to handle this situation. In what felt like slow motion, I wrote a pass for the student to go to the restroom - hastily, they left so no one could see the tears running down their face. I picked up the phone to contact my administrator. With my back to the class of students, I whispered, "The

students report there is a student in my class with a gun." Minutes later, the student left

my room without incident. Even though that student did not like me, I remember thinking

that they trusted me to keep them safe and do the right thing.

Resilience Theory

Resilience theory focuses on the processes and conditions that enable individuals

or systems to adapt, recover, and grow in adversity, stress, or trauma (Gu et al., 2007).

The theory posits that resilience is not merely an inherent trait but could be developed

and nurtured through several factors like social support, coping mechanisms, and

adaptive capacities. Beltman (2015) explored the concept of teacher professional

resilience and its significance for surviving and thriving in the demanding teaching

profession. The study emphasized the cultivation of resilience among teachers with the

development of self-efficacy, maintaining a positive outlook, and the employment of

effective coping strategies. Beltman's work suggested that teacher resilience is crucial to

foster job satisfaction, reduce burnout, and enhance the quality of education provided to

secondary school students. As a continuation of Beltman's (2015) study, Mansfield et al.

(2016) investigated how teacher education programs could better prepare future educators

to survive and thrive in the demanding profession. The study underscored the importance

of developing resilience skills, self-efficacy, and positive professional identity in pre-

service teachers. The authors argued that teacher education programs could contribute to

the resilience of future educators and long-term success by equipping teacher candidates

with the tools to navigate challenges, handle stress, and maintain their well-being. The

recommendations of the study suggest a proactive approach to building resilience in

teacher education to improve the overall quality of teaching and teacher retention in the profession.

Care Theory

Nodding (1984) challenged future educators to teach students how to care for themselves, the environment, the community, and other people's ideas and ideologies. She spoke of the ever-changing evolution of the world and how, even in the politicization of current state affairs, the educator's role is to encourage lifelong learning since all things are connected. While there is an urgency to teach children to care, as educators, it is essential to consider the societal changes that impact children's ability to care and what students care about. As society has changed, the needs of students have changed, but the educational system has not adapted quickly enough to accommodate emerging needs (Gilligan, 1982). It is impossible to teach students to care when the system has forsaken its primary stakeholders to political policy, utterly unaware of the adversities and intricacies of each classroom. Care theory highlights the importance of relationships and connectedness in educational settings (O'Conner, 2018). When teachers feel valued and cared for within their professional community, their job satisfaction increases, significantly affecting their decision to stay.

Erika's Journal as a Student

As of October 22, 2021, the class temperature has changed this week. It was refreshing to have the feeling of warmth return to the group. Everyone was lighthearted and friendly; it was refreshing for a change. We have been experiencing growing pains with technological confusion, but the patience shown by Dr. H., even when she stumbled, is inspiring. She includes us in her pursuit of understanding recent programs and is honest

about how we are growing together. That is exactly what a good educator does. Teachers should be honest about what they do not know and allow the students to grow with them. It makes the learning environment more comfortable for all involved and helps the learning process.

Teacher Identity Theory

Teacher identity theory explores how educators form, maintain, and evolve their professional identities within the complex teaching landscape. It looks at factors, such as, personal beliefs, values, and experiences and the influence of external factors like institutional culture, social interactions, and policy (Beauchamp et al., 2009). Teacher identity is viewed as dynamic and continually negotiated through various experiences and interactions. It is intricately linked with teachers' sense of agency, job satisfaction, effectiveness, and longevity in the profession (Day et al., 2006). Teacher identity theory posits that a strong, positive professional identity is crucial for teacher retention. Providing opportunities for teachers to develop and affirm their identity through leadership roles, collaborative projects, and a voice in decision-making could strengthen their commitment to the profession and their institutions.

Erika's Journal Entry on Her Parent's Teacher Identity

As a little girl, I remember my mother's classroom as a meeting place for the other English teachers during breaks, early mornings, and late afternoons. Smoking was still allowed in classrooms and airline flights in the early 80's, and my mother was a heavy smoker. Her ashtray was hidden in the top drawer of her desk. She was proud of her classroom, Room 106, right underneath the stairs. My mother would always say that her room was perfect for her because her birthday, coincidentally, was October 6. She

would laugh and play these numbers in the lottery because she believed in them. She personalized her license plates to match her classroom and birthday and drove around town proud to be a teacher.

Because of her success with children, she became a prize employee for the district. She taught the gifted track of students in C. Junior High School. Her students always tested above their grade level in English. The classroom always felt like a home away from home. Books like *Canterbury Tales, 1984*, and *Catcher in the Rye* lined the shelves, and I loved going to school with her because I felt like I was "hanging out" with the older children. I would read with them to fit in at eight years old. Beta Club meetings and presentations were practiced on weekends and after school, sometimes in our home. My mother's students took pride in being a part of her class. She remained in the same classroom for twenty years before becoming assistant principal and an eventual promotion to Manager of the English Department for the district. She created a stable environment for students and coworkers to flourish because she could stay in one place and hone her craft. I always admired how people loved her; she genuinely loved teaching English.

A newspaper clipping headline reads:

Students Highly Motivated Through Language Arts Team Teaching At Clark

EAST ST. LOUIS, ILLINOIS   DECEMBER, 1978

Reading in Language Arts is a pilot reading class that was developed by Mrs. D. Johnson and Mrs. D. Adams, Language Arts teachers at Clark Jr. High School. Many of the students, realizing that reading is fundamental as well as fun, graciously accept help from their peers who are not enrolled in the class. The availability of individualized instruction, reading games which build comprehension skills, audio-visual materials, and the use of different high interest materials that focus on various reading skills are great starting points for these students who accept the venture into reading and the pleasures it offers. Many of the students experience success that was not imaginable before enrolling in the course.

Mrs. Johnson gives a student one to one instructions.

In this study, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is instrumental to investigate the motivational aspects of the professional journeys of teachers, considering their fundamental and growth-oriented needs. Chaos theory provides a lens to appreciate the unpredictable and dynamic variables that could impact teacher retention, recognizing the complex systems in which educators operate. Resilience theory is pivotal to understanding how teachers adapt and survive the stresses of their profession, highlighting the qualities that enable them to thrive amidst adversity. Care theory adds an essential dimension of relational ethics and empathetic engagement, crucial to fostering environments in which teachers feel supported and valued. Lastly, teacher identity theory explores the self-conception of teachers and agency, reflecting how their professional identities evolve and influence their commitment to the field. These frameworks offer a rich tapestry of conceptual understanding and establish a solid foundation for the

exploration of the multifaceted reasons that teachers choose to stay in or leave the profession. This duoethnographic approach could compellingly articulate the interplay of personal experience with broader structural factors, providing valuable insights into teacher retention.

Conclusion

This duoethnography focuses on the resilience and adaptability of K-12 educators in the face of societal and systemic challenges. The aspirational history of the U.S. public educational system is rooted in providing free, universally accessible education to prepare citizens for a multifaceted future. The role of educators is pivotal in shaping democratic values and equipping students with essential skills for workforce participation. Additionally, the professionalization of teaching and the commitment of teachers to student success and societal betterment drive them to navigate various obstacles, including school violence, curricular changes, and performance pressures. The duoethnographic approach of the dissertation aimed to explore the educators' personal narratives, providing insights into factors contributing to teacher retention.

Chapter 3: Methods and Design for Action

Grant (2023) said that embracing, seeking, and amplifying discomfort is the most suitable means to speed growth. Successfully navigating the complexity of K-12 education requires resilience and persistence. This chapter sets the stage for an in-depth exploration of the teaching profession's challenges and rewards. It explores the historical and societal shifts that have influenced teacher motivation to remain in the classroom through the lens of two educators who, like their parents, chose to stay. To represent the experiences and motives of educators in a field characterized by constant change and difficulty, duoethnography uses the narratives and conversations of the educators. This method looks at internal and external elements that support teacher retention and offers a distinctive viewpoint on teachers' persistent dedication in various challenging learning environments.

Methodology

During the preliminary inquiry, several qualitative research methods were investigated. While other approaches rely on input from an externally specified group, this study was anchored in the belief that the commonality and power of the involved researchers were valid components of their stories. A duoethnography allowed the researchers as educators and children of educators to present a different lens regarding the state of education and a practical guide to changes for success. A duoethnographic approach allowed the analysis of their relationships as teachers and friends. Articles related to autoethnographies and duoethnographies emphasize reflexivity, positioning, and ethical considerations while suggesting steps to conduct systematic, rigorous, and ethically responsible research projects.

Chang (2008) offered helpful guidance and a thorough theoretical framework for those interested in utilizing autoethnography for their dissertation. The importance of self-reflection, reflexivity, and narrative analysis was emphasized, highlighting how firsthand experiences and stories could be powerful tools to understand complex social and cultural phenomena. The article focused heavily on methodological rigor and ethical considerations.

Qualitative traditions, including ethnography, phenomenology, case study, and autoethnography, could all have provided insights into research design, data collection, and analysis (Densin et al., 2011). Autoethnography merges biographical and ethnographic methodologies as a qualitative research approach. (Ellis et al., 2011). The literature supported an investigation of the subjective experiences of each researcher to understand broader social and cultural phenomena and to make meaning of the factors that motivate teachers to remain in education despite its chaotic and complex nature. The importance and significance of subjectivity, self-reflection, and narrative construction are emphasized in autoethnographic research (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). It highlights historical context, theoretical foundations, and methodological considerations of autoethnography. This study stresses the role of reflexivity, ethics, and subjectivity in qualitative research.

The shared critical ideas from autoethnography revolve around recognizing and promoting autoethnography as a distinct and valuable qualitative research design. According to Grant (2020), autoethnographic research emphasizes the importance of subjectivity and reflexivity in research. It encouraged researchers to engage with their experiences and to be mindful of observing the biases within their perspectives. The

research design underscores the centrality of narrative and storytelling to convey individual experiences within broader social and cultural contexts (Bochner & Ellis, 2022). Per the normal expectations of doctoral research, ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent and truthful representation of experiences are imperative. The source explored in this literature review recognizes the interdisciplinary nature of autoethnography. Finally, this approach contributes to qualitative research. It offers a diverse perspective and insight into human experiences.

An autoethnography is a qualitative research and social science approach that allows the researcher to explore and analyze firsthand experiences within a cultural and social context to advance academic theories, influence policy types, identify social issues, and provide solutions (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). As Grant (2020) posited, it is a self-narrative told within a specific social context. It began in the 1970s but became prevalent in the 1990s. Before its introduction, most research was empirical. The researcher and participants were separate entities. Duoethnography similarly allows two researchers to be the subjects of the study and analyze their individual experiences as a backdrop for a more profound understanding of a social problem through documented dialog (Burleigh & Burm, 2022).

Duoethnography is a qualitative research method that is, however, used to explore the lived experiences of two people who have a relationship with each other (Wiant-Cummins & Brannon, 2022). The goal is to create a collaborative text that represents the shared experiences of the two researchers (Banegas & Gerlach, 2021). The use of a duoethnographic dissertation is like a traditional autoethnographic dissertation, but there are some key distinctions. The first difference is that the research team is comprised of

two people who are in a relationship with each other (Burleigh & Burm, 2022). Co-researchers form a high level of trust, are deliberate with each other, and expect changes and differences between their narratives (Norris et al. 2012). The second difference is that the research focuses on the shared experiences of the two researchers (Burleigh & Burm, 2022; Wiant-Cummins & Brannon, 2022).

The primary step in duoethnography is to identify a topic that interests both researchers (Banegas & Gerlach, 2021). According to Norris et al. (2012), The topic should be relevant to their lives and one about which both are passionate. Once a topic has been identified, the researchers should develop a research plan. The research plan should include a statement of purpose, a research question, a literature review, and a methodology section. The next step is to collect data. The data collection methods for duoethnography could vary depending on the research topic. However, some common data collection methods include interviews, observations, and document analysis. Once the data has been collected, the researchers should analyze it by coding the data, identifying themes, and developing interpretations.

Data Collection

Data collection for this duoethnography primarily involved gathering rich, narrative data from the lived experiences of the two educators. This included in-depth, reflective journaling and dialog between the researchers, who emphasized their teaching journeys. These narrative accounts explored the motivations, challenges, and experiences that have influenced their decision to remain in K-12 education. Information was collected using self-documentation through diary reflections, personal narratives, transcribed dialogue between researchers, field notes, photographs, and artifacts as

primary sources. Additional data sources entailed conversations with colleagues or family members who have observed their educational journey. Secondary sources include academic articles and current events that forecast future education developments. This approach allowed the researchers to capture the depth and complexity of their experiences in a nuanced and personal manner.

Data Analysis

The analysis began with one question: Why do we stay? While most studies tend to investigate a problem, the objective as researchers was to find positive reasons why teachers would remain in education. Initial methods for research development included journals and personal narratives of each educator. Academic articles, current events, and educational news were also analyzed to demonstrate social and political contexts. Relevant themes emerged through conversations between the two researchers that related to their shared experiences as the children of educators and teachers.

Internal Factors

1. How do personal values and motivations influence a teacher's decision to remain in the profession?
2. What are the factors that contribute to teacher job satisfaction?
3. How do intrinsic motivations affect teacher decisions to stay in the profession?
4. What role does work-life balance play in teacher retention?
5. What is the impact of salary and benefits in relation to other criteria on teachers' decisions to stay in the teaching field?

External Factors

6. What impact does the school leadership and administration have regarding teacher retention?

7. What is the impact of student behavior and teacher-student relationships on teacher decisions to stay?

8. How do external factors such as education policy and societal attitudes towards teaching impact teacher retention?

9. What is the impact of the school environment in relation to teacher retention?

During the data analysis process, common themes were identified. While there were various parallels in experiences, for the scope of this study, the themes were narrowed to prominent aspects between the experiences of the educators' parents and themselves. This study used duoethnographic research methods and theoretical frameworks to dissect why the educators remained in a profession with a complex intersection of people, policies, and outcomes.

Introduction to the Educators

Erika Johnson

Erika Johnson is a master educator, activist, and jazz vocalist who has been active in the St. Louis Metropolitan music and education community for twenty years and is known for teaching from the cradle to college. Erika is a St. Louis Blues Society and the University City Symphony Orchestra board member. As an advocate for music and education, Ms. Johnson has raised funds and started programs to promote fine arts in schools, recorded educational programming in conjunction with the Sheldon Concert

Hall, and continues her grassroots efforts to help as many up-and-coming artists as she can in South St. Louis city.

Joelle McIntosh

Joelle M. W. McIntosh is a dedicated wife and mother of two children who draws inspiration from her mother, a lifelong career educator. Joelle holds a Certification in Business Education from Lindenwood University and earned a BA and MBA in Business Administration from Webster University. Her professional journey includes teaching in St. Louis Public Schools, Riverview School District, Ritenour School District, and the School District of University City at the secondary level. Her achievements in the field have culminated in notable roles, including being a Fulbright (formerly IREX) Teachers for Global Classrooms Fellow in Peru during 2017-2018 and a Guest Presenter at both the National and Midwest Global Teaching Dialogue in 2019. Joelle's contributions to education and her commitment to fostering global and innovative learning environments continue to impact students and educators.

<center>Personal Narratives</center>

Baptism by Fire: Joelle's Journal

I am the only daughter born to a railroad switch operator (father) and a teacher (mother). In 1973, my parents purchased our first and only home as a family in a primarily White suburb in St. Louis County. My earliest remembrance of school was the neighborhood preschool at the bottom of our block. I jumped from the stage and knocked out all my front teeth. I punched a boy, and I stood on the table and told the teacher, "You can't tell me what to do because my mommy is a teacher, and she's smarter than you!" Not long after I made that declaration, I found myself in a Catholic preschool with Black

nuns from the Caribbean. Years later, when I asked my mother why she moved me, she commented, "That little White woman didn't know what to do with you, and I wasn't raising no fool. The Black ladies knew how to keep your butt in check." From kindergarten to twelfth grade, I attended catholic schools. These academic environments boasted behavioral compliance, academic structure, and rigor. College was a natural next step upon high school graduation.

I graduated from Webster University with a bachelor's degree in business management. While working in the corporate sector, I quickly re-enrolled in Webster University to pursue a master's degree in business administration with an emphasis in international business. I spent my entire corporate career working in the banking and finance industry. I worked in several organizations, as the industry was fraught with mergers and acquisitions. With each organizational change, my role and responsibilities changed. During that time, my teammates were often located in a different state. This work environment taught me to be an adaptable collaborator, a resilient self-starter, an effective communicator, a critical thinker, and a problem solver. My degrees and corporate experience, paired with the aspirational programs of my youth, such as Youth Leadership St. Louis, Minority Youth Entrepreneurship program, and INROADS, provided me with a distinct perspective on the importance of learning that values both traditional academic rigor and the practical career skills that are essential in today's rapidly evolving world.

The birth of a child is a wonder to behold. My first child was born in 2001. She was perfect in every way. She had butter-smooth reddish-brown skin, a head full of silky black wavy hair, ten beautifully formed fingers, and ten tiny toes. Her facial features

were well-defined, and my heart melted with gratitude when she looked at me. This little human being made me a mother. In those brief minutes after her birth, I knew I was smitten. My life would never be the same. She was God's gift to my husband and me, our rainbow after the storms of loss. As I held her in my arms during her first evening of life, taking in every incredible detail of her being, I knew that I could not return to that job in corporate America. I could not spend my days in an environment where my soul was dying slowly.

I joined the teaching profession in 2001 as a long-term substitute teacher in a K-12 vocal music position. After only four weeks of school, I was the third teacher in the music classroom. I remember thinking, "How difficult could teaching music be?" On my first day, the first hour, I was greeted by a group of bright and smiling kindergarten students, forty of them to be exact. The school had four kindergarten classrooms. To ensure that each classroom of students received the mandated number of music instruction minutes, two classrooms were combined and scheduled to attend 'electives' or 'specials' simultaneously. Shortly after their teachers departed, the class erupted into utter chaos. While some students sat at the table, others stood up almost immediately and began to run around the tables. Others rocked in chairs, touched, and poked their table partners, and played as if they were on the playground. Crayons became weapons of destruction, pelting students like rocks, and they used them to write on everything other than the paper in front of them.

I remember thinking, "I must be doing something wrong; every class cannot be like this." Fifty minutes feels like an eternity when disorder and destruction are the rule instead of the exception. The second hour was first grade. They silently marched into

class in a single-file line, following their teacher. Seeing this, I remember sighing with relief because I believed this class would be different. Unfortunately, as soon as the door closed behind their teacher, the same behavior occurred again. I seriously contemplated quitting during that first month. But how could I? We had a young child. We needed the money. I had to find a way to make this work, and I did.

As a new substitute, I faced many challenges. I needed to understand the profession of teaching, the pressures of school culture, the nature of children, and the curriculum of my subject. I learned all this on the job, in what I call 'Baptism by Fire.' I quickly learned that behind the sweet and angelic faces of elementary, prepubescence, and adolescent students lie a laundry list of social, emotional, physical, and academic issues that makes teaching incredibly difficult. Over the years, those challenges have compounded with more significant and more extensive expectations.

Why Joelle Stayed

"*Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects*" - Dalai Lama

When I walked into a classroom for the first time as a substitute music teacher for a PreK-5 school, I figured the job would be easy. It would be a way to pay our bills. In hindsight, the term 'easy' should never have been a part of my lexicon as it related to becoming a teacher. Our marriage was three years old. It is now 2001, and my husband and I purchased a home and had a newborn child. I thought I would return to corporate America once my child was old enough to attend preschool. At the time, it seemed like a seamless transition back to a career that I once believed was my professional destiny.

Several events during those early years forced me to challenge my once-held beliefs, do deep soul-searching, and reevaluate my professional future. My vision to become a teacher stemmed from many conversations that I had with my husband and mother (herself a lifelong educator) that my workdays would be easier. As a substitute teacher, my day ended at 3 pm, and my weekends could be earmarked for my home and family care. With that, I decided to stay. I remember feeling accomplished when I orchestrated the school's first holiday program. I beamed with pride as each performed their song and choreography. And the smiles on the faces of everyone in the gym that night made all the demanding work worth it. At that moment, I knew that teaching was my calling!

After 22 years later, I still feel that same pride as a teacher of career and technical courses in high school. I always say, "Everyone will not go to college, but everyone will have a job." I teach in a way that students can be prepared for any choice that they might make following high school. I teach courses that help them develop analytical, technical, and problem-solving skills that are essential for a functioning society. The classes I teach can change the trajectory of lives and communities. That is why I stay.

Erika's Journal

Adopted by my aunt and uncle at ten months old, my parents brought me to East St. Louis, IL, and raised me as their only daughter. My father is my uncle by birth. Born to his alcoholic younger brother, I simultaneously suffered neglect and contracted tuberculosis and pneumonia. I was left on a porch and taken as a ward of the state. My uncle and his wife heard of my peril and brought me back to East St. Louis to raise me. Both were English teachers at the time who had moved to the area from Mississippi. I

always loved education and showed high intelligence early. I attended a Catholic school where I skipped the 4th grade and met Joelle in the 5th grade. She was always my protector because I was so small. I became a 'troubled teen.' I subsequently attended Montessori middle school and a boarding school where I repeated the 7th grade. My parents believed that repeating the grade would help me socially and emotionally adjust to my new school with peers of my age, an all-girl Catholic school where Joelle and I met again. Unfortunately, I still struggled, and my parents decided to enroll me in a public high school, and I sang jazz with the big band there and anchored the school news channel. I never planned to be a teacher, but the universe had other plans. It is not a job; it is a calling. I have fought this calling many times, only to watch myself come full circle. What began as my aversion became my passion. I was meant to be a teacher. What I have learned as a teacher is that everything begins with relationships.

I started teaching by accident. Initially, I intended to be a professional jazz musician. As a professional singer, I attained reasonable success and sustainability for many years. I traveled the country to sing jazz and had an opportunity to perform in Italy at the Blue Note Jazz Club in Milan. I secured a job as a receptionist, primarily for web developers, when I did not sing. The dot com industry fell dramatically in 2004, and I quickly realized that I would need a contingency plan. Nervously, I enrolled at H. University and majored in Business Administration-Marketing. I intended to support other musicians in the development of business plans and finding success in self-employment. My father, a lifelong teacher, worked part-time for S. with the upward bound program during the afternoons, and I searched for a part-time job while attending school. He said that he would talk to his supervisor about a part-time tutoring position for

me. I received an offer for the job. I enjoyed the relationships that I experienced with youth and the intrinsic excitement of being involved in the learning process of students. My part-time job was converted to a full-time position as an education specialist in 2008. During my employment at S., I graduated with a master's in education - learning, culture, and society, emphasizing cultural diversity. Even with a fancy master's degree, no one cared, and mobility was difficult. I decided that substitute teaching would be easy, and I could remain in the discipline of education.

The beginning of my teaching career was fraught with uncertainty. All I had was a jazz instinct and a desire not to fail. I have worked with young people and children before, so how hard could it be? The first day that I walked into F. Middle School, I was met by the principal, now Dr. B. She gave me a quick tour and showed me to my room. Two teachers had already quit in this room.

The school was known for behavior issues, unbeknownst to me. I was given the schedule, general rules, and instructions to call security if I needed help. I was shown where the textbooks were and given best wishes. I had fifteen minutes to survey my surroundings and acclimate. The students poured in for the first hour of class. I had no plan or idea of how I would make this work. I was terrified. The first few students who arrived were curious and asked my name. They were interested in me as a new person. The children who came in later could have been more kind. They came into the room, cursing loudly, and one exclaimed to the group, "Hey yall! We got a new sub!" They were determined to come into the classroom and make it hard for me, and they did.

During the first three days, I had already called security to break up two fights in my classroom. Another student became so disruptive that the principal came in to remove

them from the classroom. I tried some "getting to know you" activities that I used from a few summer camps at S., but I learned quickly that middle school was another animal. What I did know was that a few kids liked me.

I came home feeling defeated and tired every day. I would have no voice when I returned home because I felt as though I spent the entire day screaming, whether to complete the lesson or yelling at a kid for acting out in class. I needed to improve. I came home one day and decided to quit at the end of the week and look for something else.

That evening, as I was almost certain this would be my last week, I remembered that I had an astrology book with characteristics of each sign depending on the day of the year. Each day was specific and quite different. Each zodiac sign had a precious stone and planet assigned to it. The next day, I brought my astrology book and put it on my desk. As the students arrived, I asked them for their zodiac sign and shared what I knew about each character. I let them find their birthdays in the book and allowed them to read their signs. After the class arrived, I divided them into groups according to the elements associated with their zodiac sign: earth, wind, water, or fire. Each group was tasked with investigating their element and presenting their findings to the class.

I tried to coincide the studies with the textbook that I was given. I started with an utterly out-of-control classroom and slowly transformed it into a classroom that students wanted to visit because they felt acknowledged as individuals. The principal noticed and praised me; she always made me think that I was doing a wonderful job and supported me. She always supported me regarding students' parents and showed me grace with what I did not know. Many teachers have different work environments. I was truly

fortunate. I had great coworkers. I did not know everyone, but the students were always first for the principal and myself.

As the school year continued, I did my best to make the class enjoyable. I was learning on the job. Science with physical experiments was a completely new experience. Dr. B allowed me the capacity to grow. Growth was uncomfortable most days, but behaviors eventually settled as students acclimated to who I was and my expectations. I had to learn science quickly, so I had two jobs simultaneously. I began to like the kids. There were a few who reminded me of myself, and I wanted to make sure that they were okay. I assumed that they could learn some life lessons if they did not learn any science.

I taught at F. Middle School from 2013 to 2017, one year as a science teacher and three years as a music teacher. Dr. B. liked how I taught science and knew that I was a musician. After the first year, she needed a music teacher, so I became the classroom teacher for the following three years as an uncertified long-term substitute. At that time, the pay was $150 a day. During the second year, I struggled financially. My lights were cut off. I was not earning enough money to sustain myself. I believed in what I was doing and could create my classes. That feeling was priceless. I accepted being paid less because I was happy. Dr. B's belief in me made a difference in my motivation.

Why Erika Stayed

Despite everything that I experienced as a long-term substitute teacher, I stayed because of the relationships and freedom from lesson plans. I love caring for teachers and students by showing them that I care. I feel good about myself when I come home from work, knowing that I did my best to ensure that someone had a good day and that we all

made it home safely. My favorite part of teaching is coming in the morning and saying, "Good morning. Let's have a wonderful day." I say it for myself, but if it helps someone to have a good start in the morning, I want us all to get there together.

I am comfortable being underestimated. When I came in as a substitute, the expectations were incredibly low. When I go beyond to ensure that the students engage with the assignments that the teacher leaves, it feels good to watch attitudes toward me change. I leave notes for teachers about their class behaviors and try to clean up and make the room nice for their return. I would want someone to do that for me, so I find it an honor to support surprisingly and quietly. It is a personal challenge to see if I can care about students and teachers as an action rather than merely supportive words. Can I push myself out of my comfort zone, remain authentic, and get results? Can I gain respect by my actions and not my title? I come home every day knowing that I did my best and made everyone that I encountered in the school feel that they mattered without the responsibility of a classroom. This gives me personal satisfaction. I have never worked for money. I have always worked where I could be happy to come to work every day. I work for the outcome, not the income.

Comparative Analysis of Narratives

This duoethnography exploring teacher retention presents a reflexive comparative analysis of the narratives of Joelle and Erika, two educators with unique yet intersecting journeys in the teaching profession. The narratives of Joelle and Erika offer rich, personal insights into their journeys in the teaching profession, highlighting common themes and individual challenges. Both stories reflect a transition from different initial career paths to teaching, driven by profound individual experiences and realizations.

Joelle's narrative begins with her upbringing and progression through Catholic schools which shaped her understanding of academic rigor. She developed important soft skills, such as adaptability, critical thinking and problem-solving while working in corporate America. These experiences later influenced her teaching approach. The birth of her first child marked a pivotal moment which compelled her to leave the corporate world to pursue teaching. Joelle's initial experiences in the classroom were challenging, characterized by behavior management issues and a steep learning curve. However, she persisted, driven by a commitment to student success and personal growth.

Meanwhile, Erika's path to teaching was marked by an unintended shift from a career in music to education. Her initial experiences in a challenging school environment required her to adapt and innovate her teaching methods rapidly. Erika's narrative is a journey of discovery and adaptation, as it highlights her creative approaches to teaching and her ability to build meaningful relationships with students.

Common themes in both narratives include the influence of personal backgrounds, the transformative power of motherhood, and the challenges faced during the early years of teaching. Both educators displayed a strong commitment to their students and a willingness to embrace the profession's challenges. They encountered challenging experiences that revealed their resilience and adaptability. Their narratives underscore the impact of personal life changes for career decisions and the importance of relationships as the foundation of their educational philosophies. While their backgrounds and initial motivations differ, their stories converge on a shared commitment to education and a profound understanding of its challenges and rewards.

These narratives contribute to the broader understanding of teacher retention. They emphasize the importance of firsthand experiences, resilience, and adaptability in the face of professional challenges. Their stories highlight the complex, often non-linear paths to and within the teaching profession, offering valuable insights into educational policy and practice.

Chapter 4: Actionable Knowledge

Three conversations were transcribed and coded for recurring themes. For the scope of this study, the initial dialogue was used as an opportunity to become familiarized with transcription and was not included for theme recurrence.

In the first transcribed dialogue, the researchers discussed the personal values and motivations that may influence a teacher's decisions to stay in education. They discussed the importance of making a difference in student lives, finding joy in teaching, and creating a safe and supportive environment for students. There was also an acknowledgement that teaching could be challenging and that teachers should find their joy to succeed.

Dialogue

How do personal values and motivations influence a teacher's decision to stay?

[Joelle McIntosh]

> It goes back to, at least for us, our parents and watching their journeys, understanding that what we do makes a difference. The seeds that we plant in the classroom don't always bear fruit. It's usually later that we learn the impact we've had just like we were able to observe, being in that front seat of observing what our parents did. Personally, you know, I always run into my mother's students, her children, if you will, and how they are always talking about things that she did, words that she said. Prayers that she may have, whatever she poured in, and how they could use it for their good, whether personal, like relationships, or professional or academic. They always found a way to apply what she taught in the classroom, those life lessons. I remember running into a guy who said, "You know, I wasn't a reader until your mom gave me The Color Purple. She had just read it. She thought it was an enjoyable book and shared it with me. I read it, fell in love with reading and I haven't stopped." That was just one way. I don't even think he was her student. It was just somebody she encountered at her school. That was something that shifted his life, right? I think the personal values of wanting to make a difference and valuing relationships. Those things influence your decision to stay in education because you want to have relationships and don't want to disappoint your kids. You have relationships; you want to be there to write letters of recommendation. You want to see them graduate, and those things internally make you stay.

[Erika Johnson]

I asked my father this question today. He said he found joy in teaching. He looked
forward to talking to his students daily, finding out how they were, cracking
jokes, and making life light when heavy. I have that same personal motivation. I
wonder how my kids are and how they're doing. As a substitute, what I do is
twofold because not only am I taking the place of the teacher, but I'm also making
sure that the students have a peaceful transition on the days when their teacher,
whom they depend on, is not there, but they know that if Miss Johnson is there,
they'll be okay. They'll still have a good day. That job for me is student support. It
is important to support students, but I also think that to support them, we must
support teachers. Happy teachers make happy kids. One of my students said,
"Miss Johnson, I wish you could find more happy teachers. I would come to
school every day and be glad to learn." I didn't think about it that way. For me,
that is my motivation. I value knowing that they're okay, but I could leave a little
piece myself in there for them to use in the future.

How do intrinsic motivations affect teachers' decisions to stay in the profession?

[Joelle McIntosh]

I hear both of us talking about the value of service to others. Being of service in
our classroom and creating those safe spaces for our students, we value their
emotional safety. That is why we value that and want to share it with them.

[Erika Johnson]

That's our joy. As educators, when we show joy in what we're doing, no matter
what it is, we teach our students how to find joy.

[Joelle McIntosh]

Agreed. Your student was insightful in asking why anybody wants to sit in a
classroom with somebody who is always angry? It rubs off at all the spaces, and
nobody wants to endure that daily. That does not make learning fun, so our joy or
happiness has value.

[Erika Johnson]

Joy is a value. I think that educators have settled for spaces that have no joy. We
have been conditioned to be okay with no joy. That is why we're losing teachers:
we have not allowed teachers to find their identities to find joy.

[Joelle McIntosh]]

An internal factor. The passion we have for our subject matter, the passion that we
have for young people, or the passion we have for making a difference in our

community. The fact that we see purpose in all three of those things. As you said, we find joy in all of them. We find ways to make it fun and enjoyable on the inside.

[Erika Johnson]

Absolutely. My mantra in the classroom is: if it's not enjoyable for you, it won't be enjoyable for me.

Joy is often characterized by intense feelings of pleasure, happiness, and contentment. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), joy emerges when individuals experience a sense of harmony between their skills and challenges, leading to a state of "flow." Happiness is not solely an individual experience but is deeply intertwined with social connections. Social interactions and relationships contribute significantly to the experience of joy (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Shared pleasure enhances interpersonal bonds, fostering a sense of belonging and communal celebration (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Delight, a fundamental aspect of the human experience, encompasses a rich tapestry of emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. Building positive relationships with students based on trust, empathy, and encouragement fosters a supportive classroom community where both teachers and students can experience joy in each other's successes and growth (Seligman et al., 2009). If they adopt an optimistic and resilient perspective, teachers and administrators may face obstacles with grace and find satisfaction in the major influence they have on the lives of the children they teach. (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Teachers and administrators who infuse their practices with passion, creativity, and empathy, could create an environment in which joy flourishes, enriching both their own experiences and those of their students.

The second dialogue transcription revealed the importance of teacher internal motivations and external factors, such as school leadership, in our work. There was a

consensus that when teachers feel care and support, they are more likely to stay in the profession and positively impact students. School leadership and administration could have a significant impact on teacher retention. According to Gray and Taie (2015), principals of schools who are trying to effectively retain teachers seem to share certain traits. They stay instructionally focused, assist teachers in their duties, and cultivate an engaging school climate.

How do school leadership and administration impact teacher retention?

[Joelle McIntosh]

> Something my principal does in terms of a leader, and so does Dr. B. He has this open-door policy and means it. His door is not locked. You can go by and peek your head in and say, hey. Even when he put a policy in place that I did not agree with, I felt okay saying, it didn't mean I changed anything, but at least I felt comfortable enough to say hey. I do not agree with this, and here are my reasons for this. I think that leadership plays a role. When I think about the previous building, my leader was a great numbers person. He was great with data. He was great at analyzing reports, but he wasn't a great people person, and it was difficult for me to hear and follow this leadership style. I will not say I did not respect him, but I asked myself why he was the person in the role. That does have to do with respect.

[Erika Johnson]

> People seeking leadership should be assessed for interpersonal skills and data expertise. There are leaders who thrive in one area but struggle in the other. I believe that these criteria should be applied when people choose their leaders.

How do student behavior and teacher-student relationships impact teacher decisions to stay?

[Erika Johnson]

> Student behavior is not a big issue because I am a seasoned teacher. Because I have seen a lot of things, I have context on how to handle student behavior. But for a new teacher, if you do not have the spine for a student misbehaving and you cannot handle that yourself, that will impact whether you choose to stay. Because I have good relationships with my students and I have had time to foster those relationships, when I can correct a student, that relationship is personal. It's not somebody that doesn't care about them saying, no, don't do that. I'm telling you,

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do not do that because I don't want you to get in trouble. It has nothing to do with me preventing you from doing anything. For a seasoned teacher, relationships with students and relationships with other coworkers are the things that help keep you there. However, a lack of administrative support or a lack of resources makes a teacher feel like they're alone. If you feel like you are alone, of course, you are going to leave. But if you feel that you are part of a community and have good relationships with your students, that will impact a person's reason to stay. It impacts my reason to stay. Because I wake up every morning and the kids I like seeing. I get to say good morning to them, find out how their day was, help them make good relationship decisions, and choose healthy situations for themselves. That cannot be quantified, but it matters.

[Joelle McIntosh]

Agreed. I think about my last days and years in my previous school district. Part of what kept me going, even though there were probably 2, 3, or 4 times I was ready to quit, were the relationships with the students and want to make sure that this student got the letter of recommendation that they needed or this student got information on the suggested program for them or just their faces and the fact that I recognize my classroom was a sanctuary for them. Those things kept me in the building. I love how you talked about how, as a seasoned teacher, you have developed tools, policies, and procedures in your classroom to handle behavior. And again, that's something that just comes with time, right? I remember how that first year, I spent a lot of time yelling to the point where I was hoarse, or until I was just sick, and I would come home when I needed a full day, or I would think about just even grading papers. I spent a whole weekend grading papers. The longer I've been in the profession, the better I've gotten. I don't yell anymore. I refuse. When there's an altercation, I handle it differently. I don't panic as much. I don't bring home as many papers. It doesn't mean that I'm not writing, but how I look at assessments. I can do it faster because I know my content. Behavior does not impact me, but it impacts other newer teachers because they are just not ready. No class can teach you about the behaviors you will experience in a school classroom. There just is not. And I do not even think that there is a class. You might know how you will respond, but not until you are in it do you know how you are gonna respond to that questionable student behavior. Even as I sit here now, I am thinking about some of the things I saw in my early years. I had one class where I had two girls who had life-threatening seizures. I could never figure out when it was happening, but because they were familiar, they could see it in each other, and they would alert me. I was so thankful for that. I wonder now if I had the same situation, would I have the same type of response and not. Why? Because I have been teaching for 20 years, I guess to go back to the question, yes, behavior impacts your teachers' decision to stay, and so do student-teacher relationships over time. They get deeper and more meaningful. That becomes more important and makes the idea of leaving more difficult.

[Erika Johnson]

It does for me. I was at C last year and did not want to leave, but I had to. I had to acclimate to an unfamiliar environment, new kids, new administration, new rules, in a day. Initially, it hurt for about three hours. I cried. I was incredibly sad.

[Joelle McIntosh]

Yeah, I remember.

[Erika Johnson]

I called you that day. You were the only person that understood what I was going through. I had nobody else that would have understood how incredibly hurt I was. I would have to leave people that I cared for, such as students, coworkers, and a building I was familiar with, and go somewhere I did not know what to expect. But thankfully, because of you, a teacher who is a friend who also knows me well, you supported me through that. You reminded me to breathe. You reminded me to stay calm. I do not think I would have been able to be at ease so quickly had it not been for the support of a friend who had been there before. Because of our relationship, I could reevaluate, regroup, and move forward. It is those moments that you cannot quantify but matter. That makes a teacher stay. Makes you push through, makes you dig your heels in and say, okay. Changes happen. What are we gonna do now? And it turned into a wonderful opportunity. It was not easy, and it was not without tears, and it was not without discomfort. But I made it. We made it.

[Joelle McIntosh]

"What's important to note is that we're not in the same building, but I could support you in that transition."

In the final dialogue, Erika and Joelle openly discussed several ways to make teachers feel supported. The main themes in this conversation were teacher retention and making teachers feel supported. The participants discussed the importance of feeling validated, supported, and safe in the workplace. Creating a positive school climate and providing teachers with opportunities for professional development were also identified as principal factors in teacher retention. The conversation mentioned the importance of administrators intentionally making teachers feel appreciated. Appreciation could include things like giving teachers public praise, taking the time to listen to their concerns, and providing them with opportunities for professional development. As a last action of

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practice for this study, Joelle, her daughter, and Erika's cousin, a museum curator of

African American Art in Pittsburgh, came to visit Erika's school to help with the Living

Black History Museum project. The following dialog explores the internal factors of

Erika and Joelle's experience.

[Erika Johnson]

My internal factor is that I want to make a difference for other people's children because I care about them and want them to do well. But it takes on a completely more personal feeling when that child is my friend's child. Wanting that child to succeed is far more personal, and seeing their success is more personal. I feel like I am motivated to figure out how to crack this code to help your daughter see possibilities, and that internal factor is such a motivator for me.

[Joelle McIntosh]

That is your purpose, and that is a legacy.

[Erika Johnson]

Very much legacy. You and your daughter, my cousin the museum curator, coming to the school, let me see the generational legacy of excellence. Excellence is not required. But if you can see what excellence looks like, we can get there. Internally, I felt motivated yesterday when you all came to the school. It made me want to do more. It made me proud of what I did. You helped me solve things that I could not see.

[Joelle McIntosh]

As you should be. The living museum was phenomenal, and I could see and hear what those students had to say.

[Erika Johnson]

Your input as an educator, an objective educator, and a caring educator took me back to when we discussed our frameworks. We were talking about the challenge of care in schools. Each child felt cared for in their role in the living museum. As we walked around and gave constructive criticism, the students saw these outside people who cared for each other, showing them how to care for themselves practically. We in this program are practitioners, and yesterday was a real testimony to why we stay in school.

[Joelle McIntosh]

Definitely. Because you get to those moments that come outside of the classroom.

[Joelle McIntosh]

Administrators, simple thank you's matter. Praise matters.

[Erika Johnson]

Intentional moments of joy matter, and we created some intentional moments of joy. That is what makes people want to stay. You must be intentional about making people feel included valued and heard and seen. That requires much more than a simple certification can prove for a person's ability to be in the education system.

[Joelle McIntosh]

That is insightful, Erika. What I also want to say is when you talked about those moments of joy, What the students received and having me there and your cousin there and G there also impacts them. It created a moment of joy that Miss Johnson wanted somebody to see us. They came in the middle of their day to see us, to talk to us. One of the things we hint at in our study is how behavior today is worse than it was when our parents were in the field. You saying that makes me think about how your mama had people at your house. Students. Joy. My mom took the kids on field trips. Joy. My mom made cheerleading skirts, she was never a cheerleader, but she was a cheerleading coach. Joy. That is the remedy.

[Erika Johnson]

It is a truly relevant theme that is often left out in education. When we are putting together curriculums, when we are setting up schedules, we are taking out the most important piece. If you are not happy to be there, you will not be happy about your outcomes, but if we find times where you feel valued, seen, heard, acknowledged, or appreciated. That is outside of just the regular Schmegular everyday stuff. Why don't we just put intentional joy in our schedules, for students and teachers?

[Joelle McIntosh]

It is different than mindfulness. To me, mindfulness is a quiet time and a settling of the spirit, helping students and teachers manage anxiety. But joy. Joy makes me think also about when I taught elementary school. There was one year, there was a set of teachers that, of course, when they got frustrated would take recess from the kids, but then it became an overall building decision because they were not making progress on AYP. They would take away their recess. Kids who had finished eating would sit in lines in the cafeteria for 15, 20 min, and then they would go back to class. I always said that speaks and goes directly against what is suggested in kids' psychology. They need to play. They need to run. They need to destructively push or constructively tussle, but they need these moments because

that is where the growth happens. They get to run some energy out. They come back happy, and they are a willing vessel to receive instruction. But, if you made me sit down and be quiet and be still, which goes categorically against everything I am made up of at the age of 5, 6, 7, 8, Why am I coming back into that classroom ready to learn? Ready to listen. I just want to play.

It is equally critical to foster a healthy school environment. One possible approach could be to cultivate a feeling of community between administrators, educators, and learners. Teachers must also experience emotional and physical safety at work. Support entails giving them the tools they require for success and a secure setting free from harassment or bullying. Ultimately, it is critical to acknowledge that educators are distinct people and that what functions for one may not function for another. Thus, it is imperative to listen to teachers and ask them what they need to feel supported.

Chapter 5: Dissemination Plan

This dissemination plan outlines a strategic approach to share the findings of this study with stakeholders in the education sector. The primary aim of this plan is to ensure that the insights gleaned from this study are positively leveraged to support new teachers and retain experienced teachers. This study utilized the theoretical frameworks of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Resilience Theory, Chaos Theory, Identity Theory, and Care Theory to understand the internal and external needs of long-term educators past and present. The researchers conclude that a teacher's ability to find or create joy in the workplace is crucial to enhancing work satisfaction and influencing decisions to remain in the teaching profession.

The information provided in this plan is for a diverse audience within the education sector, including school principals, district administrators, state policymakers, educational researchers, teachers, and educational staff. The researchers believe the content of this to be relevant and valuable to these individuals in their respective roles, aiding them in addressing various concerns, trends, and developments within the education system to impact new and veteran teachers decision-making processes.

District and school leadership are instrumental in the creation of positive school cultures to directly impact new and veteran teachers. School districts can meet the basic needs of teachers by providing competitive compensation and benefits and address their needs for belonging by having events to build professional communities. By supporting teachers' professional growth with professional development opportunities inside and outside of the district districts exhibit a sense of trust that teachers can self-select opportunities to grow in the way the teacher deems best. These efforts improve job

satisfaction and contribute to the success and quality of education within the school. When school leaders focus on these factors, they create a school environment that is conducive to teacher retention, which leads to higher-quality teaching and better student outcomes.

An effective way to share the findings and have a sizable impact is to present at local, state, and national conferences. Many conferences solicit presentation proposals that align with the conference theme and objectives. The conference information can be used to determine the best dissemination strategy to meet the target audience's needs. Delivering in-person presentations and workshops conferences and hosting virtual interactive sessions via communication platform like ZOOM are a few ways to communicate the key findings of this research. The timeline intends to achieve this objective within the first-year post-dissertation completion by targeting three or four major conferences focused on the improvement of educational outcomes. This approach ensures the suggestions of this study are heard by key stakeholders to influence opinion and decisions in the education sector.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Tic Toc, and X (formerly known as 'Twitter') allow this information to reach a broader audience and foster frequent and real-time engagement with educators and policymakers. Creating informative content such as infographics, short videos, memes, and tweets enables the researchers to push key findings and recommendations to a captive, targeted audience. The further utilization of affinity groups on each platform serves as a space for the collaborative efforts of the membership to create a continuous flow of information and support through regular postings. By leveraging the power of social media, this method

enhances visibility and facilitates active dialogue, creating opportunities for knowledge sharing and impactful connections within the education community.

The introduction of quarterly anonymous peer support group meetings aims to provide continuous support and foster idea exchange among teachers and school leaders. These meetings begin with the central question: 'How can school leaders establish environments that create and foster a sense of joy?'. By creating a space for discussing challenges, sharing accomplishments, and exploring practical implementations of the dissertation's recommendations, these gatherings become instrumental in nurturing collaboration within the education community. The timeline for this initiative targets initiation within six months post-dissertation completion, ensuring regular quarterly meetings to sustain this supportive and insightful platform for school leaders.

Direct communications play a pivotal role in ensuring that research findings reach key decision-makers capable of implementing meaningful change. By crafting policy briefs and recommendation papers specifically tailored to state policymakers and district administrators, this method focuses on providing targeted information that is relevant to their roles. Accompanying these written resources, scheduling meetings or webinars offers a direct platform for discussing and elaborating on these recommendations. As an integral component of the overall communication strategy, the timeline for this approach involves starting to engage policymakers in tandem with the launch of social media campaigns and maintaining these interactions continuously to drive impact and influence decision-making processes effectively.

Strategies

The strategy to create flexible and adaptive school environments, drawing on Chaos Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, focuses on fostering autonomy and voice among teachers. This approach emphasizes open and transparent leadership, where teacher input is not only solicited but actively incorporated into decision-making processes. Understanding the complex and evolving nature of schools, flexible policies and practices are implemented to enable teachers to navigate changes and uncertainties effectively, thus promoting stability and security within the educational setting. By empowering teachers with autonomy in their instructional approaches and involving them in school-wide initiatives and policy formulation, school leaders recognize and leverage their expertise, nurturing a culture of collaboration and innovation within the school community.

Schools can incorporate various support systems and programs to cultivate teacher resilience by integrating principles from resilience theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Mentorship programs, seminars on stress management, and peer support groups are among the approaches employed to equip educators with the essential resources and tools to bolster their resilience. Emphasizing practices prioritizing well-being and coping mechanisms will equip educators with the skills needed to navigate the intricacies and demands of the teaching profession effectively.

In aligning with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and focusing on addressing the fundamental need for safety, schools should prioritize meeting teachers' basic requirements like fair compensation, job security, and safe working conditions. By establishing a supportive and nurturing work environment that fosters a sense of value

and respect for educators, schools can create a solid foundation for teacher motivation and engagement within the educational setting. This approach is vital in ensuring that teachers feel secure, enabling them to focus on their roles effectively and contribute positively to the school community.

By embracing the principles of Care Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, schools can establish a nurturing environment that champions social and emotional safety, empathy, and respect for all individuals within the educational community. It is essential to promote a culture that prioritizes care and mutual support among teachers and staff. This can be achieved through the implementation of policies aimed at fostering teachers' well-being, personal growth, and professional development, enhancing their sense of belonging and dedication to the school's mission. Creating a culture of care will contribute to a more harmonious and supportive school community where every individual feels valued and respected.

To advocate for work-life balance based on various theories such as chaos theory, teacher identity theory, resilience theory, Maslow's theory, and care theory, schools should prioritize policies and practices that enable a healthy equilibrium for teachers. This may involve implementing flexible scheduling, alleviating non-teaching tasks, and providing easy access to mental health support services to assist educators in handling stress and preventing burnout. By fostering a balanced professional and personal life, teachers are more likely to maintain well-being and fulfillment, contributing positively to their teaching effectiveness and overall school community.

After conference presentations, the researchers will collect and evaluate feedback via surveys to gather information and determine the next steps. Additionally, monitoring

social media engagement helps determine content reach and impact, while roundtable

discussions in peer support group meetings allow for qualitative feedback on

implementation. Regularly reviewing the impact of direct communications with

policymakers through follow-up interactions aids in understanding policy interests and

fostering action. These actions collectively contribute to a comprehensive evaluation

process, enhancing the effectiveness and impact of dissemination strategies.

The restoration of joy in education is essential for cultivating rich and impactful

learning environments that ignite a student's enthusiasm for learning and teachers'

dedication to teaching. The following suggestions are various strategies and methods that

can contribute to realizing this objective.

- Encourage creativity and exploration by offering opportunities for artistic
  expression and creative outlets such as art, music, writing, and more
  within the curriculum.

- Foster a positive and supportive learning community where both students
  and teachers feel safe, valued, and respected, promoting collaboration and
  a sense of unity.

- Prioritize personalized learning tailored to teachers' and students' diverse
  needs and interests by incorporating personalized approaches like inquiry-
  based and project-based learning to engage the school community
  effectively.

- Recognize and celebrate students' and teachers' achievements and progress
  to foster a positive learning environment and mindset, providing

constructive feedback and encouragement to boost confidence and
resilience.

- Promote a passion for lifelong learning by inspiring curiosity, questioning, and continual pursuit of knowledge, skills, and perspectives beyond the confines of the classroom, encouraging a culture of continuous growth and discovery among students, teachers, and administrators.

The implementation of these strategies allows educators and administrators to cultivate learning environments that prioritize joy, engagement, and meaningful learning experiences, thereby enriching the educational journey and outcomes for all involved.

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